This dissertation looks at new evidence and asks new questions about Irish and Irish-American identity and U.S.-Irish relations from 1932 to 1945, especially during the critical years of World War II. It explores the relationship among the Irish, American, and British governments, the role of Irish Americans in shaping each government’s policy, and the consequences of those policies in the postwar period. Through extensive use of primary sources in Ireland and the United States, it builds on recent trends in the history of American foreign relations, contributes a fresh perspective to the relatively new field of Irish diplomatic history, exposes the myths surrounding Irish neutrality, and brings to light new evidence on the role of Irish Americans in shaping official diplomacy.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter examines the Irish-American pattern of immigration, the history of Irish-American involvement in Irish nationalist groups prior to the outbreak of World War II, and subsequent efforts by the American, British, and Irish governments variously to control, discourage, or incite Irish Americans. The second chapter examines the context of the relationship between the U.S. and Irish governments from 1932, the year de Eamon de Valera took office as President of the Executive Council and Franklin Roosevelt was elected president, until the outbreak of the European war in September 1939. Chapter three examines the tense years from
1939 to 1941, when the British fought the war but the Irish and the Americans did not. Churchill pressed de Valera to abandon neutrality, even to the point of discussing the possibility of invading Ireland. De Valera countered by appealing to Irish Americans, hoping that their influence would force the U.S. government to hold the British in check. Chapter four examines the American-Irish relationship from Pearl Harbor until the end of the war. The wartime activities of the American Minister to Ireland, David Gray, had a tremendous impact on postwar Anglo-American and American-Irish relations, and this is the subject of chapter five. The myth of Nazi spies dominating Dublin and the misrepresentation of the actual impact of Irish neutrality took root largely as a result of Gray’s actions.
Dedicated to my parents
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Most important, Nancy and Erin. Thank you and I love you.
VITA

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INTRODUCTION

“Support for Irish neutrality is a core republican value. It has never been more relevant than at this time of great volatility in international relations.”

Gerry Adams
28 May 2004

Somewhere in the Bronx, only twenty minutes or so from the cemetery, Maeve found a small bar-and-grill . . . that, lacking only draught Guinness and a peat fire, might have been a pub in rural Ireland. Or lacking dialogue by John Millington Synge, the set of a rural Irish play. . . .

You could not redeem Billy’s life, redeem your own relentless affection for him, without saying at some point, “There was that girl.”

“The Irish girl.” . . .

“That was a sad thing, wasn’t it? That was a blow to him.”

“A girl he met right after the war. Right after he came home. Out on Long Island.”

Alice McDermott
*Charming Billy*

Ireland and Irish America shared a struggle for political identity during the twentieth century that echoes and continues in current Irish politics and Irish-American culture. After gaining independence from Britain in 1921 and enduring a civil war over

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the partition of the island, Irish leaders were eager to establish a national identity that
secured Ireland’s place in the world and promoted internal unity. In the 1930s and 1940s,
faced with the growing European crisis and eventual war, Irish leaders used the issue of
neutrality to forge a distinctly “Irish” identity. In doing so, however, they had to balance
that neutrality against competing desires to see the Allies win the war and to prevent a
strong British backlash to the policy. That Gerry Adams, a former leader of a group
whose goal was to eliminate the British presence in Northern Ireland through violence,
would embrace a policy of neutrality is an illustration of just how well the identity
mission succeeded.

In the twentieth century, Irish Americans faced a similar identity crisis as they
struggled to find their place in American society. Like many immigrant groups, Irish
Americans tried to forge an identity that recognized their ethnic and national past but
allowed for assimilation into an American society that put up first racial and then
religious roadblocks to their integration. Alice McDermott, like many other Irish-
American novelists, explores this complicated nature of Irish-American identity in her
writings. These artists have given expression to the Irish-American dilemma of feeling
forced to choose between an ethnic community that insulated them from mainstream
society and the dominant culture that allowed them to rise up the economic ladder but did
not offer real assimilation.

This dissertation explores how the Irish and Irish Americans negotiated their new
identities, how each struggle played itself out, especially before and during World War II,
and how their interactions affected each other. For Irish Americans, it attempts an
accounting of, in Nathan Glazer’s and Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s phrase, the “persisting facts of ethnicity.” For Ireland, it explores how Eamon de Valera, who led Ireland from 1932 through 1947, his followers, and his Irish Republican Army (IRA) opponents could all agree that neutrality was the means to establish an identity for Ireland on the world stage.

Much of the early work on Irish immigrants of the nineteenth century reflected the wider historical debates over “assimilation” that dominated immigration and ethnic history for many years. Oscar Handlin, for example, argued that replacing “dysfunctional Irish culture” with American mores offered the best hope for Irish-American success in the United States. Thomas Brown asserted forcefully that Irish America’s active work on behalf of Irish nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century was their ticket into the American mainstream. By maintaining their ethnic identity and working for Irish independence, Brown posited, Irish Americans were able to show their respect for American values. Kerby Miller showed the degree to which early Irish immigrants saw themselves as “exiles,” and explained how this perception formed their identity. Hasia Diner and Noel Ignatiev have highlighted the importance of gender when examining Irish
America and how Irish Americans navigated the race issue in their process of creating their identity in America.¹

The most promising recent approach to examining ethnic history and identity involves the concept of “invention.” In 1992, Kathleen Conzen and several other prominent ethnic and immigration historians called for a wider perspective on the nature of ethnic identity and how ethnic groups reinvent themselves over time. Timothy Meagher’s work most clearly adopts this very historical view of ethnicity, especially Irish-American identity. Meagher focuses on the generational shifts of ethnic communities who “continually reinvent themselves through new definitions of identity.”²

While Meagher and almost all historians of Irish America have focused primarily on the period before 1920 or after 1968, this dissertation examines the invention and negotiation of Irish-American identity in the 1930s and 1940s.

As the twentieth century unfolded, Irish Americans, because of the color of their skin and their knowledge of English, had a greater ability than other ethnic and racial groups to “choose” their public identity. This was not possible when they first came to the United States, when they had to define their identity against the powerful stereotypes

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of race and religion. This ability to invent a “symbolic ethnicity,” as Mary Waters described it, makes the choices and expressions of that identity even more important in understanding the development of the Irish-American community.3

Patrick O’Mahony and Gerard Delanty have defined national identity as “the cultural outcome of a discourse of a nation.”4 Throughout much of the studied time period, the desire and ability of de Valera to craft and implement a wider vision of an Ireland that was Gaelic, Catholic, and rural was the discourse of Ireland. After he realized that effective collective security through the League of Nations was not possible, de Valera turned to neutrality as the method to safeguard Ireland and create an Irish identity at home and in the world.

The importance of the war years, the “Emergency” as it was known in Ireland, in this effort is hard to overstate. Terence Brown has called the war “the beginning of a watershed in Irish life.” Until the late 1930s, the rural aspect of de Valera’s vision of Irish identity was very much a reflection of the actual life of most Irish. During and after the war, however, Brown argues that all the official and unofficial evidence “agree in their discovery of an almost universally demoralized rural scene.”5 This transformation of the Irish view of rural life, which had for so long been the integral element of Irish cultural

4 Patrick O’Mahony and Gerard Delanty, Rethinking Irish History: Nationalism, Identity and Ideology (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 2. For a review of the major themes of Irish historiography and revisionism, see ibid., 9-11.
experience, explains the rising importance that neutrality began to take on as an aspect of Irish identity.

Irish politics, as evidenced by Gerry Adams’s statement above, is still very concerned about neutrality as an important element of what it means to be an Irish state in the world. It is therefore crucial to understand the elements and strategy of the first implementation of that policy and how it continues to shape Irish understanding. Writing in 1999, Sean Farrell Moran argued that “the issue of identity remains at the forefront of Irish politics and culture.” Neutralty remains an important part of that identity, and has influenced recent Irish debates about NATO and the European Union.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter examines the Irish-American pattern of immigration, the history of Irish-American involvement in Irish nationalist groups prior to the outbreak of World War II, and the efforts by the post-Famine generation and their children to define their identity in their new home. Against this backdrop the events of 1932-1945 can best be explained.

The second chapter examines the context of the relationship between the U.S. and Irish governments from 1932, the year de Valera took office as President of the Executive Council, a post equivalent to Prime Minister, and Franklin Roosevelt was elected president, until the outbreak of the European war in September 1939. During this time, de Valera was eager to press any advantage to end the partition of Ireland that began with the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, even as he struggled both to achieve a greater degree of
practical independence for Ireland and to maintain links to the British Commonwealth. Irish Americans, struggling with the rest of their countrymen against the ravages of the Depression, also began to question their new-found status in American society.

Chapter three examines the tense years from 1939 to 1941 when the British fought the war but the Irish and the Americans did not. David Gray, the new American minister to Ireland, pressured Ireland to allow the British to use Irish naval bases, known as the Treaty Ports. Gray first tried to cajole de Valera into entering the war and, after repeated failures, organized a concerted effort to discredit him and to distort the nature of Irish neutrality to both the American government and the American people. For de Valera, neutrality at this time was the most practical option, but also the one that would most likely assist in having his dream of an independent and sovereign Irish identity come true.

Chapter four examines the American-Irish relationship from Pearl Harbor until the end of the war. Official tensions among the American, Irish, and British governments came to a head during this period. De Valera struggled to maintain neutrality in the face of a series of challenges by Gray. Despite waning British interest in the Irish help after the Battle of Britain, Gray continued to press the Irish government to join the war. Much of Gray’s motivation, however, was not his desire to bring about a shift in Irish policy, but his concerns about domestic American politics and postwar international developments. Specifically, Gray worried that Irish Americans might develop a postwar

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plan to split the Anglo-American alliance in order to push the British out of Northern Ireland.

After the war, American policymakers were at first eager to punish Ireland for its wartime neutrality. Growing concerns about the Cold War and a knowledge that Ireland would be a firm supporter of Western democracy soon led them to change their postwar policy toward Ireland, and this is the subject of chapter five.

More than simply filling gaps in the literature, this dissertation offers insights into a wide range of important historiographical debates in American diplomatic history and Irish history. Historians of American foreign relations are currently expanding the boundaries of the field asking new questions and looking at new evidence. This dissertation continues that effort by examining the role of Irish Americans in shaping the actions of the various governments into the narrative, just as they were important to each government’s calculations at the time. It also extends our understanding of the role that foreign affairs plays in the formation of ethnic identity. Building on recent works dealing with African Americans and foreign affairs, this is the first scholarly study to explore the self-identity of Irish Americans through the lens of their activities in relation to Irish affairs during this time.

Finally, it plays an important part in the developing literature of Irish diplomatic history, a field in relative infancy. The nature of Irish neutrality is one of the most contested issues that these historians are beginning to engage. It is also one of the most pressing contemporary issues for the Irish people. This dissertation addresses these issues
while expanding the inquiry beyond the British Isles, for no examination of Irish foreign policy is complete without looking at its Irish-American dimension.
–But do you know what a nation means? says John Wyse.
–Yes, says Bloom.
–What is it? says John Wyse.
–A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.
–By God, then, says Ned, laughing, if that's so I'm a nation for I'm living in the same place for the last five years.
So of course everyone had the laugh at Bloom and says he, trying to muck out of it:
–Or also living in different places.¹

James Joyce, *Ulysses*

In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom. Having organised and trained her manhood . . ., having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America . . ., she strikes in full confidence of victory.²

Proclamation of the Republic of Ireland, 1916

On the surface, the “Irish” in Irish-American is fast fading . . . Unquestionably, however, an Irish identity persists.³

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 1963

The Irish, both in Ireland and the United States, constantly negotiated, molded, and created their identities as they struggled to find their role in the ever more complicated world of the early twentieth century. The millions of Irish men and women

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who came to the United States between the Great Famine of the 1840s and the eve of World War II brought with them collective memories of injustice, oppression, and efforts to assert independence. They passed those memories on to their sons and daughters, who faced other issues of identity as they forged their own way in America. At the same time, the Irish in Ireland negotiated a resurgent Irish identity, fought for and won independence, quarreled among themselves, and then tried to assert their national identity on the world stage.

Both groups labored against others’ pre-existing notions of the Irish and of Ireland. The American Irish had to deal with the stereotype of the drunken, irresponsible, lazy Irishman that had existed since before the great influx of emigrants during the Famine. The anti-Catholic elements of this stereotype reached their zenith in the Know-Nothing party of the 1850s, and remained powerful well into the twentieth century. Against this background, Irish Americans attempted to forge their identity. The Irish government and the Irish people faced different yet related challenges after winning independence from Great Britain in 1921. The Irish government was acutely aware of the importance of establishing a strong identity for the new nation on the international scene as well as cognizant of how that process would require challenging the contemporary international perception of Ireland. Desmond Fitzgerald, the first Minister of External Affairs of the Irish Free State, told the Dáil Éireann (the Irish Parliament, pronounced "doyl eh-rinn") in 1924 that, “We are a new country and an unknown quantity in the
world. Ireland is not only an unknown quantity in a neutral form, but in a negative
form.”
Almost all of the new state’s diplomacy centered on establishing that identity and
its importance for independence. The Irish Free State targeted its efforts at both the
international scene and the domestic audience because, on the heels of the Irish Civil
War, it was just as concerned about legitimizing itself to its own citizens as it was about
becoming a full-fledged member of the community of nations. Finally, both groups
looked across the Atlantic to each other for support and guidance.

This chapter will examine these themes as they played out in both Ireland and the
United States from the time of the arrival of the great mass of Irish in the United States
during the Great Famine until the elections of Franklin Roosevelt and Eamon de Valera
in 1932. The Irish who came to the United States during this time faced a wide variety of
obstacles, but they soon found ways to position themselves in local government, the
Catholic Church, labor unions, and other places of influence. On the surface, especially
by the eve of the Depression, Irish Americans had effectively shed the outward signs of
an ethnic minority that faced structural hurdles to full assimilation into American society.
Assimilation, however, was not synonymous with identity. That Irish identity persisted
well beyond the mythical 1920 mark delineated by so many histories of Irish

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4 Throughout this study, “American Irish” generally refers to the first generation of Irish immigrants. “Irish
American” generally refers to second and subsequent generations of those who trace their ancestry back to
Ireland. “Ireland” and “Irish” are associated with either the whole of Ireland prior to 1921, the Irish Free
State to 1937, or Ireland (Éire in Irish) thereafter.
5 Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Debates, Official Report vol. 8, 9 July 1924, col. 800. Hereafter, references
to Dáil debates will be cited as Dáil Debates, with volume number, date in parenthesis, and column
number, e.g. Dáil Debates 8 (9 July 1924), 800.
At the same time, the Irish who stayed in Ireland reinvented their identity, as a people and as a new nation.

“Identity” and “nationalism” were intertwined for the Irish and for Irish Americans. This study’s working definition of “identity” stems from each group’s self-perception and the wider cultural, social, religious, and political factors that set the boundaries of each group’s ability to define itself. “Identity,” therefore, is defined as the individual’s or the group’s sense of “peoplehood,” to borrow a phrase from Milton Gordon. This includes not only the set of characteristics and traits that each group ascribed to themselves, but also, for Irish Americans, their negotiations with the wider culture about what it meant to be an Irish American, indeed, what it meant to be an American. The working definition of “nationalism” relies heavily on Benedict Anderson’s definition of a nation as an “imagined political community.” “Nationalism,” in the context of this study, is defined as the effort to create and then support a politically independent and culturally Gaelic Irish state.

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6 For example, see Patrick J. Blessing, “Irish Emigration to the United States, 1800-1920: An Overview,” Irish Studies 4 (1985); Joseph Edward Cuddy, Irish-America and National Isolationism, 1914-1920 (New York: Arno Press, 1976); and Timothy J. Meagher, From Paddy to Studs: Irish-American Communities in the Turn of the Century Era, 1880 to 1920 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986). The 1920 date is often chosen as a convenient demarcation because of several influential events so close to each other in time: the end of World War I, Irish independence, partition, immigration restrictions, etc.


IRISH IMMIGRATION

The Great Famine of 1845-1849 marks the pivot point for analysis of Irish emigration to the United States. Irish men and women went to the United States in limited numbers before the Famine, but it was the massive Famine and post-Famine emigration that marks the arrival of the predominantly rural and unskilled Irish Catholics who would eventually begin to identify themselves as Irish Americans. Their arrival in large numbers strengthened the already evolving self-identity of Irish Protestants in America as “Scotch-Irish” in their effort to differentiate themselves from the Catholic masses then entering the country. Overall, almost five million Irish men and women left Ireland for the United States between 1800 and 1920.9

The first concentrated influx of Irish into the United States came in the period from the end of the Revolutionary War to 1845, when approximately one million Irish made the journey. The most-cited study claims that in 1790 there were 306,000 Americans who were born either in Ireland or were of Irish descent, out of an overall population of slightly less than four million. The majority of these Irish were Presbyterians from Ulster, who had first begun to arrive in the colonies in 1680 and who made up almost two-thirds of Irish immigration between 1783 and 1815.10 By 1830, however, Catholic emigrants outnumbered Irish Presbyterians. By 1840, Irish Protestants

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9 Blessing, “Irish Emigration,” 11.
10 Ibid., 12-13.
made up only about ten percent of Irish emigration to the U.S., and that percentage would remain fairly constant through 1900.\footnote{Ibid., 13-15; Kevin Kenny, \textit{The American Irish: A History} (New York: Longman, 2000), 45-46.}

The Great Famine and its aftermath would bring almost 1.7 million Irish to the United States in the 1840s and 1850s. The British authorities who ruled Ireland encouraged this population transfer as a way to ease the crisis of the Famine. Already suffering from an increased population’s strain on the available economic resources, Ireland faced the Famine ill-prepared to deal with such a catastrophe because a large portion of the people relied almost exclusively on the potato for survival. By the end of the Famine in 1850, almost two million Irish were gone: half died of starvation or disease; the other half emigrated, mostly to the United States.\footnote{Blessing, “Irish Emigration,” 17; David M. Emmons, \textit{The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875-1925} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 1-3; Kenny, \textit{American Irish}, 89-91.} They brought with them memories of suffering, loss, hopelessness, and a sense of betrayal by the British.

As the central defining element in nineteenth-century Irish history, the Famine has long been a topic historians hotly debate. The first wave of nationalist histories placed the onus for the catastrophe squarely on the British, but the popular memory of the Famine by both the Irish and Irish Americans took it a step further. They saw the lack of a British response to the suffering of the Famine as the direct result of a British genocidal policy, the logical continuation of centuries of British neglect and misrule of Ireland. Richard Williams has described the involuntary nature of Famine emigration: “Economic forces generated conditions that confronted many people from the lower social group in Ireland...
with the prospect of starving to death.”

As such, Irish Americans moving to the United States saw themselves as exiles from tyranny and oppression.

Economic hardship in Ireland triggered a continuous wave of emigration to America between 1855 and 1920, when another three million Irish landed in the United States. Why did the Irish continue to leave Ireland after the Famine? As historian David Emmons has eloquently summarized it, “In sum, there were no jobs, no inheritances, no dowries, no access to the land, no promise—or even faint hope—of a secure future.”

After the Famine, men in Ireland had to face the dismal prospect of finding employment outside of the family farm if they were not lucky enough to be the eldest son, who alone would inherit the land. The later emigrant groups would be younger, poorer, have fewer skills, but be more literate than those that went to the United States before the Famine. When asked upon arrival, almost four of five would claim to be unskilled and from a rural background. The population of people born in Ireland and living in the U.S. reached its peak in 1890, at just over 1.8 million. By 1900, almost five million first- or second-generation Irish lived in the United States, a number greater than the population of Ireland at the time. In 1920, approximately twenty percent of the U.S. population was either born in Ireland or of Irish descent.

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14 For a review of Famine historiography, see Kenny, American Irish, 84-95. The classic work explaining the self-identity of nineteenth-century Irish Americans as “exiles” is Kerby A. Miller, Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
15 Emmons, The Butte Irish, 3; Kenny, American Irish, 130-38.
While the economic prospects were dim for men in nineteenth-century Ireland, they were worse for women. Women and men arrived in approximately equal numbers before 1900, but even by then women emigrants began to outnumber men.\textsuperscript{17} Women in Ireland not only had to deal with economic hardship, but they had to do so within the confines of a male-dominated society, one that was much more restrictive than that found in the United States. Once in the United States, however, Irish women were able to take advantage of educational opportunities not afforded them in Ireland. As Hasia Diner describes it, “Irish girls continued to flock to the American classrooms because of what those classrooms promised for their futures.” In America they were able to prepare for careers and find employment that was not available in Ireland.\textsuperscript{18}

HARDSHIPS in AMERICA

The new arrivals of the 1840s found that a series of difficult challenges awaited them. While many Irish were already in America, the earlier emigrants had more skills and shared a religious heritage with the dominant American culture. The new Catholic immigrants, coming mostly from the west and south of Ireland, faced a set of obstacles that included ostracism, an anti-Catholic bias, and the development of social and economic stereotypes that sometimes labeled them as an unassimilable race.

The term “Irish American” came to be so closely identified with Catholics because the Protestants who predominated the Irish immigration until about 1830 began to identify themselves as “Scotch-Irish” during the time of the Famine emigration. These self-described Scotch-Irish were the descendents of Presbyterians from Scotland, who had begun to settle in Ireland from the time of the Cromwellian land settlement in the seventeenth century. They used the term to differentiate themselves from the primarily Catholic masses that entered the U.S. after 1845.19

Kerby Miller has recently challenged this predominant view of the emergence of the term. He claims that it owed its appearance “as much to social, cultural, and political tensions within the Ulster American Presbyterian community itself.” Miller’s argument is that when Federalists applied the term “wild Irish”—which signified the more radical Catholic elements in Ireland—to the Irish American supporters of Thomas Jefferson, the group responded by finding ways to purge its ranks of any radical elements. The origin of the term “Scotch-Irish,” then, was more a means to assert the British and Protestant nature of the group, long before the great influx of Irish Catholics. Over the course of the nineteenth century the term would expand to include all non-Catholic Irish or their descendants.20

19 Brown, Irish-American Nationalism, 35; Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White, 39. Irish Protestants continue the effort to differentiate themselves from Irish Catholics to this day. John Taylor, MP, a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, said in 1993, “Much as I enjoy the Irish and admire many of their cultural pursuits, I have to remind them that we in Northern Ireland are not Irish,” quoted in Lawrence McCaffrey, “Diaspora Comparisons and Irish-American Uniqueness,” in New Perspectives, 18.
20 Kerby Miller, “‘Scotch-Irish’ Myths and ‘Irish’ Identities in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century America,” in New Perspectives, 76-80.
This effort by earlier Irish immigrants to disassociate themselves from the influx of Irish Catholics arriving in the 1840s and thereafter is a part of the wider society’s reluctance to accept this new group. Anglo-Americans viewed the poor, predominantly rural, Catholic, and traumatized newcomers with varying degrees of suspicion and hostility. An “Irish personality” or “Irish traits” moniker soon became the predominant culture’s standard description of the American Irish; the Irish were lazy drunkards, prone to violence. The destitution, crime rates, alcoholism, and other anti-social behavioral traits in the areas where the American Irish settled reinforced this view and led many to believe that it was not just a matter of economic status, but that the Irish Catholics had “permanent racial endowments” which would prevent them from ever assimilating into American society.21

This ethnic stereotype became the predominant depiction of the Irish in song and stage throughout the rest of the 1800s. In Joseph Curran’s vivid description:

At his best, “Paddy” was a happy-go-lucky buffoon, shiftless and tipsy. At his worst, he was a simian-featured barbarian: “childish, emotionally unstable, ignorant, indolent, superstitious, primitive or semi-civilized, dirty, vengeful and violent.” His “stage Irish” costume consisted of ragged tail coat and battered truncated conical hat, knee breeches, coarse stockings, and buckled shoes. Almost invariably, he was armed with a shillelagh [an Irish cudgel], smoked a clay pipe, and was extremely voluble. His hair was often red, as fiery as his temper.22

21 Fallows, Identity and Assimilation, 26. The sociologist Richard Williams makes a similar argument, but he bases his conclusion on the assumption that Anglo-Americans based their negative perception of Irish Americans solely on economic grounds. That might be true for those Anglo-Americans in the lower economic levels, but it fails to explain the wider acceptance of the stereotype. See Williams, Hierarchical Structures, 142-47.
The American Irish and their descendents, therefore, had to negotiate their identity through this stereotype. It predated their arrival and struck a dissonant chord with the dominant Protestant culture, apart from any economic rivalry that occurred among those in the unskilled labor pool. Irish Americans attempted part of that renegotiation by appropriating the stereotype and altering some of its core features. As “Paddy” morphed into a working-class figure near the end of the 1800s, many Irish Americans began to cheer the subtle digs that the “stage Irishman” was able to give to the wider Anglo-American culture and those Irish who aspired to move from the “shanty” Irish into the “lace curtain” crowd.23

These were not enough, however, to overcome the prejudice and stereotype that had taken such a strong hold by the late 1800s and early 1900s. One element that Irish Catholics would not, and could not, change was their Catholicism. Anglo-Saxon Protestants considered the United States to be a Protestant country, founded on Protestant values. Their anti-Catholicism, then, was not just based on religious differences, but on their perceived threat of Catholicism to the very foundation of American values and democracy. Francis Carroll has succinctly summarized the view: “Briefly, many Americans viewed Catholicism as an anti-christian (sic) conspiracy which threatened political, religious, intellectual and educational freedom.” An influx of superstitious and dogmatic Catholics, especially from Ireland, seen as the militant opponent of Anglo-
Saxon Protestant rule who looked to Rome for guidance, would only bring ruin on America.\footnote{Carroll, American Opinion and the Irish Question, 11.}

A second major strain of anti-Irish American feeling grew out of the emerging Anglo-Saxon racism that began to take shape in the late 1800s. In a world-view that placed Anglo-Saxons as the preeminent civilizing force in the world and relegated others to lower rungs on a racial ladder, the Irish, with their resistance to the tutelage of years of Anglo-Saxon rule, seemed hopeless. This view was “popular in academic, political, and journalistic circles.” So even as more “new” immigrants came to the United States and as Irish Americans moved into the middle class, they were still negotiating and creating an identity against an antagonistic background.\footnote{McCaffrey, “Forging Forward and Looking Back,” 226.}

The rise of the temperance movement also placed Irish Americans in a defensive position with respect to white middle-class reformers. There was a vigorous temperance movement in Ireland, led by Father Theobald Mathew, designed to curtail the extensive social drinking of Irish men. In the United States, however, temperance “soon became indistinguishable from the general nativist critique of Irish immigration.”\footnote{The Irish use of satire to counter stereotypes had its roots back to the 1820s. See Charles Fanning, The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 6-38.}

\footnote{See William H. A. Williams, ‘Twas Only an Irishman’s Dream: The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), especially 237-45.}
In Ireland during the 1800s, as religious allegiance became the defining characteristic of the political and cultural world, Catholicism became a central element in the Irish nationalist movement. Both the political and cultural nationalists came to regard Catholicism as the true mark of the Irish people. Drawing on this development, Daniel O’Connell created the Catholic Association in 1823. The Catholic Association eventually became a mass movement after O’Connell instituted the “Catholic rent,” which allowed Catholics to join the organization for only a penny a month. Riding this popular wave of mass politics, O’Connell stood for and won election to Westminster in 1828. He refused to take an oath that described Catholicism as “superstitious,” and, fearing an Irish uprising, Parliament removed the last of the official restrictions on Catholics the next year. This reinforced O’Connell’s reputation with the Irish people, but more important, it reinforced the importance of Catholicism as, in the words of historian Kevin Whealon, “the principal repository of a distinctive Irish nationhood.”

The Famine generation of Irish that came to the United States brought this sense of Catholic identity and experience of the power of political action with them. When O’Connell’s Repeal movement—an effort to repeal the 1801 Act of Union and reestablish a separate Irish parliament—failed, they also brought with them a profound disillusion about the efficacy of constitutional nationalism.

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26 Kenny, American Irish, 78.
In 1848, at the height of the Famine, the Young Irelanders—a group of Irish nationalists who called for a renewed Irish culture that would bridge the gap between Protestants and Catholics—led a short-lived and unsuccessful rebellion in Ireland. Their legacy, however, would not be to renew efforts to bring the Irish together but to reinvigorate the physical-force nationalism, which called for direct military action against British rule, that O’Connell had done much to constrain. As the Young Ireland leaders emigrated to the United States, they carried that philosophy with them. John Mitchell, one of the 1848 leaders, upon landing in the United States in 1853 said:

I mean to make use of the freedom guaranteed to me as a citizen or inchoate citizen of America to help and stimulate the movement of . . . Irish independence. I mean to claim for the revolutionary refugees here . . . that America shall be to them the very stamping ground prayed for by Archimedes whereon they may plant a lever that shall move the world.29

This first organized expression of Irish nationalism by Irish Americans came in 1858 when John O’Mahoney and Michael Doheny founded the Fenian Brotherhood. It was associated with the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), founded in Ireland that same year. Both organizations hoped to mobilize American money and support for physical-force nationalist efforts to overthrow British rule in Ireland. The Fenians, mostly U.S. Civil War veterans, numbered approximately 250,000 by 1865. Hoping to take advantage of Anglo-American tensions, the Fenians staged several ill-planned and

unsuccessful raids into Canada. Those failures, and a failure of an uprising in Ireland in 1867, led to the quick demise of the Fenian Brotherhood by 1870.\textsuperscript{30}

The factionalism that plagued the Fenian Brotherhood led Jerome Collins in 1867 to found of the Clan na Gael (Band of the Irish). The Clan thought that the open membership of the Fenians allowed for greater numbers, but also brought them to the attention of the authorities. The Clan was a secret, oath-bound organization, willing to trade a large membership for the advantages of an underground organization. Soon it had created revolutionary cells across the country, with membership by invitation only. In 1877 the IRB and the Clan developed a revolutionary directory to coordinate actions. By the end of the 1870s the Clan was the single most influential Irish nationalist organization in the United States, with a membership estimated at about ten thousand. Many of the rank and file appear to have been working-class Irish, but the leadership drew from politics, labor leaders, and journalists. For example, Terence Powderly, leader of the Knights of Labor and former mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania, was the “senior guardian” of Camp 470.\textsuperscript{31}

What motivated these early Irish-American nationalists? Thomas N. Brown developed the classic theory on this question. In \textit{Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890} (1966) he writes that Irish-American nationalism at the time was a product of “the realities of loneliness and alienation, and of poverty and prejudice.”\textsuperscript{32} Brown argues that Irish Americans, faced with economic hardship and prejudice in the United States, looked

\textsuperscript{30} Kenny, \textit{American Irish}, 128; McCaffrey, “Forging Forward and Looking Back,” 223. The term “Fenian” referred to ancient warriors of Ireland as described in the Celtic myth of Fionna.
to Irish independence as the means to legitimize themselves. If Ireland were free, then maybe Americans would accept the Irish among them. For Brown, “the hard life of the immigrant” formed the basis of Irish-American nationalism. He assumes that these immigrants strove toward assimilation into the American middle class, and that being from a free country, an equal country in some sense, might make other Americans treat them more as equals.\textsuperscript{33}

There are, however, more persuasive answers to this question that go more to the heart of why Irish Americans would continue their quest for identity into the twentieth century. First, Brown diminished the influence of a wide segment of the Irish-American community that was more concerned with working-class values rather than an ascension into the middle class. Many were happy to live out their lives in the neighborhood. Those who gave their time and money to Irish nationalist causes did not have economic motivation at the core of their activism. David Emmons argues persuasively that, at least for the majority of Irish Americans of all classes, their desire to see a free Ireland stemmed from the fact that they were “historically conditioned to wish it.”\textsuperscript{34} Those born in Ireland but living in the United States saw themselves as exiles, with a natural desire to right the wrong which forced them to leave. In turn, they passed that identity down to their sons and daughters. As this speaker at a St. Patrick’s Day rally in Worcester, Massachusetts in the 1870s phrased it:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[32] Ibid., 23.
\item[33] Ibid., 41.
\item[34] Emmons, \textit{Butte Irish}, 294.
\end{footnotes}
Though I have never breathed the invigorating air of the land of happiness... from my infancy my father has instilled in my mind and impressed it so deep in my heart, that for his sake and in detestation of the wrongs inflicted by the hand of tyranny, it shall never be erased from my memory.35

Kerby Miller argues that a “crisis of identity,” only partly explained by the rejection Irish Americans felt from Protestant America, helped fuel Irish-American nationalism. Irish Americans shared a deeper level of alienation with the dominant culture that played itself out through a resurgent ethnocentric Catholicism as well as through Irish nationalism. That alienation stemmed from a combination of experiences, both in Ireland and the United States, that led the American Irish to consider themselves as exiles. The horrors of the Famine and the English responsibility for it became the defining memory in Irish families for the rest of the century. Emigrants, then, “landed in America already predisposed... to perceive emigration as forced exile and to respond to unpleasant situations abroad with resentments and desires easily translated into nationalist expressions and activities.” At some level, Irish-American interest in Irish affairs was irrational and emotional, but it was real.36

Irish-American nationalism in the later parts of the nineteenth century exhibited several diverse streams, echoing the diversity of Irish nationalism across the Atlantic. Some physical-force nationalist groups, especially Clan na Gael, then led by the ex-Fenian John Devoy, called for the violent overthrow of British rule. Jeremiah O’Donovan

Rossa led the United Irishmen, another physical-force Irish-American nationalist group. Conservative Irish-American nationalists, characterized by their espousal of constitutional nationalism and calls for middle-class respectability for Irish Americans, looked to John O’Reilly, the editor of the Boston *Pilot*, for leadership. Patrick Ford published the *Irish World*, which allowed him a platform to push for Irish-American working-class issues as well as Irish land reform concerns. Ford believed that “the cause of the poor in Donegal is the cause of the factory slave in Fall River.” The *Irish World* was the most popular Irish-American newspaper of the time, reaching a circulation of almost 120,000 by 1900.\(^{37}\)

John Devoy, who attempted to bridge some of the gaps among the groups by his proposal of what became known as the New Departure, was the dominant Irish-American nationalist figure from his arrival in the United States in 1871 until his death in 1928. He was born in Co. Kildare in 1842. After his imprisonment for recruiting for the Irish Republican Brotherhood, he sailed to the United States and settled in New York. For a time he was the foreign editor of the New York *Herald* and published the *Gaelic-American* from 1903 until his death. He was an ardent supporter of physical-force nationalism and the chief fund-raiser of the 1916 Easter Rebellion.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{36}\) Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 546, see also 345-555; Sean Farrell Moran, “Images, Icons and the Practice of Irish History,” in McBride, ed., *Images and Icons*, 173. Moran deals with Irish nationalists, but his observations could easily be applied to Irish Americans as well.\(^{37}\)


\(^{38}\) For the most recent study of Devoy, see Terry Golway, *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America’s Fight for Ireland’s Freedom*, (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999).
Devoy’s 1879 New Departure plan was an attempt to meld together the various strands of Irish and Irish-American nationalism. By bringing together ardent, physical-force republicans, those in favor of constitutional nationalism, and those interested in land reform, Devoy hoped to create a scenario that would create the basis for a revolution in Ireland. The objective was to mobilize and radicalize the Irish peasant class around land reform which would, when the British failed to accede to the demands, lay the grounds for a widespread revolution. Such a combination, funded and eventually armed by Irish Americans, would be a formidable force. To accomplish the goal, Devoy worked with Patrick Ford, Charles Stewart Parnell, a member of the Irish Parliamentary Party and Parliament, and Michael Davitt, another ex-Fenian who, like Devoy, had also served time in prison.39

The Land War, the political and social unrest that enveloped Ireland from 1879 to 1882, grew out of the New Departure alliance. Davitt returned to Ireland in 1879 and founded the Land League. Building on widespread discontent on the land-owning system throughout Ireland (2,000 people owned 70 percent of the land and over three million tenants were renters), the Land League pushed for reform through a series of rent strikes, sporadic violence, and the innovation of the boycott. Parnell served as President of the League and arrived in the United States in early 1880 to drum up American support. He raised over $300,000 during his visit and organized the American branch of the Land

39 Most historians argue that Devoy’s interest in land reform and social issues was cosmetic and that his main goal was always the creation of an Irish republic. For example, see the most recent synthesis of Irish America, Kenny, *American Irish*, 175-80. Terry Golway, however, argues that Devoy “was leading Irish-American nationalism into the wider world of social protest and progressive reform.” See Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 104 (quote), 103-13.
League. In a February 1880 address to a joint session of Congress, Parnell declared that American public opinion should be on the side of Irish nationalists and push the U.S. government to confront the British because “the laws of freedom are not observed” in Ireland.\footnote{Quoted in Sean Cronin, \textit{Washington’s Irish Policy, 1916-1986: Independence, Partition, Neutrality} (Dublin: Anvil Books, 1987), 15.}

It is not surprising that a coalition consisting of proponents of such widely divergent strategies and ultimate goals, faced with a combination of determined outright opposition and a policy of limited appeasement by the British government, would be short-lived. In 1881, Devoy, already under fire from other hard-core republicans for working with the constitutionalists, had declared that Home Rule would not be a satisfactory resolution of the Land War. By mid-1882 Davitt began to call for the abolition of private property, leading to condemnations from Parnell and Devoy. Parnell’s arrest and his subsequent agreement to call off the Land War in exchange for his release and an expansion of land legislation, relegated radical nationalists such as Davitt and Ford to the fringes of the Irish and Irish-American nationalist movement. The New Departure was gone.\footnote{Brown, \textit{Irish-American Nationalism}, 85-131.} Its demise stemmed in part from the type of Irish-American in-fighting lamented in this excerpt from an 1880 letter to Devoy, “It is the same sad, sad, old story. Divisions, ill-wills, lack of common courtesy to one another, and a failure, therefore, to present a front of unity to the world.”\footnote{Alexander Sullivan to John Devoy, 13 October 1880, quoted in William O’Brien and Desmond Ryan, eds., \textit{Devoy’s Post Bag, 1871-1928}, vol. 1, 1871-1880 (Dublin: C. J. Fallon, 1948), 556.}
Sorting out their own identity became a more complicated process for Irish Americans in the early 1900s. Timothy Meagher has vividly described them as “enmeshed in a process of transition.” They were numerous. In 1910, more than 4.5 million were born in Ireland or had at least one Irish-born parent. They had made inroads into politics, labor movements and the Catholic Church. They loudly proclaimed their patriotism. They founded the American-Irish Historical Society and commissioned books that listed Irish-American accomplishments. They moved up the economic ladder of assimilation. But through it all, many still felt that acceptance was out of reach. This Irish-American struggle for acceptance and identity played itself out as the United States also underwent a period of growth and development. Industrial and urban growth changed the cultural and economic landscape. A flood of new immigrants, mostly non-Protestant and many non-English speaking, made second- and third-generation Irish Americans seem less foreign, less dangerous by comparison in the dominant culture’s view. The first two decades of the twentieth century would also see the United States became a major presence in world affairs and grow closer to Great Britain. That would renew an Irish-American nationalism that had lain dormant for almost twenty years.

George McManus satirized the Irish-American ambivalence on joining the mainstream as well as the class conflicts within the Irish-American community in his

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43 Meagher, From Paddy to Studs, 10; Alan J. Ward, “America and the Irish Problem, 1899-1921,” Irish Historical Studies 16, no. 61 (1968): 64.
comic strip, “Bringing Up Father.” The strip began in 1913 and for forty years chronicled the adventures of an Irish-American couple, Maggie and Jiggs. Jiggs was constantly in trouble with his wife Maggie for his friendship with his former working-class pals. Maggie was forever trying to join the Anglo elite and get invitations “to the opera from the Van Snoots or some other feckless members of Manhattan’s aristocracy.” They even had a no-good son-in-law named Lord Worthnotten. MGM and W.R. Hearst’s Cosmopolitan Pictures made the strip into a movie, “Bringing Up Father,” in 1928.45

The McManus strip is indicative of a widely held perception among Irish Americans in the early 1900s: that their full acceptance into the American mainstream was out of reach. It was their Catholicism, Thomas Rowland argues, that was “undoubtedly the greatest impediment to Irish-America’s assimilation.”46 They had tired of efforts to hide or diminish their Catholic identity, strategies that had not succeeded. Only by embracing their Catholicism and combining it with an overtly self-conscious American patriotism did they feel they could gain a secure place in America. Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota, would declare that “America demands that all who live on her soil and are protected by her flag be Americans.”47 Irish Americans, always teetering between a desire to “join the ins” or “lead the outs,” decided that the price of true inclusion and assimilation, the abandonment of their religion, was too great a price to pay. In many ways, even though many of their families had been in the United States for more than fifty years, they had more in common with the newer immigrants than with

most Anglo-Americans. The new strategy, one that would play itself out through World War II, was to become the leader of a broad-based Catholic ethnic movement. Timothy Meagher argues that Irish Americans wanted to create “a militantly Catholic, patriotically American pan-ethnic, American Catholic people, with themselves as leaders of this new group, arbiters of this new identity.” As part of this effort, the Knights of Columbus added a 4th Degree of membership (a high honor) in 1900, designed exclusively as a reward for those who met elevated standards of patriotism.

This class consciousness and antagonism, as well as the co-option of “Paddy” by Irish Americans, can be seen clearly in the career of Edward Harrigan. Harrigan wrote a series of musical comedies in the 1870s and 1880s that highlighted the “Mulligan Guard,” an Irish-American social club. Dan Mulligan, the central character of the stories, was hard-drinking and impulsive, but he was also well-meaning, loyal, and honest. As more Irish Americans joined the middle classes by the turn of the century, however, their criticisms of any negative Irish stereotype became louder and more frequent. The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) stepped up its critique of Irish stereotypes in the popular culture, as did Irish-American politicians. By the eve of World War I, the “stage Irishman” was no more. Irish-American songwriters would eventually turn to parodies of Harrigan. George M. Cohan would write “H-A-R-R-I-G-A-N,” along with “Yankee Doodle Boy,” and “You’re a Grand Old Flag,” a signal that Irish Americans felt there

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was only room for fully patriotic Irish Americans on the American stage and in American songs.49

Tending to the public representations of Irish Americans in films fell in part to the renewed Ancient Order of Hibernians. The AOH, with a membership in excess of 180,000 by 1910, joined by the then fairly influential ranks of Irish-American politicians, worked to combat the remaining Irish-American stereotypes in the media. A variety of the early films in the nickelodeon era perpetuated the image of the drunken, violent, and lazy Paddy. Only after 1910, with concerted efforts by the AOH, Irish-American politicians, the Catholic hierarchy, and a subset of Progressive reformers, did film depictions of Irish Americans begin to move beyond the stereotype. What is significant, however, is that the changes occurred only after these efforts. The underlying anti-Irish and anti-Catholic views remained.50

Why did Irish Americans take such offense to the negative depictions of themselves after the turn of the century, especially when for so long they were content to tolerate and satirize the stereotype? John Ibson observes that the shift, “did not signal the ‘Americanization’ of the Irish. The matter merely became less amusing as the Irish moved in greater numbers out of physical slums while remaining in a psychological

49 Curran, Hibernian Green, 10-13.
50 Ibid., 16-19; Ward, Ireland and Anglo-American Relations, 27.
ghetto.” In effect, the process of assimilation allowed the Irish to move up the economic ladder, but their failure to acquire full acceptance made the sting of the stereotype that much harder to accept.

On the eve of World War I, Irish America could look proudly on many accomplishments. Indeed, Irish Americans felt a need to look for them everywhere, as far back as possible, to make exaggerated claims about their importance, and to proclaim them loudly. Driven by a basic insecurity about their status in American society, faced with obstacles, and never feeling entirely at home in an Anglo and Protestant America, Irish Americans had a desperate desire to look “American.” They would do so to the extent they could, short of giving up their Catholicism and their Catholic identity. John Ibson is correct when he writes that “Irish-Americans sought success to prove their worth before Protestants.”

Irish Americans would also seek to be Americans by looking across the Atlantic, by linking their Irish nationalism with the broader historical themes of American foreign policy. At the same time, the families they left behind in Ireland were trying to determine what it meant to be Irish.

As Irish Americans struggled to define themselves at the start of the twentieth century, their Irish cousins labored to create a new sense of Irishness as well. Many Irish, frustrated with the ineffectiveness of political initiatives to create an Irish state, hoped a cultural rebirth would create the necessary conditions for a political liberation. These

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cultural developments centered on sports and language, forming the basis of a “new nationalism,” the more militant nationalism that came to dominate Irish nationalist thought in the twenty years prior to 1916.

Michael Cusack, disturbed about the role of English sports in Ireland, founded the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in 1884. Soon after, Irish nationalists took control of the GAA and ousted Cusack from a leadership position. Gaelic football and hurling became the basis of the GAA’s efforts to create a new Irish identity. With the worldwide growth of spectator sports in the early years of the century, GAA events began to draw huge crowds. At the same time, the Irish Republican Brotherhood transformed the GAA into a distinctly nationalist, although not revolutionary, organization by excluding anyone who played or watched “imported games.”

Irish Americans and the Irish became concerned about the survival of the Irish language during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Douglas Hyde, who would later serve as President of Ireland during World War II, served as the first president of the Gaelic League, founded in 1893. A few years earlier, Hyde had visited New York’s Gaelic Societies and observed their efforts to promote Irish. The Gaelic League consciously attempted to remain apolitical, enabling it to draw support from across the political and religious spectrum. As the “new nationalism” began to gain momentum, however, Irish nationalists began to use the Gaelic League as an instrument of IRB policy. Many

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52 Ibid., 43.
53 For the most recent account of the influence of sports on Irish nationalism, see Mike Cronin, Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity since 1884 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999).
members of the League participated in the Easter Rising of 1916, and the British finally outlawed the League in 1919.\textsuperscript{54}

These new nationalists found common cause with a revived nationalism by Irish Americans. In 1903 John Devoy created the \textit{Gaelic American}, a New York-based weekly designed to publicize the activities of Clan na Gael. The Clan by this time had almost 40,000 members and Lawrence McCaffrey argues that it had the “emotional and financial backing of many other Irish Americans.”\textsuperscript{55} The Clan faced a difficult challenge in putting the issue of Irish independence before the American public. Anglo-American relations were strong in the early twentieth century, boosted by American neutrality during the Boer War and Great Britain’s benevolent neutrality during the Spanish-American War. The United States and Great Britain had also settled the Venezuelan border dispute of 1899 and signed the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty in 1901. Add those developments to the common Anglo-Saxon culture and the anglophile Republican elites and the obstacles faced by the Clan become clear. In response, the Clan attempted to influence public and official opinion by “identifying themselves with traditional themes in American foreign policy, most notably non-alignment in the European balance of power.” Even the more conservative Ancient Order of Hibernians signed a pact in 1907 with the German-


\textsuperscript{55} McCaffrey, “Forging Forward and Looking Back,” 224. On the founding of the \textit{Gaelic American} and the Clan’s effort to portray the British as trying to trick the United States into a military alliance, see Golway, \textit{Irish Rebel}, 173-96.
American National Alliance to work together to disrupt any growing Anglo-American partnership.56

WORLD WAR I and the EASTER RISING

Political developments in Great Britain in the years before World War I reinforced the growing power of the new nationalism and its cultural manifestations.57 After the 1910 elections, the ruling Liberal Party needed the support of the Irish MPs to stay in power. The price of that support was the introduction of a Home Rule bill, which was designed to give Ireland control over most of its affairs. Other Home Rule bills had failed when the House of Lords vetoed them, leading to the growing Irish disillusion with constitutional nationalism. Recent reforms, however, had curtailed the absolute veto power of the Lords and the House of Commons had merely to approve a bill three times for it to become law.

Home Rule galvanized both die-hard Unionists in Ulster, eager to remain a part of Great Britain, and the new Irish nationalists, intent on seeing Home Rule pass. Unionists, anxious about the impending passage of Home Rule legislation, organized several existing militias into an Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in 1913. It soon had over 90,000 members and had smuggled in over 25,000 rifles. The UVF hoped the threat of civil war would lead to the rejection of Home Rule, or at least to a modification that would exclude


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Protestant Ulster. Irish nationalists responded later that year by forming the Dublin-based Irish Volunteers. On the surface, the Volunteers were designed to defend Home Rule, but the IRB had a strong presence in its leadership. John Devoy and the Clan na Gael created a Irish Volunteer Fund to support the new militia, prompting Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, the British ambassador to Washington, to write to London that should fighting break out in Ireland “men and guns will almost certainly be sent” from the United States.58

After the start of World War I, the British government attempted to put the whole Home Rule debate (as it had done with other reforms such as woman suffrage) aside for the duration of the war. The government had submitted the Amending Bill in June 1914, designed to allow the counties in Ulster an opportunity to remove themselves from the effects of Home Rule legislation. Once Britain was at war, the government removed the Amending Bill and passed a Suspension Act, delaying the implementation of Home Rule until the end of hostilities. John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, hoping that a strong showing of support for the British during the war would ensure the implementation of Home Rule at its end, called for the Irish people to join the war effort. Most of the Irish Volunteers joined with Redmond and formed the National Volunteers. Only about three thousand committed nationalists remained with the Irish Volunteers, but by 1916 they numbered around fifteen thousand.

The war also influenced the Irish-American community’s attitude toward nationalism and Anglo-American relations. A growing number of Irish Americans began to see the war in the traditional mindset of Irish nationalism, that “England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity.” Many Irish American nationalists began to sense a change in Irish-American opinion away from support for Redmond’s pro-war stance and reliance on eventual Home Rule to a more radical and immediate call for Irish independence. In February 1916, Devoy knew that Irish nationalists were planning an uprising in Ireland against British rule. Eager to arrange a strong show of Irish-American resolve, and after discussions with the Clan leadership, Devoy and over three hundred and fifty high profile Irish Americans sent out an invitation to an Irish Race Convention to be held the next month in New York. That convention founded the Friends of Irish Freedom (FOIF), which eventually would have over 250,000 members, to support “any movement that will tend to bring about the National Independence of Ireland.”

On Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, despite pleas to stop activities from the head of the Irish Volunteers, a dedicated group of physical-force nationalists staged a rebellion in Dublin. Numbering just over fifteen hundred, they took control of the General Post Office and other strategic points throughout the city. Padraic Pearse, the commander-in-chief of the rebel forces, knew that the chances of military success were slim, but he felt a blood sacrifice was needed to create the situation necessary for independence. In less than

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a week, British authorities routed the rebels and arrested the main leaders, including Eamon de Valera. More than five hundred people died during the week’s fighting.

Initial reaction to the Rising was similar in both Ireland and the United States. Most Irish reacted with surprise and horror over the violence. John Redmond criticized the rebels for damaging the nationalist cause and possibly upsetting the awarding of Home Rule at the end of the war. The subsequent executions by the British of many of the leaders of the Rising, however, caused a firestorm of protest on both sides of the Atlantic. One Irish American wrote to Redmond:

The present wave of fury sweeping through Irish America originated with the executions and not with the rising. The rising only called out sympathy for you, except in a small circle. The executions enabled that circle to spread their ripple further than they had hoped or dreamed.

In July, the U.S. Senate passed a bill urging clemency for those leaders arrested by the British, but to no avail. The end result of the executions was the effective end of Irish-American support for constitutional nationalism and the belated realization by British officials that Irish-American opinion was an important component of Anglo-American relations.60

American entry into the war in April 1917 presented Irish Americans with a fresh challenge. They naturally felt compelled to prove their loyalty if they were to have any influence over public or official opinion, but the pro-German stances previously held by

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the more radical nationalists meant that they faced an uphill fight to gain credibility.

Irish-American leaders took a two-track approach to the problem: convince other Americans of their loyalty and patriotism, and work to have Irish independence become a war aim that was included in the final peace settlement. Daniel Cohalan, a leader of the Clan na Gael and the FOIF as well as a justice on the New York Supreme Court, organized a meeting of 4,000 Irish Americans in Carnegie Hall that urged Wilson to “take such action as will secure the independence of Ireland.” Wilson recognized that an Irish settlement would promote Anglo-American cooperation. On 12 April, he wrote to Lansing that the British should be informed, unofficially, that “substantial self-government” for Ireland would add “a very great element of satisfaction and enthusiasm . . . to the co-operation now about to be organized” between the United States and Great Britain.61

The end of the war allowed for a renewed effort to secure Irish independence. Eamon de Valera, spared execution after the Rising, probably because he was born in the United States, led a renewed Sinn Fein (Ourselves Alone) party to a resounding victory in the December 1918 elections. Rather than take their seats at Westminster, the Sinn Fein MPs convened in Dublin on 21 January 1919 to establish the first Dáil Éireann, or Irish Parliament, and unanimously elected de Valera as the Dáil’s president. They reaffirmed the 1916 Declaration of the Irish Republic, began to form a government, and appealed for

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a seat at the Paris Peace Conference. On the same day, members of the Irish Volunteers, now being referred to as the Irish Republican Army, ambushed British soldiers and officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary, killing two of them. The War for Independence had begun.

Throughout 1919, the U.S. Congress worked to force the Paris Peace Conference to recognize the Irish delegation attempting to get a hearing. Over Wilson’s objections, both houses passed resolutions during the spring and summer in support of Irish independence and calling on the Conference to meet with the Irish representatives. On 28 March 1919, a group of Democratic officeholders wrote to Wilson expressing concern that his unwillingness to bring Irish issues to the table would hurt them in the next election. Wilson was unmoved. Eventually, those opposed to the Versailles Treaty would use the extensive logistical support of a variety of Irish-American organizations to help defeat the treaty’s passage in the Senate.

By 1921, both the Irish and the British were ready to end the hostilities. The Government of Ireland Act in 1920 had already effectively divided the island into two political entities by allowing Ulster to form its own parliament. The negotiations to establish an independent Ireland in the south centered on what status that state would have with Great Britain. In December, both sides signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which

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gave the “Irish Free State” independence, the constitutional status of a self-governing
dominion, and membership in the British Commonwealth.  

IRISH AMERICANS, IRELAND, and the UNITED STATES: 1921-1932

Most Irish Americans viewed the creation of the Irish Free State as the fulfillment
of the long-held nationalist desire for a free and independent Ireland, so they were
confused and disengaged as die-hard Republicans in Ireland started the Irish Civil War.
In fact, even though many Irish would have preferred complete independence from
Britain, more than eighty percent of the new nation supported the Treaty. Eamon de
Valera, who resigned from the Dáil when the Treaty passed, helped lead the anti-Treaty
forces. Violence broke out in June 1922 when the provisional government’s army
attacked the Irregulars, the anti-Treaty Irish Republican Army members. More than eight
hundred people died in the war by May 1923, when the IRA command ordered its troops
to dump their arms, signaling the end of the conflict. The pro- and anti-Treaty split would
be the main element in Irish political life for the remainder of the century.

After the Civil War, issues of national identity, especially the importance of
disassociating Ireland from Britain, formed the core concern of Irish foreign policy in the
1920s. Early Irish foreign policy drew its inspiration from the notion that it would be
much more difficult for Britain to interfere in Irish affairs if the international community

65 “Final Text of the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland as Signed,
London, 6 December 1921,” in Ronan Fanning and others, eds., Documents on Irish Foreign Policy, 1919-
embraced the Irish Free State as a fully independent nation. Policymakers had to play out this strategy out, however, as a member of the Commonwealth. 66

Dominion status meant that the Free State could have trade representatives, but not official diplomats, in foreign countries. In the next ten years, however, Ireland would make considerable gains in expanding the range of its diplomatic activity. The government became the first Dominion to appoint its own minister plenipotentiary when Timothy Smiddy became Irish minister to the United States in 1924. While a significant development in the Irish government’s effort to bolster its image on the international scene and within the United States, the appointment was also designed to show the Irish people—only one year removed from a civil war—that the government was able to assert itself on the international scene. 67

Ireland’s membership and participation in the League of Nations during the 1920s was another effort to secure for the new state a legitimate international foundation as a bulwark against Britain. It became important for the Irish government to have the League recognize the Anglo-Irish Treaty as an international treaty between two sovereign states. The League did so in 1924, over heavy initial British opposition. Subsequent Irish governments continued to pursue active agendas within the League, focusing on the role

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66 As an example of the concern over international image, Irish diplomats routinely carried the Irish flag to international sporting events out of fear that organizers would use the Union Jack as the symbol of Irish athletes. Such was the case in Belgium in 1926. See Gerard Keown, “Taking the World Stage: Creating an Irish Foreign Policy in the 1920s,” in Irish Foreign Policy, 1919-66: From Independence to Internationalism, eds. Michael Kennedy and Joseph Morrison Skelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 38.

of small states in the world. The League recognized those efforts in electing Ireland to the League Council in 1930.68

Irish Americans also played an important part of the new nation’s foreign policy considerations. The diaspora, with Irish Americans being the primary component, was one of the most significant factors in Irish foreign policy during the nation’s first decade.69 Ironically, Irish-American leaders opposed Ireland’s entry into the League of Nations. This opposition grew from the intense opposition to the League during the treaty fight in the United States after the Paris Peace Conference.70

While the Irish government throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s turned to Irish America for validation and support in its effort to forge a national identity, Irish Americans continued to wrestle with similar concepts of identity and power. True, Irish Americans were making more money, getting better jobs, living in better conditions, and achieving much of the stereotypical trappings of the American Dream, but they still did not feel accepted. The rise of Catholic institutions—schools, colleges, hospitals, social clubs, etc.—were part of the larger pan-ethnic Catholic leadership role that Irish Americans sought to acquire. They are also evidence that even as Irish Americans were climbing the economic ladder on the outside, they continued to feel that no matter how

69 Keown, “Taking the World Stage,” 33-34.
70 For Irish American opposition to Ireland’s entry into the League, see Smiddy to FitzGerald, Washington, 20 April 1923, in Fanning and others, eds., Documents on Irish Foreign Policy, vol. 2, 1923-1926, (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2000), 91. The definitive work on Irish actions within the Commonwealth during the 1920s is Harkness, The Restless Dominion.
high they reached they would never be able to climb into the “real” American house. The “extensive organizational network” that they built as a counter to the barriers erected by the dominant American culture “functioned to separate their lives, at the primary level, from those of Anglo Protestants.”

CONCLUSION

Historian John Patrick Buckley has written that by 1921 Irish Americans were “largely indistinguishable from their fellow Americans.” Likewise, Kerby Miller has argued that in the early years of the twentieth century Irish Americans remained in figurative exile, “remarkably estranged from the dominant culture of their adopted country,” but that by 1923 “the long, dark winter of Irish exile in America was over.” These and other arguments that equate a decline in Irish-American nationalism and the rise in the Irish-American standard of living with the end of Irish-American identity miss the mark. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Irish Americans continued to develop their sense of place in American society. When the international situation thrust Ireland into a crisis, Irish Americans responded by again looking across the Atlantic to help discover their identity as both Irish and American. That could not have happened if their internal acceptance of complete assimilation had been complete. Irish leaders, with Eamon de

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Valera in the lead, would similarly use the international situation as an opportunity to shape an Irish identity, with an eye toward Irish America’s potential to help.

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CHAPTER 2

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITIES, 1932-1939

Let it be made clear that we yield no willing assent to any form or symbol that is out of keeping Ireland’s right as a sovereign nation. Let us remove these forms one by one, so that this State that we control may be a Republic in fact.¹

Eamon de Valera
1933

True, some of our people still hold high places in the various phases of our city, state and national life, but what about the hundreds of thousands who are never heard from, who are the backbone of our race?²

Daniel Danaher
American Federation of Irish Societies
1938

Most standard histories of Irish America mark 1920 or 1921 as the point at which extensive Irish-American participation in the Irish nationalist movement ceased, a product of the creation of the Irish Free State and Irish-American lack of understanding, and hence concern, about the issues that triggered the Irish Civil War. This standard interpretation misses the mark, however, because it implies that this development meant that Irish Americans had assimilated into American society to such a degree by the early
1920s that they had lost their sense of “Irishness.” A typical example comes from the conclusion to *How the Irish Became Americans*, by Joseph O’Grady: “By the 1930’s and 1940’s, Irishmen were absorbed into American life, pursuing their careers as Americans and not as Irish-Americans.”

Charles Fanning more accurately describes Irish America in the 1920s and 1930s as an “ambivalent culture in transition,” a transition that continued through World War II. In fact, many Irish Americans began in the 1920s and 1930s to explore other dimensions of their Irish identities that they continued to cultivate, primarily as a result of their lack of integration into society. The marginalization process was especially true for lower- and working-class Irish Americans. The economic effects of the Depression during the 1930s would reinforce their place on the fringes of American society and bring to the fore the latent Anti-Catholicism that helped fuel the immigration restrictions of the previous decade.

Historian Timothy Meagher opens his investigation of Irish-Americans’ “quest to define their identity” in 1880-1920 with a discussion of Patrick Lonigan’s reflections about the changing nature of Irish-American neighborhoods at the start of James Farrell’s *Studs Lonigan* trilogy. Farrell wrote the trilogy in the 1930s, but Meagher focuses on the opening, set in 1916, when Patrick, Studs’s father, remembers his immigrant parents and impoverished childhood. Now, by 1916, Patrick Lonigan declares himself “comfortable

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2 *Irish World*, 3 September 1938.
and content,” “a good Catholic and a good American,” yet not quite at home with himself or society. Meagher argues that there were “thousands, perhaps millions” of Irish Americans like Lonigan in 1916. That Irish-American search for identity and acceptance into mainstream American society did not resolve itself in 1920; it continued throughout most of the twentieth century. Reflecting on his own childhood growing up Irish and Catholic in 1950s America, Gary Wills recalled that “we grew up different . . . there were places we went and others did not . . . and also places we never went and others could.” Irish Americans were “stranded in America, out of place.”

In Ireland, Eamon de Valera embodied a similar search for identity and a place in the world by the Irish. He spent much of the 1930s trying to give birth to a renewed, truly independent, Catholic, rural, nation. He turned to Irish America for support in that effort, but failed to realize that many Irish Americans had indeed lost interest in using nationalist ties to Ireland as a means to define their identity. The Irish in Ireland and America, still fashioning their national and cultural identities, switched from a strident anti-British stance. In the United States, they attempted to establish their place in American culture, and in Ireland to forge independent economic and diplomatic strategies.

IRISH AMERICANS in the 1930s

The severe dislocation of the Great Depression saddled Irish Americans struggling to gain firmer social ground with an added burden in their effort to be a part of

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5 Meagher, *From Paddy to Studs*, 1-25.
the American mainstream. On top of the continuing anti-Catholic prejudices, they now had to deal with the fallout from an economic downturn that affected all classes, regions, and ethnic groups. The economic challenge delayed Irish America’s journey to acceptance and assimilation.

In 1929, the *Irish World* editorialized about the basic insecurity of the Irish in America: “We see all around us, the people of other races forging ahead.”

This insecurity would lead to conflicts between Irish Americans and other ethnic groups, especially Jews, struggling to maintain their economic and social position in a desperate economic environment. Irish Americans felt that 1930s America truly did not accept them. The anti-immigrant political developments of the 1920s, the renewed Ku Klux Klan, and the anti-Catholic backlash from Al Smith’s 1928 presidential campaign among other developments highlighted for Irish Americans their outsider status. Kevin Kenny correctly assesses that Irish-American support for Fr. Charles Coughlin, the anti-Semitic “radio priest,” reflected a basic insecurity and anti-Semitism on the part of middle- and working-class Irish Americans who were “not fully assimilated into the American mainstream despite several generations in this country.”

One of the best ways to examine the state of Irish America in the 1930s is to examine how Irish Americans portrayed themselves and their situation. The continuing success of George McManus’s popular comic strip, “Bringing Up Father” highlighted

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7 *Irish World*, 4 February 1929.
tensions within the Irish-American community about their level of acceptance into the wider culture.\textsuperscript{10} By the 1930s, the strip’s main characters, Maggie and Jiggs, began a series of reminiscences about the social relationships of their old Irish-American neighborhood, relationships that were unattainable given their current situation. The strip often satirized the social unease felt by many middle-class Irish Americans and their longing for the ethnic community urban past, exploring McManus’s recurring theme of the tension between success and alienation. His characters often reminisce about the social life of the “old neighborhood,” replete with the darker elements of criminals and drunks. When McManus portrays Jiggs’s material success, it is always tempered by a lack of spiritual fulfillment. Jiggs would much rather go back to the pleasures of his old friends. The popularity of the strip during the 1930s and 1940s, especially among Irish Americans, testifies to its ability to tap into an important element of the Irish-American experience.

In literature, John O’Hara’s characters in “BUtterfield 8” are the fullest expression of the experience of many Irish Americans in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{11} O’Hara was born in 1905 to a prosperous Irish Catholic family in Pottsville, Pennsylvania; his father was a doctor. In spite of his family’s standing, O’Hara never felt accepted by the local WASP elites. He left Pottsville in 1928, but it became the setting (Gibbsville) for most of his best fiction. In BUtterfield 8, James Malloy tells his girlfriend, “I want to tell you something

\textsuperscript{9} Kenny, \textit{American Irish}, 208. See also Griffin, \textit{Irish Americans}, 165-90.  
\textsuperscript{10} See chapter 1.  
about myself that will help to explain a lot of things about me. . . . First of all, I am a Mick.” In spite of the fact, Malloy says, that he maintains the outward appearances of acceptance, the Irish are “non-assimilable,” and that he is “pretty God damn American, and therefore my brothers and sisters are, and yet we’re not Americans.”

O’Hara’s Irish Catholic background served as the backdrop to his fiction and his insights into Irish-American life in the early part of the twentieth century. He modeled his characters after himself, his family, and his friends. The struggles of gaining wider acceptance into American society take the foreground in his work. O’Hara himself described his schoolmates as “the Studs Lonigans of our place and time,” evoking the eponymous creation of James T. Farrell.

Farrell is the other most important literary interpreter of the Irish American experience in the 1930s. After growing up in a tough Irish neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side, the son of an Irish-born teamster, Farrell used his fiction to examine the economic, cultural and spiritual impoverishment of Irish America in the 1930s.

In the Studs Lonigan trilogy, Farrell creates the story of Studs Lonigan, an Irish-American Catholic kid from Chicago’s South Side who struggles to find his way in the world, ultimately dying a tragic death in his family’s home. Farrell later wrote that one of the most important goals he had for the work was “to reveal the concrete effects of

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13 Wolff, *Burning Bridges*, 34.
spiritual poverty.”\textsuperscript{15} He wanted to capture that even as Irish Americans were moving up the economic ladder, they never truly became a part of the mainstream, in part because of their Catholicism.

The novel starts in 1916, with Studs graduating from the eighth grade of St. Patrick’s school. He barely goes to high school, finishes only two years, and spends his days roaming the streets of Chicago. He later works for his father’s painting business, but as that slowly begins to unravel, so too does Studs. At one point, a couple of friends have this exchange: “Andy, are the Irish hundred-per-cent Americans?” “No, because they believe in the Pope.” He dreams of a boyhood crush, Lucy, and carries her as a lifelong dream that would make him a true man, “strong, and tough, and the real stuff,” carrying him out of the despair and uncertainty of the South Side. After his family finally moves from the neighborhood, Studs feels lost. He goes back, only to find that the old gang gone, dead, or in prison. On a trip back from one friend’s funeral, Studs sits alone on the train:

It was funny that he should riding home now from the funeral of Shrimp Haggerty, and so many things should have been changed from what they used to be, and from what he had expected them to become. But since his kid days, there had been many years, all piled on top of one another, and now, each year, each month, each week, each day, every hour, every minute and every second even, carried him further and further away from them, just as if he was on a moving express train which was shooting him forever away from some place where he very much wanted

to be, and all the while carrying him nearer and nearer . . . to his own death.\textsuperscript{16}

Near the end of the trilogy, with a similar sense of being lost in the world that McManus captured in his mid-1930s cartoons, Patrick Lonigan, as his son Studs is home dying, drives around the old neighborhood longing for the certainty and security that came with the familiar. Faced with economic ruin as the Depression is deepening, Patrick saw “another closed bank . . . more men on the corners. Kids. More idle men.”\textsuperscript{17}

Farrell was conscious of the dual identity of Irish America in the 1930s, and worked to bring out that underlying uncertainty and searching in his work. Writing in 1932 to Ezra Pound, who had just read the galleys of \textit{Young Lonigan}, the first part of the trilogy, Farrell commented, “As to the Irishness of it. I generally feel that I’m an Irishman rather than an American.”\textsuperscript{18} In 1962, Farrell wrote, “I am a second-generation Irish-American. The effects and scars of immigration are upon my life. The past was dragging through my boyhood and adolescence.”\textsuperscript{19} Charles Fanning’s assessment of Farrell’s portrayal of Irish Americans in the 1930s is correct: “In their struggles, silences, and unshared epiphanies, their alienation and loneliness and endurance, Farrell’s Irish continue to express essential realities of American immigrant and ethnic experience.”\textsuperscript{20}

In her study of St. Sabina’s and other Catholic parishes in Chicago, ones very much like the real and fictional parishes of Farrell, Eileen McMahon shows how much

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 828.
\textsuperscript{18} Quoted in Fanning, \textit{Irish Voice}, 257.
\textsuperscript{20} Fanning, \textit{Irish Voice}, 291.
the church proved to be a vehicle for Irish-American identity throughout the first half of
the twentieth century. Faced with rising economic status but “second-class citizenship” in
a predominantly Anglo-Protestant community, Irish Americans clung to their church as a
way to maintain “an integral part of their identity.” This sense of exclusion from the
mainstream led to feelings of “defensiveness,” on the part of the parishioners, much like
that of Lonigan.21

John Ford, the legendary second-generation Irish American film director, made
his first two sound movies explicitly about Ireland in the 1930s: The Informer and The
Plough and Stars. Ford, perhaps more than any other filmmaker, helped convey and
reflect the wider culture’s prewar views of Ireland, and by extension, Irish America. The
son of Irish immigrants and fluent in Irish, Ford brought his Irish Catholic upbringing and
outlook to his movies. The Informer, Ford’s adaptation of Liam O’Flaherty’s novel about
an Irish Republican Army informer, follows a dark pattern of shame, remorse and
forgiveness, while stressing the overriding values of solidarity within Ford’s “militant
nationalist” views. The Plough and the Stars, Ford’s depiction of Sean O’Casey’s play
about a widow whose husband died in the Easter Rising, portrays Irish nationalism in the
most sympathetic and romantic light.22 This interplay between self-identity and the
perceptions of others was also happening in Ireland at the same time.

21 Eileen McMahon, What Parish Are You From?: A Chicago Irish Community and Race Relations
ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS and IRISH AMERICANS in the 1930s

De Valera and his political party, Fianna Fáil\textsuperscript{23} had as their overriding goal in the 1930s the creation of a state entirely independent of Great Britain: politically, militarily, culturally, and economically. This mission centered on policies designed to create an internal and external Irish identity that reflected de Valera’s vision of a self-contained, rural, Gaelic, Catholic state. While much of the literature on 1930s Ireland focuses on the state’s efforts to impose censorship and foster the growth of the Irish language, there are some recent attempts to show that Ireland in the 1930s was not as hidebound as previously believed.\textsuperscript{24}

De Valera outlined his vision for Ireland in the February 1932 Fianna Fáil Election Manifesto.\textsuperscript{25} He sought above all to remove the oath that bound members of the Dáil to declare allegiance to the British crown prior to taking their seats, to reunite the island, and to keep the land annuity payments that the Irish government had been sending to Great Britain.\textsuperscript{26} In addition, he sought tariff protection for Irish agriculture and industry and the expansion of Irish as a national language. The overall goal was to create an Ireland that would be truly independent, Catholic, and Gaelic. He soon enlisted the

\textsuperscript{22} Curran, \textit{Hibernian Green}, 73-79.
\textsuperscript{23} Pronounced “Fee-anna Foyle,” meaning “Soldiers of Destiny” in Irish.
help of Irish America in his cause during two radio broadcasts to the United States the following month.\textsuperscript{27} On 9 March 1932, de Valera took office as President of the Executive Council.

Upon taking office, de Valera maintained the External Affairs portfolio for himself. His vision of a renewed Irish identity rested on his hopes for an undivided Ireland that could stand separately from Great Britain in all fields, from economics to language. He knew, however, that the geographic proximity of the two states and the long list of historical interconnections would make that difficult. He was already receiving advice to take a hard-line approach in order to isolate Great Britain internationally by using the power of the Irish living abroad.\textsuperscript{28}

One of the first tasks facing de Valera was determining how to deal with his old cohort who did not follow him into constitutional politics by joining Fianna Fáil, but remained committed to the physical-force nationalism espoused by the Irish Republican Army and its Irish-American advocates. De Valera met with the IRA leader Sean MacBride several times in 1932 and 1933 in an effort to win him over to Fianna Fáil’s new-found faith in constitutional politics. In an effort to convince Irish-American activists, chief among them the Clan na Gael leader Joseph McGarrity, de Valera sent the

\textsuperscript{26} The land annuities were the sums paid by Irish farmers for becoming the owners of land on which they had previously been tenants. It was collected by the Irish government and paid to Great Britain under the 1926 Ultimate Financial Settlement: “1. The Government of the Irish Free State undertake to pay to the British Government at agreed intervals the full amount of the annuities accruing due from time to time under the Irish Land Acts 1891-1909,” “Financial Settlement between Free State and British Government,” in Mitchell and Ó Snodaigh, eds., \textit{Irish Political Documents}, 173.
\textsuperscript{27} “Prospect of Peace and Reconstruction,” 4 March 1932, in \textit{Speeches and Statements}, 191-93.
\textsuperscript{28} MacEntee to De Valera, 18 March 1932, MacEntee Papers, Archives Department at University College, Dublin, P67/94. Hereafter manuscript collections from the Archives at University College, Dublin will be cited as “UCD” with appropriate file number.
Irish vice-president Sean T. O’Kelly to the United States. De Valera made clear the importance of persuading Irish America to join in his efforts: “If our friends over there could be got to bring pressure on the IRA to throw their weight behind the Government, tremendous progress could be made.”

McGarrity and the IRA remained unconvinced. McGarrity, writing to de Valera, argued that the IRA and Fianna Fáil could benefit from a working agreement that would allow the IRA to “do the things that you will not care to do,” presumably carry out bombing missions. De Valera responded back angrily:

Is this need and desire for unity to be used as a means of trying to blackmail us into adopting a policy which we know could only lead our people to disaster? . . . What is the use of talking any more with people who are too stupid or too pig-headed to see this. We have undertaken a responsibility to the people at present living, to the future, and to the dead. We will not allow any group or any individuals to prevent us from carrying it out.

De Valera then soon turned to Anglo-Irish relations, specifically the oath of allegiance. British objections to the removal of the oath revolved around two concerns. The first was what the removal meant for the place of Ireland within the Commonwealth. The second, and more important concern, was what the oath’s removal from the Irish

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30 Ibid., 156.
31 De Valera to McGarrity, 31 January 1934, McGarrity Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, MS 17,441. Hereafter manuscript collections from the National Library of Ireland, Dublin, will be cited as “NLI Dublin,” with appropriate file number.
Constitution portended for the future of the entire Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1921. De Valera countered that the Irish Constitution was a purely domestic matter and that British government imposed the oath on the Irish government only accepted under threat of war. In the Dáil, de Valera argued that if Commonwealth nations had equal status under the law, then the fact that the British Parliament could enact legislation dissolving the oath for MPs should allow the Dáil to do so same for its members. For de Valera, the removal of the oath, which was an integral element of his election platform, represented the first step in creating a truly independent Ireland. The Dáil passed the bill on 19 May 1932.

De Valera’s attempt to create a new Irish identity also included a religious component. As such, he was glad to build on the planning begun under the previous government to host the 31st International Eucharistic Congress in June 1932. De Valera was a deeply religious man, but the Irish hierarchy had united against him during the Irish Civil War. De Valera saw the Congress as a perfect vehicle to shore up his relations with the nation’s bishops, showcase Ireland’s independence to the world, and reaffirm his view that the nation’s Catholic faith was an integral element of its identity. Representatives from around the world converged in Dublin, with the culmination of the

32 “Despatch from the British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Minister for External Affairs,” 23 March 1932, in Mitchell and Ó Snodaigh, eds., Irish Political Documents, 196. See also the discussion in Paul Canning, British Policy Towards Ireland, 1921-1941 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 121-75.
34 Ó Dáil Deháis 41 (19 May 1932), 2141. The bill later stalled in the Seanad, but eventually became law on 3 May 1933.
Congress a Mass attended by more than one million people. The entire event was a "manifestation of Catholic nationalism."  

De Valera saw the Economic War, precipitated by his refusal to pay the land annuities, as another step to realize his wider vision of Ireland’s identity. The land annuities were the sums paid by Irish farmers for becoming the owners of land on which they had previously been tenants during British rule. Realizing that the economic dislocation would cause hurt Ireland’s industrial sector, de Valera was willing to make the sacrifice because it would be “made up by the foundation here of the sort of economic life that every Irishman who thought nationally in the past hoped for and prayed for and, so far as he was able in his own time, worked for.”  

De Valera hoped that economic strife with Great Britain would help bring about the pastoral vision of Irish identity so near to his heart.

Negotiations between Ireland and Great Britain about the disputed land annuity payments continued during the spring and early summer of 1932. They collapsed, however, on 1 July when de Valera withheld £1.5 million due the British, who soon retaliated by imposing a twenty percent duty on most Irish imports. De Valera based his position on the fact that the previous government of William Cosgrave had never submitted the 1926 agreement, which called for the payments, to the Dáil. Part of the British negotiating strategy was to make the economic suffering so tough on the Irish that de Valera would lose the next election. British policymakers held out that goal while at

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the same time voicing concern that too tough a stance would put them at odds with other members of the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{37} The British were also concerned about the lasting effects of an economic war with Ireland on its relations with the United States. Members of the Foreign Office and business leaders who had dealings in both Ireland and the United States raised their concerns to the government’s Irish Situation Committee, which had been organized that March. In August, the British Lord Chancellor wrote, “the present situation cannot be allowed to go on forever.”\textsuperscript{38}

Despite these warnings, British Prime Minister James Macdonald was hesitant to pursue further negotiations with de Valera. MacDonald headed a coalition government that had to work with a vocal Conservative press and Conservative politicians who argued that negotiation with or concessions to de Valera would simply lead to a long list of additional Irish demands. He also felt the chilling effect of Winston Churchill’s comments, who was waiting in the wings hoping to form a Conservative government: “English people are better pleased with the Duties are weighing on the Irish . . . and they will be very sulky if anything happens to take these duties off, and woe unto the man by whom it happens.”\textsuperscript{39} The Anglo-Irish Economic War continued until 1938.

De Valera, in his bid to create an independent Irish identity, took on another battle with the British in 1932. Irish republicans had always resented the symbolism of the

\textsuperscript{36} Dáil Debates, 15 (18 July 1932), 1322.
\textsuperscript{38} Sankey to MacDonald, 10 August 1932, quoted in Canning, \textit{British Policy Towards Ireland}, 140.
British crown’s dominion of Ireland as it was represented by the office of the Governor-General. John Dulanty, the Irish High Commissioner in London, requested in September that King George V remove James McNeill as Governor-General. By the end of November, McNeill was gone and de Valera had the King appoint an old supporter to the office. The new Governor-General did not take up residence in the official Viceregal Lodge and did not attend social functions. De Valera effectively eliminated the public symbol of the King’s role in Irish affairs.  

It was not long after Fianna Fáil’s second government took office after the general election of January 1933 that de Valera started to enlist the support of Irish Americans in his vision to remake Ireland. Drawing on references to Lincoln’s saving the Union, de Valera made his case that the partition of Ireland was “imposed by force” and is “maintained by subsidies” solely to satisfy British imperial policy. He derided the notion that partition was necessary to prevent the religious persecution of a minority as “an invention without any basis in the facts.” What the British in fact had done, according to de Valera, was to create a religious minority by forcing Northern Catholics to live in an artificial state where they became the persecuted. He ended by appealing for the help of our “generous and loyal” friends.

De Valera outlined his continuing assault on the Treaty and the symbolic and substantive signs of British power over Ireland in an important speech commemorating the fallen leaders of the 1916 Rebellion. After opening remarks in Irish that hailed the

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military defeat in 1916 as the spark that ignited modern republicanism among the
majority of the Irish people, de Valera spelled out what would become his policies for the
next six years:

Let it be made clear that we yield no willing assent to any
form or symbol that is out of keeping with Ireland’s right as
a sovereign nation. Let us remove these forms one by one,
so that this State that we control may be a Republic in fact
and that, when the time comes, the proclaiming of the
Republic may involve no more than a ceremony, the formal
confirmation of a status already attained.42

The intense efforts by de Valera to remove all vestiges of British rule from Irish
life embroiled the U.S. Department of State during the credential presentation of the
newly appointed U.S. Minister to Ireland, William McDowell, in March 1934. McDowell
presented his credentials directly to de Valera, not to the Governor-General as had been
the custom. Even though the British had cleared the procedure beforehand, when Irish
Vice-President Seán T. O’Kelly used the occasion to announce that “every day something
is being done to oust the British from control of our county,” the press in Ireland, Britain,
and the United States gave the whole episode a lot of publicity.43

After the split with de Valera, the Irish Republican Army and its American
supporters faced a crucial turning point. Internal struggles over the strategy to achieve a
united Irish Republic began to revolve around what social policy would the organization
call for in the as yet unrealized new state. Many IRA leaders, including James Graltan,
who lived in the United States from 1909 until 1932, called for a Republican Congress

that would be an “organizing centre for anti-Imperialist activity.” This short-lived movement split the IRA when the governing Army Council forbade members to be a part of the Congress. While only a few members left, the split left the IRA operating from a weakened position for the rest of the decade, even before de Valera began his full-scale assault on his old comrades.44

After the departure of the Left, Joseph McGarrity in Philadelphia drafted a plan on the future of IRA activities. Hoping to lift the spirits of the approximately 30,000 IRA members in Ireland at the time, McGarrity argued that future IRA activities should focus ending partition, eliminating from the group’s agenda the fight over the legitimacy of the Irish government in Dublin. McGarrity wanted to carry the fight to the North and to the British Isles. The goal would be the “demoralization of the enemy” in an attempt to make the cost of keeping partition too high for the British government and public. The opening phase of the campaign should be public, McGarrity argued, in order to influence public opinion in the United States and Great Britain before any bombing took place. He wanted to once again “make the name of Ireland a household word in America.”45

It was not until the autumn of 1934 that the Irish and British governments began to explore ways to end, or at least tamp down, the Economic War. The main impetus came from the British, because it had become clear by then that the economic pressure would not drive de Valera from power and that the British economy was suffering as

much or more than the Irish economy. In addition, the growing international instability stemming from Hitler’s rise in Germany led many policymakers to rethink the value of maintaining such an adversarial relationship with Ireland. Two British officials and the Irish representative to London initiated the conversations: Neville Chamberlain, then Chancellor of the Exchequer; Sir Warren Fisher, the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury; and the Irish government’s High Commissioner in London, John Dulanty. Chamberlain was concerned with the depressed coal and shipbuilding districts; Fisher had long been troubled about the state Anglo-Irish relations, realizing that in the past the Irish had “in the past been desperately wronged;” Dulanty felt that the Economic War was a mistake and had been looking to end it “from its inception.”

After meeting with Irish representatives who stopped in London in October 1934 en route to Germany to negotiate the transfer of Irish cattle for German coal and iron, Dulanty hoped a similar arrangement could be made between Ireland and Great Britain. Dulanty sounded out Fisher about having Great Britain increase the quota of Irish cattle to the fullest amount possible, with the Irish then diverting coal orders from Germany or Poland to South Wales in an equal amount. Negotiations proceeded very quickly and the widely praised Coal-Cattle Pact announcement came on 3 January 1935. The pact, however, did not result in further movement to a political settlement.

The next important movement in Anglo-Irish relations came after Malcolm MacDonald joined the British cabinet in November 1935 as Secretary of State for the

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Dominions. His job was to find a way to improve Britain’s relations with Ireland as the
British government was becoming increasingly concerned with settling matters before the
European situation became critical. After several clandestine meetings with de Valera,
MacDonald produced a report for the Irish Situation Committee that concluded that there
was an opportunity for a breakthrough in relations, that the British public would not look
kindly on a missed chance at resolution, and that the state of Anglo-Irish relations was
“unsatisfactory in itself, and inevitably tends to weaken the moral authority of the British
Commonwealth of Nations in world affairs.”

Discussing Britain’s position with regard to Germany over the breaches in the Locarno Pact, he argued more explicitly that
“without ridicule or damage” British policy could not be “less realistic and generous in
our treatment of a Dominion Government than in our treatment of a Foreign
Government.” MacDonald had convinced the majority of the Cabinet, including the
soon-to-be Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, that British policy should accommodate
Irish demands as much as possible, as long as Ireland remained in the Commonwealth.

Part of the Cabinet’s reasoning for working with de Valera was the sense that
while his rhetoric might make it difficult to sell any agreement to the British public, any
deal struck with him would more than likely bring with it the acceptance of all but the
most radical Irish republicans. In order to shore up his own credentials and to diminish
any attacks, either political or military, from the right, de Valera proclaimed the Irish

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47 For a full treatment of the effects of the Coal-Cattle pact, see ibid., 160-64. See also Keogh, Nation and State, 87-90.
48 Quoted in Longford and O’Neill, De Valera, 304-5.
49 Quoted in Canning, British Policy Towards Ireland, 167.
Republican Army (IRA) an “unlawful association” on 18 June 1936.\textsuperscript{50} The order solidified in British eyes de Valera’s ability to have Irish republicans adhere to any agreement. De Valera’s political opponents in the Dáil, although not in favor of “physical-force” tactics, charged him with a complete reversal of his position. De Valera countered that the repeal of the obligation to take an oath to the crown, previously required to take a seat in the Dáil, removed the last obstacle to any person’s full participation in the government. There was, therefore, no more need for groups like the IRA\textsuperscript{51}

The Irish government’s outlawing of the IRA did force it to turn even more to its supporters in Irish America, chief among them Joseph McGarrity. While the rest of the IRA’s ruling Army Council urged a time of restraint and regrouping, the Quartermaster-General Richard Russell believed only a renewed campaign could save the organization and end partition. Russell went to the United States in July 1936, met with McGarrity, and together the two reached a “complete understanding” on a bombing campaign in Britain, with McGarrity pledging Irish-American money and support. Upon Russell’s return to Ireland, the Army Council court-martialed him and suspended him. He continued his planning, however, and returned to the United States in 1937, visiting Clan na Gael groups in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, New York City, and the largely Irish-American Butte, Montana. In November 1937 he wrote to McGarrity that only a few of the groups wanted to postpone the bombing campaign until

a vote of the IRA’s Army Council.\textsuperscript{52} At the Council’s meeting in April 1938, Russell supporters took over a majority of the Council, eliminating a logistical barrier to the campaign.

The crisis precipitated by King Edward VIII’s abdication in December 1936 provided de Valera with an opportunity to advance his efforts at securing a more independent Ireland. De Valera moved to exploit the situation to remove the role of the Crown in any Irish internal affairs, but to retain its role in certain matters of foreign relations. All of the Dominions had to pass legislation to regularize their relations with their new head of state, but de Valera on 10 December merely told the British Dominions Office the title of the two bills he planned to introduce, not what the bills would do. The first bill, the Constitution (Amendment No. 27) Bill, removed all references in the Irish Constitution to the King and the Governor-General. In effect, the executive authority of the state no longer flowed from the authority of the British Crown, but resided in the power of the Executive Council.\textsuperscript{53} With Fianna Fáil’s majority in the Dáil, the bill passed easily.

Once the Constitution no longer contained references to the British Crown, de Valera had to deal with the potentially difficult issue of diplomatic activity. All diplomats in Ireland held official status because of their accreditation by the King. Likewise, Irish diplomats in other countries carried credentials from the King. To lack any legal association with the British Crown would put all of the state’s diplomatic activity into

\textsuperscript{51} Dáil Debates, 63 (23 June 1936), 108-19.  
\textsuperscript{52} Russell to McGarrity, 5 November 1937, in Cronin, ed., McGarrity Papers, 164.
legal limbo. De Valera always had the option of simply declaring Ireland a republic, but he did not want to declare a twenty-six county republic and felt that declaring an all-Ireland thirty-two county republic while the British were in the midst of a constitutional crisis would only invite more difficult problems down the road. His solution was to rush through the External Relations Act that he had been working on for some time. The Act stated that as long as Ireland remained in the Commonwealth, the British monarch would, “when advised by the Executive Council to do, be authorized to work on behalf of the state for the appointment of representatives and the conclusion of international agreements.”

DE VALERA’S CONSTITUTION

The 1937 Irish Constitution was De Valera’s crowning achievement in his effort to fashion a new Irish identity. *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, literally “Ireland’s Basic Law,” fundamentally changed the Irish nation’s self-identity as an independent state. Structurally, the Constitution made important changes in the government’s operating procedures. First, the official name of the state changed from Saorstát Éireann, or Irish Free State, to “Éire, or in the English language, Ireland.” (Article 4) The new office of the President assumed the duties of the Head of State, although without any real power. The Taoiseach (pronounced Tee-shock), literally “Chief” was entrusted with the powers of “head of Government, or Prime Minister,” replacing the President of the Executive

53 *Dáil Debates*, 64 (11 December 1936), 1341-85.
Council. (Article 13) The Constitution also created the position of Tánaiste, or Deputy Prime Minister, a completely new position in parliamentary systems. The Constitution did not, though, declare Ireland to be a republic.\textsuperscript{55}

The most significant aspects of the new Constitution related to the nature of the Irish state. The preamble cited the “Most Holy Trinity” as the basis of all temporal authority and acknowledged the nation’s “obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ.” Article 1 stated the basis of the Constitution, reiterating de Valera’s most valued political philosophies:

\begin{quote}
The Irish nation hereby affirms its inalienable, indefeasible, and sovereign right to choose its own form of Government, to determine its relations with other nations, and to develop its life, political, economic and cultural, in accordance with its own genius and traditions.
\end{quote}

Article 2 declared that the national territory of the state was “the whole island of Ireland,” but Article 3 acknowledged the political reality that the laws and actions of the state were limited to the twenty-six counties in the South.\textsuperscript{56} The Constitution enshrined Irish and English respectively as the first and second official languages. Even though de Valera drafted the Constitution in English, the Irish translation stood as the official version.

Articles 40-44 dealt with “Fundamental Rights” and “directive principles of social policy.” De Valera’s goal in these articles was to protect those elements of Irish society

\textsuperscript{54} “Executive Authority (External Relations) Act, 1936” in Mansergh, \textit{British Commonwealth Affairs}, 321-22.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Bunreacht na hÉireann}, Constitution of Ireland. Text in ibid., 333-65. The new Constitution passed in a national referendum in July 1937 and took effect that December.
\textsuperscript{56} The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution Act in 1998 amended Articles 2 and 3 in accordance with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The full text of the current Constitution is available at <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/>.
and values that he felt might be most at risk and to define the essential nature of the Irish nation. These sections committed the state to “guard with special care the institution of Marriage” and to “endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.”

De Valera highlighted the “special position” of the Catholic Church in Article 44. Other sections of Article 44 state that the State “recognizes” other Christian denominations, including the Church of Ireland, Presbyterians, Methodists, as well as “Jewish Congregations and the other religious denominations existing in Ireland at the date of the coming into operation of this Constitution,” but it was clear that Ireland was going to be a Catholic nation. During debates in the Dáil prior to the submission of the Constitution for a national vote, de Valera argued that in a democratic state, the people’s “whole philosophy of life” is going to affect the state’s politics and that that reality should be recognized.”57 De Valera was unconcerned that tying the state so closely to Catholicism would serve as an obstacle to national unity. He took comfort in the support of the outgoing leader of the Presbyterians in Ireland who welcomed the Christian tone of the Constitution and was “impressed by the unbiased fairness” that Protestants received in Ireland.58

57 Dáil Debates, 67 (4 June 1937), 1890.
58 Dr. F.W. O’Neill, Irish Press, 8 June 1937, quoted in Bowman, De Valera and the Ulster Question, 154.
In a 15 June speech to the United States, de Valera called the Constitution the “spiritual and cultural embodiment of the Irish people.”\(^{59}\) He summed up his view of the Constitution on the eve of the polling:

> It is a renewed declaration of national independence and its enactment will mark the attainment of one definite objective in the national struggle. It consolidates the ground that has been gained and forms a secure basis from which we can move forward towards the recovery of the national sovereignty over our ports and the reunion of the whole national territory into one State.\(^{60}\)

As he wanted, the ports soon became the main topic of Anglo-Irish discussions.

**THE TREATY PORTS**

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 contained an annex that allowed Great Britain to maintain control of the harbor defenses and facilities at three Irish ports: Berehaven, Cobh, and Lough Swilly.\(^{61}\) During the negotiations, the Irish delegation did not raise serious objections to the provisions, assuming that the British would not be willing to move on the issue. De Valera even included the British right to the harbor defenses in “Document No. 2,” his proposed alternative to the Anglo-Irish Treaty.\(^{62}\)

It was fortunate for de Valera that by 1937, just as he was eager to take back the Ports in order to achieve full sovereignty over the whole territory of Ireland, a series of developments in Great Britain and the Commonwealth made the British government

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\(^{59}\) *Irish Press*, 16 June 1937.

\(^{60}\) Quoted in Longford and O’Neill, *De Valera*, 300.

\(^{61}\) “Final Text of the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland as Signed,” 6 December 1921, in Fanning and others, *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, 360.
willing to turn them over. At the Imperial Conference in June 1937 the Commonwealth nations discussed the continuing Economic War and reached a consensus that the sooner it was resolved the better it would be for the Commonwealth’s image in the world. South Africa’s representative summarized the delegates’ positions by saying that “what the British Government does now as regards Ireland is, in my opinion, most important for the future of the Commonwealth.”¹⁶³ Later, Neville Chamberlain argued that even a partially satisfactory agreement would be preferable to the “insecurity of the present situation.”¹⁶⁴ With the mounting challenges from Germany, the British government also wanted to be sure that Ireland would at least not be an active impediment during a war. This was a response to de Valera’s 1936 statement that Ireland “would be almost certainly hostile as long as her independence was interfered with” by the British presence in the Ports.¹⁶⁵

De Valera’s position developed in part as a result of a 1936 Irish Department of Defence policy paper outlining “the military alternatives” available to the government should a European war break out and Britain become involved in it. The three main factors the military considered important were the strategic location of Ireland, its lack of potential defensive capability, and the existing political status. The geographic position of Ireland forced any Irish policy to be based on the likely reaction to it by Britain. The Irish

¹⁶² “Proposed Treaty of Association between Ireland and the British Commonwealth,” in Fanning and others, Documents on Irish Foreign Policy, 367-70.
¹⁶³ Quoted in Deirdre McMahon, Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish Relations in the 1930s (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 220.
¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Boyce, Irish Question, 88.
generals realized that, in the end, the British effectively controlled what actions the Irish could pursue: “geographical factors must be taken as the fundamental influence of Saorstat defence policy.” As long as the British maintained control over the Ports, the report concluded, Irish neutrality would be close to impossible to maintain.

Several reports by the British military on the status of the Ports and their utility in a war influenced the views of Chamberlain and others in the British government. The reports outlined the poor maintenance of the Ports between 1921 and 1938. The Ports were reserved for the use by the Navy, but the Army bore the financial and operational burden to maintain and secure them. As a result, the Ports did not receive any substantial renovations during the period. In addition, the reports stressed that the Ports would have no benefit to the British if Ireland during a war was not either an active ally or a friendly neutral. The best chance for either of these alternatives would be if Ireland remained a member of the Commonwealth. An Ireland outside of the Commonwealth would be more likely to have a government hostile to British interests. Using the Ports under that scenario would involve first subduing the whole of Ireland. The reports also listed the Ports as being of only secondary value if Great Britain was at war with Germany.

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65 “Interview Given by the Taoiseach to Mr. Truelove of the ‘Daily Telegraph,’” 22 February 1936, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Department of the Taoiseach, Secretary “S” Files, S10701A. Hereafter manuscript collections from the National Archives of Ireland will be cited as “NAI,” Department of the Taoiseach collections as “Taoiseach,” and the Secretary Files with their appropriate file number, e.g. “Interview Given by the Taoiseach to Mr. Truelove of the ‘Daily Telegraph,’” 22 February 1936, NAI, Taoiseach, S10701A.

66 “Fundamental Factors Influencing Irish Defense Policy,” May 1936, Irish Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin, G2/0075, p. 40. Hereafter all manuscript collections from the Irish Military Archives will be cited as “IMA,” with the appropriate file number.

67 Canning, British Policy Toward Ireland, 178-88.

additional report in January 1938 concluded that attempting to use the Ports with a hostile Irish government in power would be a “formidable military commitment and might, even so, be impossible.”

After getting the British military to accept turning over the Ports to the Irish government, Dominions Secretary Malcolm MacDonald met with de Valera in September 1937. MacDonald hoped to get de Valera to agree to accept the transfer of the Ports under the condition that the British would maintain the right to use them in case of war. De Valera refused. Not only would he not give on that point, he stressed that the ending of partition was “absolutely necessary for the good relations we both desired,” and that the land annuity payments would never be renewed. He did open up one avenue for a solution: finding a way to equate Ireland’s increased commitment on defense with the amount of the disputed annuity payments.

To press his points on the Ports, de Valera used a three-pronged strategy. He first played the Irish-American card by pointing to the benefit of an Anglo-Irish settlement on Anglo-American relations. His argument was that the financial benefits of annuity payments or of occupying the Ports against the will of most of the Irish population could not possibly outweigh a “real unqualified friendship” with the United States. He then played the IRA card by emphasizing that certain “irresponsible” elements of Irish society would probably attack the Ports during a war if Britain continued to maintain them. Finally, he argued that Ireland with the Ports would never be used as a base of attack.

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against Britain, a position he had held since 1920. MacDonald was not convinced, but both sides were eager enough for a settlement that they agreed to enter into formal ministerial negotiations in January 1938.

THE SETTLEMENT

The Anglo-Irish negotiations of January-April 1938 dealt with the Economic War, partition, and the Ports. The British negotiators were most eager to come to some satisfactory agreement on overall defense, even if that meant an unconditional return of the Ports. Chamberlain especially wanted to resolve the outstanding issues with Ireland in order to be in a better position to face the mounting challenges from Germany. Sir Warren Fisher, the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, highlighted British concerns in an internal memo the day after the talks began. He urged the negotiators to avoid negotiating from a purely legal standpoint, writing that the issue was “primarily a psychological problem.” Granting the Irish the “incontestable ground” that historically England had been the aggressor in the relationship, Fisher urged Chamberlain not to take a “haggling, huckstering attitude.” The overall concern should be: “If a showdown is forced by Germany, do we want to face both East and West?”

From the start of the final negotiations in January 1938 until the signing of the final agreement that April, de Valera sought to bring Irish Americans and the United States into play during the talks. One of de Valera’s first moves was to meet with the U.S.

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70 Longford and O’Neill, De Valera, 309.
Minister to Ireland, John Cudahy, who had arrived in Ireland in August 1937. Cudahy was born into a prominent Irish-American family in the meatpacking business in Wisconsin. He was an uncle by marriage to FDR’s Secretary of Interior, Harold Ickes. Before his appointment to Dublin, Cudahy served as Ambassador to Poland. Very quickly after his appointment, Cudahy and de Valera established a close working relationship. After leaving Ireland, Cudahy wrote that de Valera was “the greatest leader in all of Irish history, a man of singular force and outstanding high intelligence, but above all of uncompromising conviction.”

When de Valera and Cudahy met on 21 January, two days after the start of the Anglo-Irish negotiations, the Taoiseach convinced Cudahy that partition was the major sticking point. Cudahy then wrote to Roosevelt that if the United States could help resolve this dispute it would mean “the approval by a great share of American public opinion of closer American-British relations,” something close to FDR’s heart. Cudahy urged that the president call in the British Ambassador in Washington to stress the importance of movement on the issue of partition.

Just a few days later, de Valera dispatched his press secretary, Frank Gallagher, to Washington with a personal letter to Roosevelt. De Valera wrote that partition was the main issue, noting that the British “if they really have the will, can bring about a United Ireland in a very short time.” Noting the important backdrop of international events, de

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72 Canning, British Policy Towards Ireland, 191-92.
73 Quoted in ibid., 157.
74 Cronin, Washington’s Irish Policy, 54; McMahon, Republicans and Imperialists, 221.

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Valera attempted to tie the Anglo-Irish negotiations into the wider international security
debate while also playing the Irish-American card again:

Reconciliation would affect every country where the two
races dwell together, knitting their national strength and
presenting to the world a great block of democratic peoples
interested in the preservation of peace.77

It is more than likely that de Valera’s efforts to have the United States get
involved with the partition question stemmed from his realization that there was not
much likelihood that the British would acquiesce in his demands. By appealing to the
United States, however, de Valera was able to give himself an outside shot at some
movement. MacDonald later wrote that FDR’s participation had little effect. Harold
Ickes’s diary entries for July 1938 convey the sense that FDR felt that he played a
significant role, if not on the partition issue, at least by getting the parties to continue the
negotiations. Gallagher supports this claim: he credits Roosevelt for “a resumption of
negotiations when they had broken down.”78

Roosevelt’s response to de Valera came on 22 February. Drafted by Cordell Hull,
the letter agrees with de Valera’s position that an end to partition would be benefit “from
every point of view,” but FDR maintained that there was simply no benefit to discussing
the matter with the British through official channels. He did, however, agree to send

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76 Cudahy to President, 22 January 1938, Roosevelt Papers, President’s Secretary Files, PSF 56. Hereafter as “PSF,” with appropriate file number.
77 De Valera to Roosevelt, 25 January 1938, NLI Dublin, Frank Gallagher Papers, MS 18,375.
Kennedy’s discussions with the British came at a crucial point in the negotiations. The British had already agreed to return the Ports without condition. Chamberlain had at first pressed for an agreement to hand them back in the event of war, but dropped that request when de Valera refused. The annuity payment problems and the Economic War were already resolved with the agreement by de Valera for a one-time payment of £10 million and both sides agreeing to drop the duties on the other’s goods. The remaining points, however, partition and Ireland granting special trade rights to Northern Ireland, threatened to derail any final agreement.

Chamberlain was frustrated in his attempts to have James Craig, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, agree to drop his financial demands. On 8 April, the day after Kennedy met with the British Foreign Secretary and stressed the importance to Anglo-American relations of a speedy Anglo-Irish settlement, Chamberlain wrote a personal appeal to Craig:

"[It is time] to implement what you said to me . . . namely that you meant to help and not to hinder. In my anxieties over the international situation it has become almost essential for me to show some evidence that the policy of peace by negotiation can be successful. . . . [A]n Anglo-Irish agreement . . . would add greatly to the impression made upon the world."

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79 “FDR to de Valera,” 22 February 1938, FRUS, 271.
80 The £10 million amounted to roughly two years’ worth of revenue the British were collecting by imposing duties. See Dáil Debates, 71 (27 April 1938), 42-43.
He added that he would conclude the agreement in one week, “one way or another.”

Craig dropped his demands, de Valera agreed to postpone any discussion of partition and reiterated his long public stand that Ireland would never be a base for a foreign power to attack Britain, and the parties signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1938 on 25 April. At the luncheon following the signing, Chamberlain returned to de Valera the field glasses that a British officer had taken from him upon his arrest after the Easter Rebellion in 1916.

In the House of Commons, Chamberlain urged the members to realize that the main strength of the agreement was Britain’s achieving “those intangible, invaluable fruits which have on various occasions in the past rewarded a liberal and unselfish act of generosity by a great and powerful country towards a State weaker and poorer than itself.” The agreement, however, also brought several discreet advantages to Britain. It allowed Chamberlain a victory in his effort to argue that appeasement was the best policy to prevent the outbreak of war in Europe. In addition, the British security service, MI-5, and the Irish Army’s intelligence agency, G-2, began to set up the communication

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81 Chamberlain to Craig, 8 April 1938, quoted in Canning, British Policy Towards Ireland, 218-19.  
82 “The Anglo-Irish Trade Agreements of 1938 and 1948,” NAI, Department of Foreign Affairs Files, DFA 314/10/4/1.  
83 Irish Times, 26 April 1938.  
84 Parliamentary Debates, Commons, 5th series, vol. 8 (1937), col. 1074.
channels that would allow for the significant cooperation they would have during World War II.  

Winston Churchill made a vitriolic speech in Parliament against the agreement, concentrating on the folly of giving away the Ports. Ten years later in his memoirs he wrote that “a more feckless act can hardly be imagined.” The Tory newspaper the Daily Telegraph and Morning Post provided a more accurate assessment:

Mr. Churchill impressively marshaled a number of dire possibilities which cannot be lightly dismissed. The answer to them is that the Defeat of the present agreement would not avert those possibilities, but would help to realise them. The acceptance of the agreement offers at least the chance of banishing them forever. It is an act, not only of faith, but of prudence.

In his conclusion to the debate in the House of Commons, MacDonald pointed to the positive influence of the agreement on Anglo-American relations. Discussing the fact that in the United States “Irishmen take a great part in foreign affairs and politics,” MacDonald concluded that the Agreement “has resulted in improving the friendly relations which exist between the United States and this country.”

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87 Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, 6 May 1938, quoted in Canning, British Policy Towards Ireland, 220. Churchill was the only MP to oppose the 1938 Agreement. See Carroll, Ireland in the War Years, 79.
88 Quoted in Cronin, Washington’s Irish Policy, 64.
MacDonald was correct; the response in the United States was overwhelmingly supportive. The *New York Times* editorialized that “none of the larger agreements which the British Government has made or seeks to make in the effort for European appeasement will give greater satisfaction to English-speaking people everywhere.” Roosevelt commented that the new pact would go “a long way” toward removing the hostility between Ireland and Britain.89

In his address introducing the Agreement to the Dáil, de Valera focused on issues of national identity involved in the transfer of the Ports, stressed again that he had no desire to see Ireland used as a base against Britain, and preempted any possible future rumors that there was a secret deal to hand over the Ports during a war. The most important element of the Agreement involved “Irish sovereignty,” in that for the first time the Irish government had complete control of all the territory of the island not part of Northern Ireland. De Valera also reiterated his pledge that he first made “as long ago as 1920, when, on behalf of the State of that time—of the Republic— I made a request to the Government of the United States for formal recognition,” that Ireland would not be used as a base of operations against Britain. Concerned about any future attempts to claim that there was a secret deal, de Valera made sure to go on record that:

There has been no bargain. There are no conditions. There is no secret understanding, but there is a belief, I am certain—a belief which I have tried, over 20 years, to get into the minds of British Governments and of the British people, in so far as I could—that it is far better for Britain, far more advantageous for Britain, to have a free

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Ireland by its side than an Ireland that would be unfriendly because of liberties which Britain denied.  

De Valera concluded that partition remained as the only impediment to completely harmonious relations between Ireland and Britain.

On 11 July, when Ireland took possession of the Ports, de Valera decided not to embarrass the British by having any national celebrations. He was concerned that because the Irish government did not yet have the six counties of the North, any large celebration might make it “too difficult for the British to give them back.” Irish unity was very much on de Valera’s mind on that day, described as a “psycho-political” moment by historian Dermot Keogh. The Taoiseach remarked after the ceremony at Cobh that he prayed that God would help the Irish achieve the “final success” of “restoring the unity of our country and bringing the whole of this island again into the possession of the Irish people.”

IRISH AMERICANS and the IRA

At the same time that de Valera was in London negotiating an end to the Economic War and the return of the Ports, the IRA was planning a bombing campaign, with McGarrity’s heavy involvement. The campaign began in early 1939 with the publication of a formal ultimatum to the British government. The IRA, acting as the self-

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90 Dáil Debates, 71 (27 April 1938), 35-37.
91 NLI Dublin, Gallagher Papers, MS 18,375.
92 Keogh, Nation and State, 107.
93 Irish Times, 12 July 1938.
described “Government of the Irish Republic,” demanded the withdrawal of all British forces from Ireland. The campaign, as one historian has noted, “did not amount to much,” but there was a large explosion in Coventry in August 1939 that killed five and wounded another seventy.95

The campaign met with such severe public criticism in Ireland that the Dáil passed the Offences against the State Act in June 1939. De Valera was particularly upset because the bombings were undermining his long-stated and recently effective stance that Ireland would never be a base of attack against Britain. Using much of the same tactics that de Valera criticized while out of power, the Act enabled the government to hold people without trial and to use military tribunals to handle political crimes.96

The IRA campaign dealt a blow to de Valera’s plans, because by the fall of 1938 he had begun to put partition at the forefront of Anglo-Irish and Irish-American relations. “The present Partition of Ireland is a dangerous anachronism which must be ended,” de Valera noted in October, which kept alive the “ancient antagonisms” between the British and the “overwhelming majority of the Irish race.”97 Later that month he announced at a Fianna Fáil meeting that he was going to ask to Irish-American newspapers, the New York *Irish World* and the San Francisco *Leader* to concentrate on “the nature of partition

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97 “Taoiseach’s Interview on Partition,” 17 October 1938, NAI, Taoiseach, S10935A
and the wrong done by it to the Irish nation.”

Early in 1939, with an invitation in hand from FDR to attend the New York World’s Fair, de Valera decided to use his visit that May as a rallying cry to raise the partition issue directly with Irish Americans and with American public opinion. De Valera had planned to visit Washington, New York, Boston, and twenty-one other cities, speaking to Chambers of Commerce, the Council on Foreign Relations, Irish Societies, and at a variety of civic events. Public meetings were planned for Madison Square Garden and Chicago Stadium. Cudahy, however, urged him to avoid raising any anti-British feeling in the United States because “it would be resented by the people in our country and would react to the detriment of the Irish cause.”

A crisis erupted when Great Britain announced plans on 26 April 1939 to introduce conscription, causing de Valera to cancel his May trip to the United States. Northern Ireland’s Prime Minister James Craig immediately called for the draft to be extended to Northern Ireland. There ensued a major dispute between the Irish and British governments over the issue, with de Valera writing to Chamberlain in April that the implementation of conscription in the “Six counties,” considered part of Ireland by the 1937 Constitution, would be regarded as “an act of war.” The next month, Chamberlain got Craig to relent by writing “if you really want to help us, don’t press for

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98 Quoted in Dwyer, *De Valera*, 220.
99 “Chun an Taoisigh (To the Taoiseach),” April 1939, NAI, Taoiseach, S11230.
conscription.”102 Once again, Irish ties to Irish Americans and their influence on Anglo-Irish relations were clear. Home Secretary Samuel Hoare and Defence Minister Thomas Inskip wrote that “the American reaction to the contention that Great Britain is exercising a tyrannical coercion over Irishmen is a greater danger than the reaction in Eire itself.”103

CONCLUSION

The 1930s were a time of searching and uncertainty for the Irish in America and for Eamon de Valera, as leader of the Irish in Ireland. Both were looking for ways to reclaim or create identities that validated their status either in America or the world. Irish Americans had never felt completely integrated into the American mainstream, but the Depression put their modest socio-economic gains into doubt at the same time that the dislocations associated with many joining the middle class merely exacerbated their tensions. Their insecurities are evident in the artistic representations they leave behind. For de Valera, and the growing majority of Irish who supported him at the polls, however, the 1930s were a time of when they took confident and active steps to create a new identity. That identity, de Valera believed, was only to be achieved by breaking away from all things British. In spite of all the gains in the process, paid for in part by the economic dislocations of the Economic War, 1939 still saw a partitioned Ireland.

103 Quoted in Canning, *British Policy Towards Ireland*, 238.
The Second World War would soon draw the Irish on both sides of the Atlantic together. De Valera struggled to keep Ireland’s new-found identity intact by remaining neutral, as the United States was, and Irish Americans would rush to his support.
CHAPTER 3

BEING NEUTRAL(?): 1939-1941

But then look eastward from your heart, there bulks
A continent, close, dark, as archetypal sin,
While to the west off your own shores, the mackerel
Are fat – on the flesh of your kin.1

NEUTRALITY
Louis MacNiece

“Our attitude we hope to keep not by adherence to some theoretical, abstract idea of neutrality or anything like that, but by addressing ourselves to the practical question that we do not want to get involved in this war, and we merely want to keep our people safe from such consequences as we would be involved in by being in the war.”2

Eamon de Valera

The period between the start of the war and American entry into the war was the most crucial of Ireland’s effort to maintain its independent political identity through its neutrality. Of the twelve “Moments of Special Crisis” for Ireland that Joseph Walshe, the Permanent Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, came up with at the conclusion of the war, ten of them fell between September 1939 and December 1941.3

The war in the North Atlantic, the collapse of France, and the Battle of Britain all placed

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2 *Dáil Debates*, 77 (29 September 1939), 592.
3 Joseph Walshe, 15 May 1945, NAI, DFA, A2; see also Keogh, *Ireland and Europe*, 163-64.
heavy pressures on British policymakers and military planners, making them look west toward Ireland. With the defeat on the continent, the supply link with the United States became Britain’s lifeline. Many felt that if the Irish Ports were available to British warships that it would be an advantage in the fight against German U-boats. The British also worried that a German invasion of lightly-defended Ireland would provide Hitler with a base to begin a two-pronged invasion of Britain, from Ireland and France.

The strict public face of neutrality, however, masked the numerous ways that the Irish helped the Allies. In part because of this strict public stance, de Valera did not publicize, during or after the war, the support Ireland gave to Britain and the United States. The British, and later American, propaganda wars therefore served to reinforce the mistaken public view that Ireland at best did not aid Britain or at the worst supported Germany. In addition, the American Minister to Ireland, David Gray, led an active campaign to discredit de Valera and the Irish to Americans. With his biased reports to Washington and to the American press, Gray “tarnished de Valera’s reputation and thus distorted the truth about Irish neutrality.” In fact, it was de Valera who personally pushed for the level of cooperation between Irish and British security services. Eunan O’Halpin concludes that the successful cooperation of the two agencies “was founded on a clear direction from [de Valera,] the key figure in Irish politics.”

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5 O’Halpin, “Intelligence and Security,” 50.
VIEWS of NEUTRALITY

There are a number of reasons why de Valera wanted to keep Ireland out of the war, but they should not be conflated into a determination that because Ireland proclaimed a very public neutrality that it actually was neutral in any conventional or international law sense of the word. First and foremost in de Valera’s worldview was his desire to avoid having his people suffer the type of potential devastation he foresaw before the war and the devastation evident in the German conquered nations. With practically no military capabilities, Ireland would not have been able to mount even the slightest defense against Germany, or as de Valera was concerned about later, against Britain. De Valera was also aware of the historic view of Irish nationalists that “England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity,” and wanted to avoid any IRA action that might precipitate another civil war.

In addition to the practical matters concerned with Ireland’s involvement in the war, de Valera maintained an overarching goal of securing Ireland’s sense of sovereignty as a nation truly independent of Britain. For de Valera, it was important that the Irish and British both see Ireland as an independent nation. For the Irish, it was part of de Valera’s vision of Ireland’s identity; but breaking away from centuries of British domination could only occur if the British also truly realized that the fairly recent Irish independence meant that Ireland was no longer part of the British Empire. As Timothy Salmon has noted, “More important than [the principle] of neutrality per se was the imperative of proving to
the world and itself its independence.” For de Valera, the fundamental basis of neutrality was that it firmly established Ireland as a fully independent nation, no longer tethered to the will of the British.

De Valera did assert the practical and theoretical rights of small nations to remain neutral when larger nations went to war, but this did not equate to an endorsement of neutrality as the preferred universal strategy. Neutrality became a symbol of Irish identity only after de Valera had tried and failed in the 1930s to bolster a system of collective security in which small nations like Ireland would play a role together with larger nations in maintaining international peace. He had been pushing for collective security arrangements, and the attendant responsibilities of states to commit military forces, in debates in the League of Nations throughout much of the 1930s. His wartime policy, therefore, was not based on theoretical support of neutrality as a concept, but of the concept of sovereignty. For de Valera, neutrality was a symbol, consequence, and guarantor of sovereignty and of Irish identity. He was not likely to give it up easily.

De Valera’s high hopes for the League as a guarantor of small nations’ rights evaporated by 1936. Initially, Ireland placed high hopes in the League, registering the Anglo-Irish Treaty with it in 1924 as a symbol of Ireland’s independence. By the mid-1930s, it had a seat on the Council, de Valera served as President, and Irish officials “embraced the League wholeheartedly.” The Irish delegation often supported Article 16 of the League Covenant, which called for member states to commit military forces in the

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event of war. De Valera was even prepared to send Irish troops to Saar in 1935 to police a plebiscite by the League. But when the League voted in July 1936 to withdraw sanctions from Italy for its invasion of Ethiopia, de Valera felt that Ireland was now left alone to face any international crisis. Addressing the League, he said “All the small States can do, if the statesmen of the greater States fail in their duty, is resolutely to determine that they will not become the tools of any great Power, and that they will resist with whatever strength they may possess every attempt to force them into a war against their will.”

“THE EMERGENCY” BEGINS

One practical element limited de Valera’s options as the war began. While his actions to limit the influence and strength of the Irish Republican Army, through a series of laws and executive orders, were largely a success, he knew that much of the populace still maintained a deep affinity for IRA goals, if not its methods. Indeed, much of his own political support derived from those who were eager to unify the island. Any overt assistance to Britain would provide the IRA with a recruiting bonanza and increase the likelihood of their actions against both the Irish and British governments.

De Valera, and through him, Fianna Fáil, held a complete lock on Irish politics, including the politics of nationalism, on the eve of the war. Bolstered by the new constitution and the successful resolution of the Economic War, de Valera enjoyed

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widespread support among the Irish people. He was able to draw on that support as he moved the country toward a policy of neutrality.

The day after Germany’s invasion of Poland, the Dáil convened to consider two pieces of legislation by de Valera, the First Amendment to the Constitution and the Emergency Powers Act. The first allowed for an extension of the “time of war” provisions of the Constitution to any periods of armed conflict, even if Ireland were not involved. That allowed the Oireachtas to declare that “a national emergency exists affecting the vital interests of the State.”11 It is from this provision that the term “The Emergency” became the official Irish description of World War II.

The Emergency Powers Act provided for “censorship, restriction, control, or partial or complete suspension of communication” and the “control and censorship of newspapers and periodicals.”12 The strict censorship the Act allowed throughout the Emergency gave the Irish state the ability to maintain the fiction of an absolute neutrality.13 Portrayed as part of an effort to mitigate the role of the IRA during a crisis, censorship also eliminated from public debate any discussion of the unofficial associations with Britain.14 The Irish public could not read the obituaries of fellow citizens who had enlisted in the British forces and died in battle. Of course, there was also

13 The primary philosophical and practical points of Irish censorship are in “Censorship of War News, Espionage, etc. in a Neutral Country During War,” 7 March 1939, UCD, Aiken Papers, P104/3429. See also Donal Ó Drisceoil, Censorship in Ireland, 1939-1945: Neutrality, Politics, and Society (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996).
14 Ó Drisceoil, Censorship in Ireland, 7, 10-29.
no criticism of the censor’s powers. There is not doubt that this censorship also affected “the international representation of the state abroad.”

The announcement of Irish neutrality in September 1939 should have come as no surprise to British policymakers. De Valera had been advocating neutrality for small states since the failure of the League to act against Italy in 1936. As he reminded everyone at the conclusion of the Economic War, he had been advocating an Irish benevolent neutrality toward Britain as far back as 1920 when he wrote to Woodrow Wilson that “Ireland is quite ready by treaty to ensure England’s safety and legitimate security against the danger of foreign powers seeking to use Ireland as a basis of attack against her.” In July 1938 he told the Dáil that in addition to issues of sovereignty, his actions to end the Economic War and acquire the Ports rested on the “very strong consideration of our responsibility here for the defence of our people, seeing that if there was a European war we should not be taken unawares.” Only by removing British forces from Ireland could the government make possible its intention to be neutral in the next war.

The night before war broke out, the German Minister to Ireland, Eduard Hempel, called on de Valera. De Valera warned him that Germany must not make any contacts with the IRA over the issue of partition. Hempel’s later report to Berlin, after there were rumors of such contact, made it clear that “complete restraint continues to be advisable.

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17 “Open Letter to President Wilson,” 27 October 1920, *Speeches and Statements*, 41; *Dáil Debates* 72 (13 July 1938), 691.
for us,” because it would give Great Britain a “pretext for intervening.” He also reported that the declaration of Irish neutrality “has strengthened the Irish national self-consciousness.”

The official notice to Britain of Ireland’s neutrality came on 12 September 1939. Maffey advised de Valera that the note was read by the British Cabinet with “profound feelings of disappointment.” British Dominions Secretary Anthony Eden, after hearing of Ireland’s decision a few days later that Irish territorial waters would be off-limits to belligerents, felt that Britain had no choice but to accept the status quo, for a challenge “might have unfortunate reactions on neutral and particularly United States opinion.” Churchill did not want to take such a laissez-faire view, in part because he never believed that Ireland, as a member of the Commonwealth, had the legal right to declare neutrality. He argued in October 1939 that legally, Ireland was “at war but skulking.”

With the war bringing a new sense of urgency and importance to Anglo-Irish relations, de Valera consented to receiving Sir John Maffey as the “United Kingdom Representative to Ireland.” In his first report back to London, Maffey made clear that neutrality was the only viable political option in Ireland:

The creed of Ireland today was neutrality. No Government could exist that departed from that principle. The question

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21 Quoted in Salmon, Unneutral Ireland, 123.
22 Canning, British Policy Towards Ireland, 243, Dulanty to Eden, 12 September 1939.
23 Churchill to Halifax, in Coogan, De Valera, 536.
24 De Valera rejected the British preference for the title of “High Commissioner.” In his official biography, the controversy is described as follows: “The title ‘high commissioner’, with its imperial history, was unacceptable in Ireland while, for Britain, the appointment of an ‘ambassador’ or ‘minister’ might be considered a recognition of Irish independence.” Longford and O’Neill, De Valera, 350.
of the ports was at the very nerve center of public interest in the matter, and the public mood would react with intense violence to any action invalidating their integrity.\textsuperscript{25}

He went on to describe how de Valera would respond with force to a demand for the return of the Ports, and how a voluntary transfer of the Ports, however highly unlikely, would probably lead to the collapse of the government. Knowing also how much had already been accomplished toward Ireland assisting the Allies “within the limits of neutrality,” Maffey observed that “in many ways the government of Eire and the set-back over the ports has obscured the bright side of the picture.”

It was Robert Brennan’s job, as the Irish Minister to the United States, to manage the public relations aspect of that “bright side” to American officials and the American public. Brennan had served as Secretary to the Irish Legation in Washington from 1934 until 1938, when he became Minister. Born in Wexford in 1881, his first association with Irish nationalism came, as it did for many, through an association with the Gaelic League and its drive to preserve and extend the Irish language and traditional Irish culture. He later became the County Secretary for Sinn Féin in Wexford, managed to escape execution for his part in the Easter Rising, but spent time in six British jails. Before the war he was the General Manager of the \textit{Irish Press}, and after the war, he became the Director of Radio Éireann.\textsuperscript{26} Brennan used his media experience extensively in cultivating a relationship with the Washington press corps and the Irish-American press, two activities he felt were as important as his official contacts with the State Department.

\textsuperscript{25} Canning, \textit{British Policy Towards Ireland}, 353.
IRISH SUPPORT for ALLIED EFFORTS

There are many examples of how Irish neutrality took shape in ways that supported the Allies, especially Britain. Allied airmen who landed or crashed in Ireland were regarded as being on “non-operational” flights. If still air worthy, the Irish military refueled their planes and released them. The Irish government made arrangements for all stranded Allied airmen to return to Britain, while all German airmen who crashed in Ireland landed in prison for the duration of the war. In addition to the intelligence coordination between Ireland and Britain, the governments arranged a formal military defense liaison, but kept it secret from American officials. The Irish government also gave the Allied forces air clearance over parts of Donegal to facilitate easier travel to the North Atlantic. Perhaps of most benefit for the British war effort, the government allowed more than 200,000 Irish citizens to travel to Britain to work in the war industries.27 While the Irish government never took any active steps to encourage this migration, it did order that British listings of available war jobs be made available at all local Irish unemployment offices.28 Finally, during their meeting of 20 September 1939, de Valera and Maffey developed a plan that would have the Irish authorities radio to
Dublin in the clear any information about German planes, ships or submarines spotted along the coast.\textsuperscript{29}

One of the most difficult statistics to collect from the data about the British military is how many Irish citizens served in the British military during the war. In 1989, Tim Salmon wrote that the “consensus appears to be that around 40,000” Irish men served in the British forces. Using a much more thorough statistical analysis, Richard Doherty in 1999 estimated that about 78,000 Irish were in the British Armed Forces during the war, with about 58,000 of them enlisting after September 1939.\textsuperscript{30}

The Irish military would not have provided any significant military assistance to the British if Ireland had abandoned neutrality. In fact, active Irish military participation in the war effort would have been more of a drain on British resources than a benefit. The British would have had to extend their air support over the island, to train and equip the Irish Army, and to replace the Irish volunteers who would probably join the Irish Army instead of the British Army. Simply preparing the Irish military for the defense of Ireland would have been a tremendous strain on British resources. There were probably fewer than 6,000 in the Irish Army in September 1939. There was no air force, only a few lightly armed former fishing vessels that served as a makeshift navy, and little to no supplies or ammunition for even the very few under arms. It was a woefully unprepared defensive arrangement.\textsuperscript{31} Dermot Keogh has observed that “the ill-fated Polish cavalry

\textsuperscript{29} Carroll, \textit{Ireland in the War Years}, 21. Near the end of the war, Viscount Cranborne, the British Dominions Secretary at the end of the war, outlined fourteen of the most helpful Irish efforts. See Ronan Fanning, \textit{Independent Ireland}, (Dublin: Helicon, 1983), 124-25.
stood a better chance against the mechanized Nazi war machine than the Irish armed forces would have done had Hitler launched a full-scale invasion of Ireland in 1939.”

The official British history of MI5’s work in Ireland supports the contention that bringing Ireland into the war would not have aided Britain. The history, *Note on the Work of the Irish Section of the Security Service, September 1939-1945*, was made available to researchers only in 2000. In his review of the *Note*, Sir David Petrie, the director general of MI5, commented that “the one factor indispensable to success was the goodwill of the Eire officers.” Indeed, the first contact between the services came from an Irish initiative soon after the signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement in 1938. The report’s conclusion about Irish neutrality was that “Eire neutral was of more value to the British war effort than Eire belligerent would have been.”

DAVID GRAY in DUBLIN

The American presence in Dublin changed dramatically when the American Minister John Cudahy left Ireland in January 1940 and Roosevelt replaced him with David Gray. Cudahy had been eagerly trying to get out of the Dublin assignment for some time, hoping for a more crucial position elsewhere in Europe. At some point in 1939, Cudahy met Gray during a trip across the Atlantic. When Gray mentioned that he

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35 Joe Walshe and John Dulanty met with MI5 on 31 August 1938, ibid., 22-23, 31.
would enjoy Cudahy’s position and Cudahy learned of Gray’s relationship with
Roosevelt, Cudahy petitioned Washington for the change.

David Gray’s early career was a series of failures, first in the family’s newspaper
business and then for a brief time as a criminal lawyer. He eventually found some success
as a writer, mostly with short stories, but also as a playwright. His play *The Best People*
had runs in the United States and London. His appointment to the position in Dublin,
therefore, can be seen as a function of his marriage to Eleanor Roosevelt’s favorite aunt,
Maud Hall.\(^37\)

Gray was far from the ideal candidate for the position in Ireland. Dermot Keogh
has described him as a “troublemaker of the first order.”\(^38\) He was not Roman Catholic,
he was sixty-nine years old at the time of his appointment, and he had no real interest in
cultivating an understanding of Irish political culture. He brought with him no experience
with Ireland, other than a few hunting trips in the 1930s.\(^39\) Gray’s natural social
inclinations and background made him more comfortable with the Anglo-Irish and
Protestant ascendancy in Ireland than with de Valera and those in the Fianna Fáil
government.

\(^{36}\) Cudahy had been eager to move to a new position since the start of the war. See Dwyer, *Irish Neutrality*,
23.
\(^{37}\) T. Ryle Dwyer describes Maud Gray’s relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt as follows: “Maud was the
youngest sister of Eleanor Roosevelt’s mother, who died when Eleanor was a child. Subsequently Eleanor
was raised by her grandmother in the same home as Maud, who was only six years her senior, with the
result that the relationship between them was more akin to that between younger and older sisters than
between aunt and niece.” Ibid., 48. There is some evidence that Eleanor pushed her husband to appoint
Gray. See Raymond James. Raymond, “David Gray, the Aiken Mission and Irish Neutrality, 1940-41,”
\(^{38}\) Keogh, *Nation and State*, 118.
Gray’s predilection for viewing all U.S.-Irish relations through the prism of American politics and regarding Irish Americans as having an undue and negative influence is exemplified by his trip to Rome in March 1940, prior to taking his post in Dublin. Gray wanted to be assured that Pope Pius XII would not object to a distancing between church and state in Ireland, which would have been a necessary precondition to the end of partition. Gray reported back to Roosevelt that in his discussions with the Pope, Gray emphasized that “the Irish question had maintained an abnormal and almost continuous pressure on American foreign relations which the great majority of Americans resented.”

It was soon after Gray’s arrival in Dublin that events of the war brought on a more urgent pace and a more confrontational tone in Anglo-Irish relations. Germany’s attacks on the low countries brought an end to the Phony War in May 1940 and prompted Britain to renew its calls for the Treaty Ports. The importance of the North Atlantic supply line with the United States increased after it appeared certain that a long fight loomed on the continent. Coupled with the rise of Winston Churchill to Prime Minister, who vigorously protested the British handover of the Ports in 1938, the stage was set for a much more contentious relationship between the two governments. On 10 May 1940, the day that Churchill took office, Sir John Maffey called on de Valera and argued that the new aggression by Germany necessitated an Irish reappraisal of its neutrality. De Valera responded that as long as partition remained in effect it would be impossible for Ireland

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39 Raymond James Raymond argues that Gray’s talks with Roosevelt about Ireland in the 1930s prove that “Gray had the most knowledge about Ireland of any American envoy since 1922” and that “Roosevelt
to join the British in the war. He did, however, agree to arrange a series of secret meetings between the British and Irish militaries in order to draw up a coordinated defense policy in the event of a German invasion of Ireland.\footnote{Gray to Roosevelt, 8 April 1940, quoted in Dwyer, \textit{Irish Neutrality}, 49.}

Two days later, in a speech in Galway, de Valera commented on the developments in Europe. Stressing the practical benefits of neutrality, he declared that the country had been in danger since the beginning of the war and would continue to be so for its duration. His role, and the role of all Irish citizens, was “to save himself and his neighbour, and the whole community” from the war’s consequences.\footnote{Carroll, \textit{Ireland in the War Years}, 39-41; Canning, \textit{British Policy Toward Ireland}, 266.}

With Churchill now firmly in control of British policy toward Ireland, de Valera expected this tougher line. The first salvo involved denying the backorder of weapons the Irish government had ordered until it signed a formal defense agreement. The second was a series of articles in the British press, coordinated by the British government, decrying Irish neutrality.\footnote{“German Attack on Neutral States,” Galway, 12 May 1940, \textit{Speeches and Statements}, 434-35.} The final effort was direct talks aimed at bringing Ireland into the war or at least having de Valera surrender the Treaty Ports.

Faced with growing pressure from Britain, and thinking that only American pressure might dissuade Churchill from seizing the Treaty Ports, de Valera turned to Roosevelt. Through Gray, de Valera inquired if the United States would make a public statement that the preservation of the status quo in Ireland was vital to American...
Roosevelt responded that such a declaration would be a departure from traditional policies and would “lead to misunderstanding and confusion in the United States and abroad.” Roosevelt was not going to be dragged into the fight between Churchill and de Valera, not when he probably agreed with Churchill and especially not while he was determined to do everything possible to aid the British in the war.

Gray, however, was eager to help Churchill behind the scenes from Dublin. He knew that Roosevelt could not get publicly involved against the Irish stance because of the ongoing effort to inch the American public toward war. In May 1940, Gray wrote to the British Minister of Information suggesting two possible rationales for justification of a British seizure of the Treaty Ports. Gray first suggested that the British could put forward the false claim the seizure was necessary to ensure the delivery of supplies to Ireland. The second suggestion was that when the Treaty Ports were returned to Ireland in 1938 de Valera had made a secret agreement guaranteeing British use of them in case of war. De Valera had anticipated such a move when he addressed the Dáil on the return of the Treaty Ports.

NEUTRALITY and PARTITION

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44 Gray to Secretary of State, 18 May 1940, in Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1940, vol. 3 The British Commonwealth, the Soviet Union, the Near East and Africa (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), 160. Hereafter citations from Foreign Relations of the United States will be cited as FRUS, with the appropriate page number.


46 Gray to Cooper, 30 May 1940, in Dwyer, Irish Neutrality, 54; Dáil Debates, 71 (27 April 1938), 35-37.
Prompted by inaccurate intelligence reports in May and June 1940 that warned of Germany’s imminent plans for an invasion of Ireland, Neville Chamberlain approached the British War Cabinet with a proposal to send Minister of Health Malcolm MacDonald to open talks with de Valera.\(^{47}\) Chamberlain hoped that if de Valera could be convinced that the Germans would soon overrun the country then he would agree to abandon neutrality and invite in British troops. The Cabinet realized this was unlikely, and so had a fallback plan for when de Valera rejected the offer because of partition. MacDonald was then instructed to suggest an All-Ireland Defence Council that “would form a bridge for the eventual discussions on partition,” but would immediately begin a formal and public defense policy. If de Valera approved, and the Cabinet again thought it unlikely, then MacDonald was to go to Belfast and attempt to get Lord Craigavon and the Northern Ireland government to agree as well.

When MacDonald and de Valera met in London on 17 June 1940 de Valera rejected the British proposals completely, stressing his ongoing actions in support of Britain and the unacceptable situation of partition.\(^{48}\) MacDonald reported that de Valera was adamant about maintaining neutrality and was “genuine in his determination” to resist “any attempt on our part to seize the Atlantic ports by force.”\(^{49}\) Years later, MacDonald wrote that de Valera “could scarcely have promised more benevolent

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\(^{47}\) Most of the reports came from Sir Charles Tegart who had been reporting from Ireland. One of his wildly inaccurate reports stated that “up to 2,000 [German] leaders have been landed in Eire from German U-Boats and by other methods since the outbreak of the war.” Quoted in Coogan, *De Valera*, 549.

\(^{48}\) The German Minister to Ireland, Eduard Hempel, suggested on 20 June that de Valera was using the recent publicity surrounding the arrest of Michael Held for suspicion of espionage as a means to strengthen his position with Britain. See The Minister in Eire to the Foreign Ministry, 21 June 1940, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, 637. See also Mark Hull, *Irish Secrets*, 90-95.
cooperation short of declaring war against the enemy.” Upon hearing the news, Churchill was still “deeply disappointed, and deeply critical of de Valera.”

When American officials made it clear that any effort to take the Treaty Ports by force would “embarrass American efforts to aid Britain,” the British cabinet decided to continue the talks with de Valera as far as possible. At a second meeting between de Valera and MacDonald, the Taoiseach stated that only a united Ireland would be able to vote to enter the war, and that as long as partition remained he would not bring Ireland into the war. He called for an immediate reunification of the Ireland, with its neutrality guaranteed by both the United States and Great Britain, and suggested that American armed forces take up positions in Ireland.

Chamberlain wanted to pursue this option as far as it would go, but the Cabinet decided to approach the Northern Ireland government on the issue only after the rather unlikely event that de Valera accepted first. MacDonald, however, was to give de Valera the impression that the offer was already finalized. The British Chiefs of Staff had argued that the government must bring “the strongest possible pressure” on the Northern Ireland government and that the “people of the North should be told in the plainest terms that if we win the war we shall see to it that a united Ireland is ruled within the Empire,” but that if they don’t cooperate, “they will have a unified Ireland in any event, but . . .

49 Carroll, Ireland in the War Years, 48.
51 Gray to Maffey, 24 June 1940, quoted in Dwyer, Irish Neutrality, 60. Maffey and Gray met before the letter was completed.
52 Coogan, De Valera, 551.
53 Dwyer, Irish Neutrality, 60.
under the German jackboot.” Churchill rejected that approach, claiming that he “could never be a party to coercion of Ulster to join the Southern counties.”

MacDonald presented de Valera with a new series of proposals at their next meeting. The main carrot involved the British government “accepting the principle” of a united Ireland, with a committee from Northern Ireland and Ireland to work out the constitutional and “other practical details” over time. In return, Ireland was to declare war immediately and allow British forces to take positions throughout Ireland, including the Treaty Ports. De Valera rejected the proposals in their entirety. He realized that it would be almost impossible for Craigavon to agree to the unification of the island and that the British government, by only offering the acceptance of the principle of a unification, was not going to demand or pressure Northern Ireland into the agreement. Chamberlain countered with a draft that declared the agreement “would take the form of a solemn undertaking that the Union is to become at an early date an accomplished fact from which there shall be no turning back.” De Valera rejected this as well.

What may have played most in de Valera’s mind in the summer of 1940, after the British retreat at Dunkirk and the fall of France, was a suspicion that Britain was going to lose the war. In July 1940 Joseph Walshe prepared a memo entitled “Britain’s Inevitable Defeat,” that stated unequivocally that “Britain’s defeat has been placed beyond all doubt.” If Britain did go down to defeat, and de Valera calculated that Irish

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54 Canning, British Policy Towards Ireland, 279.
55 Dwyer, De Valera, 240.
56 Longford and O’Neill, De Valera, 365-68; Dwyer, De Valera, 243; Dwyer, Irish Neutrality, 65.
57 Chamberlain to de Valera, 29 June 1940, NAI, DFA/P13.
participation in the war would not increase measurably the likelihood of a British victory, then abandoning neutrality would only open up Ireland to the destruction of war and the enmity of the eventual victor. That would have been a high price to pay even if Churchill were willing or able to unify Ireland.

As with most events concerning Anglo-Irish relations, de Valera was quick to bring the American public, especially Irish Americans, into the policy mix. The day he forwarded his formal rejection of the British proposals he arranged an interview with the New York Times. During the interview, de Valera made it clear that Ireland was determined to stay neutral and deter any aggressor. While he did not mention either Germany or Britain, he did make it clear that he did not intend for Ireland to be used as a base for operations against any belligerent. Again, he stressed that Ireland wanted cordial relations with Britain, but that the lone outstanding obstacle to the bilateral relationship, was the “most important” issue of partition.\(^59\)

In order to reinforce the message, Frank Aiken arranged an interview with the National Broadcasting Company that was broadcast in the United States on that same day. When asked what Ireland’s response would be if attacked by Germany, he responded that if Ireland were attacked by “anyone,” being careful not to specify either Germany or Britain, Ireland would “certainly [be] helped by the other.”\(^60\) The implication that Ireland would call on Germany’s aid if Britain tried to seize the Ports drew the

\(^{59}\) “Dublin Arms to Bar an Invasion, Whether from Britain or Reich,” New York Times, 6 July 1940.

\(^{60}\) “Text of Interview,” 6 July 1940, Aiken Papers, UCD, P104/3577.
attention of Washington. Two days later, Secretary of State Cordell Hull cautioned the British against attacking Ireland.\textsuperscript{61}

Faced with the fact that Roosevelt would not defend a British seizure of the Ports, Churchill hoped that Irish fears of a German invasion would compel de Valera to accept at least an American occupation of Berehaven. An American naval presence at Berehaven, the most southern and western of the Treaty Ports, would be an asset in the continuing fight against German U-boats. When Churchill made the request to Washington, FDR declined, citing the importance of maintaining the fleet in Hawaii.\textsuperscript{62} Again, Roosevelt refused to be brought into the conflict by either side.

During this flurry of official and unofficial tension, the German Minister in Dublin was working behind the scenes to allay de Valera’s concerns about German intentions. On 1 July he reported to Berlin on his attempts to convince de Valera that there would be no German attack and on his broader efforts to “minimize suspicion” of German espionage activities.\textsuperscript{63} Unaware of the numerous ways the Irish were already helping the allies, the Germans did not want Ireland to join the war. As far as Berlin knew, Ireland was simply waiting out the war.

In the midst of this tension, the Irish opposition parties began to rally around de Valera even more strongly. Dr. T. F. O’Higgins, the vice president of the main opposition party, Fine Gael, wrote to the Defence Council: “Our present policy is one of ABSOLUTE NEUTRALITY with meticulous attention to very correct balance.” He went

\textsuperscript{61} Dwyer, \textit{Irish Neutrality}, 77.
\textsuperscript{62} Cronin, \textit{Washington’s Irish Policy}, 111.
on that the Irish should shoot the British, the Germans, or the Americans if they tried to
take the Ports.64 There were only a few opposition members in favor of forming a closer
alliance with the British in order to stave off a German invasion, but de Valera responded
that the best way to maintain Irish security and independence was with strict neutrality.65

In July 1940 there were a series of articles and editorials in the American and
British press condemning Ireland’s refusal of the British offers to work toward
unification if Ireland joined the war. Realizing that much of his ability to maintain
neutrality rested on whatever restraint the American and British public, especially the
Irish-American community, put on Churchill, de Valera worked hard to counter the
attacks. Meeting with the opposition, de Valera expressed his concern about the
“vigorous effort . . . to influence public opinion against us in the United States” because
he had turned down the British offer.66 De Valera felt that Gray was behind the press
barrage, in part because Gray did little to hide his pleasure in reading the tone of the
articles. In late July, he wrote to Walshe that Irish-American groups in United States had
lost their effectiveness because they were now associated “in the public mind with Nazis
and Fascists.”67

63 “SECRET: Hempel to Berlin,” 1 July 1940, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 89.
64 “Memorandum to Defence Council,” 3 July 1940, UCD, Mulcahy Papers, P7/a/215. Emphasis in the
original.
65 Cosgrave to de Valera, 9 July 1940, NLI Dublin, S14213; De Valera to Cosgrave, 13 July 1940, UCD,
Mulcahy Papers, P7/c/112.
66 “Notes on Conference Held in Taoiseach’s Room on Morning of July 16th, 1940,” NLI Dublin, S14213.
67 Gray to Walshe, 25 July 1940, NAI, DFA/P10.
Dublin was therefore eager to get its side of the story to the American press. On 21 July 1940, Walshe asked Brennan to get this following explanation of Irish neutrality out to the newspapers:

Neutrality is of the very essence of Irish independence. It is based on the fundamental and universal will of our people, so much so that no Government could depart from it without at once being overthrown. It was not adopted as a bargaining factor but as the fullest expression of our independence in time of war. We are determined to defend it against all invaders to the bitter end. The hostile attitude of certain Americans to Ireland is completely opposed to American statements about small nations and self-determination. 68

In August 1940, Walshe took his concerns over the press campaign directly to Gray. Gray sent Walshe a letter on 6 August where Gray commented that he was surprised that the Irish were worried at all about Britain seizing the Ports and therefore had nothing to fear from a press campaign. Walshe responded by sending Gray a series of clippings from British and American newspapers in an attempt to outline a coordinated anti-Irish campaign. Walshe quoted Churchill’s comments on the Ports in the 1938 debate in the British House of Commons: “Now we give up the ports to an Irish Government led by men whose rise to power is proportioned by the animosity with which they have acted against this country.” He also noted the similarities in the British and American press campaigns, noting that “the mere coincidence gives one furiously to think.” 69

69 Walshe to Gray, 9 August 1940, NAI, DFA/P10.
In the autumn of 1940, a number of developments made Churchill eager to press Ireland again over joining the war or making the Treaty Ports available to the British Navy. After the fall of France in June 1940, the German Navy began to base U-boats on the French coast. Even though only ten U-boats were ever on patrol at a time, their shorter distance to targets in the Atlantic and the British need to keep vessels in the English Channel to guard against an invasion allowed the Germans to sink a significant amount of British shipping. October 1940 was the worst month of the war for the British in the Battle of the Atlantic, and almost all of the losses came within 250 miles of the northwest corner of Ireland.\textsuperscript{70}

It is doubtful, however, what difference the British use of the Treaty Ports could have made. The Ports were in a state of disrepair and were located far from the convoy routes and perilously close to the French coast. It is telling that even in the middle of the worst British shipping losses, there is no evidence that the British Navy was pressing the government to gain access to the Ports.

Without prior consultation with the Cabinet, on 5 November 1940 Churchill made his first public speech about the role of the Treaty Ports in Britain’s war effort.\textsuperscript{71} It was also election day in the United States, so it is possible that Churchill had been waiting so Roosevelt would not have to worry about an Irish-American backlash. After recounting the success of Britain in weathering the German air assaults over the summer, Churchill turned to Ireland:

More serious than the air raids has been the recent recrudescence of U-boat sinkings in the Atlantic approaches to our islands. The fact that we cannot use the South and West Coasts of Ireland . . . to protect the trade by which Ireland as well as Great Britain lives, is a most heavy and grievous burden and one which should never have been placed on our shoulders, broad though they be.

Churchill also went on, though, to stress that perhaps the worst part of the naval situation had passed. During question time, Mr. Lees-Smith commented on the American role in keeping Ireland neutral:

Every month we watch the spectacle of hundreds of thousands of tons being sunk and of hundreds of British sailors being drowned because we cannot get the ports. . . . Ireland pays a good deal of attention to public opinion in the United States, and it is worth while calling the attention of the United States, who have influence, to what we are paying for our principles.

Other members urged direct action against Ireland, with Sir Southby urging cutting off all trade with Ireland unless the Irish government turned over the Ports. Mr. Price discussed how “the statesmen of Eire” must be hoping to use the Ports “to secure their dream of a united Ireland and to utilize American opinion to bring that about.” Mr. Tinker warned de Valera that continued refusal of British use of the Ports would mean that after the war any goodwill toward Ireland in resolving partition would be replaced with “hostility.”

Churchill’s comments encouraged Gray to continue the pressure on the Irish government. On 7 November he advised Walshe that American public opinion, far from holding back the British from action, would support Churchill if he took the Treaty Ports


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by force.\textsuperscript{72} Gray also wrote to Washington that part of the support would come from “what is reported to be Chamberlain’s undocumented understanding” that the Ports would be available to Britain in an emergency. This is one of the rationales that Gray suggested back in May that the British use as a post facto defense of seizing the Ports.\textsuperscript{73} Gray concluded his note by claiming that de Valera had the qualities of a “fanatic and Machiavelli” and that he would “do business on his own terms or must be overcome by force.”\textsuperscript{74}

De Valera’s public response to Churchill focused on the positive aspects of the Anglo-Irish relationship. He insisted that he would not have graced Churchill’s comments with any response if they had not been followed by a “Press Campaign” in Britain and the United States. De Valera emphasized the importance of friendly relations with Britain, and that save for the issue of partition, since the end of the Economic War the bilateral relationship had never been stronger. He also stressed again how he had for more than twenty years given assurances that Ireland would never be a base against Britain. Of course, he did not disclose the extensive covert aid that Ireland had been giving the Allies. He concluded, however, with a stern warning that for the first time mentioned Britain specifically as a potential enemy of Ireland:

There can be no question of the handing over of these ports so long as this State remains neutral. There can be no question of leasing these ports. They are ours. They are within our sovereignty, and there can be no question, as

\textsuperscript{72} Ironically, on 5 November Brennan reported back to Dublin that “during the past few weeks we find there is now far better understanding of Ireland’s position.” Washington to Dublin, 5 November 1941, Cable 417, NAI, DFA/2.
\textsuperscript{73} See page 104 above.
\textsuperscript{74} Gray to the Secretary of State, 10 November 1940, FRUS 1940, vol. 3, 168-70.
long as we remain neutral, of handing them over on any condition whatsoever. Any attempt to bring pressure to bear on us by any side—by any of the belligerents—by Britain—could only lead to bloodshed.75

In Washington, Brennan emphasized Irish displeasure with the official and unofficial pressure on the Ports. He presented a copy of de Valera’s speech to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles along with an official note stating that Ireland would “resist by force” either Germany or Britain should Ireland’s neutrality be violated. The note also complained that a semi-official press campaign in Britain was being “echoed” in the United States. When Welles pressed Brennan on how Ireland would fare if Germany defeated Britain, Brennan countered that if the Irish surrendered the Ports to the British in an effort to prevent a German victory, “it was highly probable that revolution would develop within the Irish Free State.”

Brennan also wrote to and met with dozens of newspaper editorial offices across the country.

De Valera felt that the only real obstacle to unilateral British action against Ireland was the Cabinet’s concern that ensuing negative American and Irish-American public opinion might limit Roosevelt’s ability to assist in the war. Consequently, he initiated a press campaign of his own, having Brennan write to and meet with dozens of

75 Dáil Debates 81 (7 November 1940), 583-84.
newspaper editorial offices across the United States. On 19 November, de Valera gave a widely published interview to Wallace Carroll of United Press International. De Valera again insisted that maintaining neutrality and not allowing Britain to use or lease the Ports was a matter of sovereignty. He also emphasized the familiar assurance that Britain had no need to fear Ireland being a base against it. In a letter to the American Association for Recognition of the Irish Republic, a group he founded almost twenty years earlier during his stay in the United States, he asked for a massive campaign “to put the Irish case, including partition, clearly before the American public.” Pointing to the rights of neutrals and drawing parallels between the American and Irish rights to decide for themselves issues of war and peace, de Valera argued that it would be an “inhuman outrage” to pressure a woefully unprepared Ireland into war.

The Irish-American press took up the call. The Irish Echo called for a meeting of “all people interested in assisting Ireland in preserving her neutrality.” Almost 2,500 people arrived in a New York hotel on 24 November for what became the organizational meeting of the American Friends of Irish Neutrality (AFIN). The AFIN hired a small staff whose primary mission was to submit articles and organize letter-writing campaigns across the country. They also published a monthly newsletter, “Neutrality News.”

76 “Memorandum of Conversation,” 9 November 1940. Welles wrote to Gray about the meeting on 19 November 1940. See Acting Secretary of State to the Minister in Ireland, 19 November 1940; Irish Legation to the Department of State, 9 November 1940, NAI, DFA/P10. There is a copy in FRUS, “Annex: Memorandum of Conversation,” Sumner Welles, 9 November 1940; Brennan, Ireland Standing Firm, 9-10, 36-39.
77 “Interview with U.S. Journalist,” 19 November 1940, Ireland’s Stand, 28-33.
78 Dublin to Washington, 8 November 1940, NAI, DFA/2.
79 Irish Echo, 18 November 1940.
80 Neutrality News, 1 July 1941, UCD, Aiken Papers, P104/3607.
Brennan was careful to remain behind the scenes of Irish-American groups like the AFIN for fear that any official Irish government representation, aid, or sanction would be seen as foreign interference in American domestic politics. He did, however, maintain extensive informal contact with prominent Irish Americans. In December, Dennis Cardinal Dougherty in Philadelphia notified him that an “English emissary” had been visiting Irish-American bishops asking them to influence de Valera to yield on the Ports.\textsuperscript{81} The emissary was Rossa Downing, who headed the Irish group of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Brennan worried that an open split among Irish Americans would deprive him “of the only weapon I had to save Ireland in the course of the administration’s headlong race to save Britain.”\textsuperscript{82} In an effort to prevent that, Brennan met with Welles to protest officially the actions of the Irish group of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Brennan told Welles that already there was a backlash among many Irish Americans and threatened that there might soon appear “Irish-American propaganda to the effect that the British were seeking these bases in Eire solely as a means of restoring British domination over Ireland.”\textsuperscript{83}

The British and American governments took note of de Valera’s campaign. There was some discussion in the British Cabinet that perhaps the government should ease the pressure on Ireland out of fear of American backlash. Churchill, however, would not be moved. He wrote to Maffey, who was advocating an ease of tension, that de Valera “should stew in his own juice for a while” and that “certainly nothing must be said to

\textsuperscript{81} Washington to Dublin, 9 December 1940, NAI, DFA/2.
\textsuperscript{82} Brennan, \textit{Ireland Standing Firm}, 24.
reassure him.” In Washington, Secretary of Navy Frank Knox was lobbying FDR to join Britain in putting pressure on de Valera, but Roosevelt still resisted getting actively involved. It is possible that he was quite content with Gray’s efforts in Dublin, where Gray was telling de Valera that American public opinion would soon more clearly see that the Irish were enjoying their continued safety and standard of living only at the expense of British lives.

The seeds of the fall’s British propaganda campaign against Irish neutrality bore fruit throughout the winter of 1940-1941 in the press, but it did not change de Valera’s position. Reviewing the nature of the articles about Irish neutrality during the time, historian T. Ryle Dwyer concluded that there were four main areas of “distortions and misrepresentations” about Ireland: that numerous German agents were in Dublin, that the German diplomatic staff in Dublin was excessively large, that U-Boats were refueling in Irish ports, and that the lights of Irish cities aided German pilots.

When the propaganda campaign failed, Churchill turned to a two-pronged strategy in December 1940: exerting economic pressure on Ireland and enlisting American diplomatic aid. While he rejected a more serious proposal to curtail trade with Ireland for fear that the backlash would only strengthen de Valera’s hand, the

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83 Sumner Welles, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 9 December 1940, FRUS, 173-75.
84 Quoted in Dwyer, *Irish Neutrality*, 93.
86 Gray to Secretary of State, 24 November 1940.
87 Clippings sent by Brennan to Dublin are contained in NAI, DFA/P10, “British and American Press and Radio Campaign Against Irish Neutrality.”
halfway measures he imposed, mostly the reduction in the amount of goods shipped to Ireland, were not strong enough to force a change in the Irish position. Not wanting even these measures to appear as sanctions for Irish intransigence, the Ministry of Information portrayed them as merely unfortunate consequences of the war. Churchill also took his case on Ireland directly to Roosevelt. In the same letter in which he suggested the outline of what became Lend-Lease, Churchill asked for the “good office of the United States, and the whole influence of its Government” to secure for Britain the Treaty Ports and air facilities in southern and western Ireland. Acknowledging the importance of the Irish-American politics, he continued:

If it were proclaimed an American interest that the resistance of Great Britain should be prolonged and the Atlantic route kept open . . . the Irish in the United States might be willing to point out to the Government of Eire the dangers which its present policy is creating for the United States itself.

In spite of the need, however, Churchill made it clear that it would not compel Northern Ireland into any union with Ireland. 90 Seemingly out of a realization that he would not get Roosevelt’s approval for a British military takeover of the Ports, Churchill deleted a line that was included in an earlier draft of the message: “It must be emphasized that failing any agreement about Eire bases, it may become necessary as a measure of self-preservation, to secure these bases.” 91 Roosevelt did not respond.

91 “Printed for the War Cabinet,” November 1940, Doc C-43x, letter, draft B, not sent, in ibid., 99.
De Valera suspected that much of the British agitation for the ports rested not on sound military judgment, but on the need for a “scapegoat.” Writing to Brennan on 5 December, he outlined how the Ports were in such an unprepared condition that it would take months to get them ready, that concerns about the Irish Army and the IRA would force the British to occupy the entire country, and that most of the ship traffic and sinkings were occurring to the north and west of Northern Ireland, not along Ireland’s southern coast. In spite of this, and in a veiled reference to Churchill, de Valera noted that the “composition of [the British] Cabinet makes [the] situation uncertain and dangerous.”

On 13 December, Churchill gave Roosevelt a warning that Britain was about to limit the amount of shipping going to Ireland. The effect, according to Churchill, was that Ireland would still have enough to survive, but not enough to have “the prosperous trading they are making now.” About a week later, Churchill also asked Roosevelt what his reaction would be to a complete cessation of shipping to Ireland, because public opinion could not much longer sustain trade with Ireland while “de Valera is quite content to sit happy and see us strangled.” Churchill asked Roosevelt to respond “quite privately.” Roosevelt may have spoken to Churchill about it, but there is no record of any response. Churchill did continue the economic pressure, but he never halted the shipping going to Ireland.

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92 Dublin to Washington, 5 December 1940, Cable 196, NAI, DFA/2.
93 “Confidential and Personal for the President from Former Naval Person,” 13 December 1940, Kimball, *Churchill and Roosevelt*, 113.
In his Christmas message to the United States, carried by the Columbia Broadcasting System, de Valera complained about the recent British actions and the “false picture” that the press in Britain and the United States were painting about life in Ireland. Citing a long list of privations being endured by the Irish, de Valera claimed that Ireland was blockaded more than any other country in Europe, including by Britain. Again stressing the commitment to neutrality, he said that the Irish people would “defend ourselves to the utmost.” Gray complained to de Valera that the speech was designed to “put the pressure on the Irish-American vote,” and that it was not so much the fact of Irish neutrality, but the “attitude of Irish opinion” as it was being reported that caused problems in the United States.  

Roosevelt reacted strongly to de Valera’s plea. Roosevelt was already deeply involved in moving the American public toward a new stage of support for Britain and in laying the groundwork for Lend-Lease. He was also facing a movement led by former president Herbert Hoover to send relief supplies to Europe. He did not appreciate de Valera’s public criticism of British naval and shipping policy. During his radio address of 29 December in which he called on the United States to be the “great arsenal of democracy,” he posited that a defeated Britain would mean ruin for Ireland. Clearly addressing de Valera and the majority of Irish Americans, Roosevelt asked dismissively if “Irish freedom [would] be permitted as an amazing exception in an unfree world.”

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94 Gray to the Secretary of State, 7 January 1941, FRUS, 215-16.
95 “National Security Address of President Roosevelt,” 29 December 1940, Department of State Bulletin, vol. 4, no. 80, 4 January 1941.
Although Roosevelt was unwilling to put any direct personal pressure on de Valera, the British economic pressure and publicity campaign began to have an effect on non-Irish-American public opinion at the start of 1941. The Gallup Poll asked Americans in the first week of January: “Would you like to see the Irish give up their neutrality and let the English use war bases along the Irish coast?” Among all Americans, 63% said yes, 16% no, with 21% undecided. Among those who identified themselves as Irish Americans, the results were 40% yes, 52% no, and only 8% undecided.\footnote{George Gallup, \textit{The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971}, vol. 1, 1935-1945 (New York: Random House, 1972), 260. The poll was conduced 2-7 January 1941.}

In Dublin, Maffey renewed his warnings to London about the possible backlash effects of the continued pressure and to remind the government about the true nature of Irish neutrality. He noted that the best hope for accomplishing British goals “always will lie in the actions and thoughts of Irishmen overseas.” He continued:

\begin{quote}
Hateful as their neutrality is, it has been a neutrality friendly to our cause. I need not give in detail what we have got and are getting in the way of intelligence reports, prompt reports of submarine movements, free use of Lough Foyle, etc. The catastrophic fall of France stiffened the country’s resolve to maintain neutrality, but the Éire government continued to help in every way which did not expose them to German action.\footnote{George Gallup, \textit{The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971}, vol. 1, 1935-1945 (New York: Random House, 1972), 260. The poll was conduced 2-7 January 1941.}
\end{quote}

The end result of the British propaganda campaigns, the appeals to Roosevelt, and the economic pressure was that they created no change in de Valera’s policy of neutrality, nor in its pro-British bias.
THE AIKEN MISSION

By early 1941 de Valera became convinced that Germany had every intention of invading Ireland. He did not believe Hempel’s assurances to the contrary, and the strategy seemed to him the best way for Germany to advance its strategic position against Britain. With Churchill continuing the public pressure on him and with Roosevelt publicly deriding Irish neutrality, de Valera felt that the only viable means of preserving neutrality was to increase Ireland’s defense capabilities. Doing so would at least give the Germans or the British some unease before an attack, or at least more than he expected they would have given the then current state of the Irish military. Unable to secure arms from Britain, he turned to the United States both for weapons and for additional ships to offset the loss of British shipping trade. De Valera realized, however, that his relationship with Gray had deteriorated to such a point that there was little prospect of successful negotiations in Dublin, so he decided to send a special envoy to Washington.

De Valera tapped the Minister for Co-ordination of Defensive Measures Frank Aiken for the mission. 98 Aiken had a long and distinguished reputation among Irish nationalists, an asset that de Valera hoped would help him establish an immediate connection with Irish Americans. He had served in the Irish Republican Army during the

97 Maffey to Cranborne, 19 January 1941, quoted in Dwyer, De Valera, 254.
Anglo-Irish War, and as IRA Chief of Staff in 1923 gave the cease-fire and the “dump arms” orders that ended the Civil War. He was instrumental in the founding of Fianna Fáil and served as Minister of Defence from 1932 until the start of the “Emergency” in 1939. ⁹⁹

Aiken’s reputation, or at least a version of it, preceded him and impeded his talks with American officials. On 10 March, Bill Donovan from the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) sent a note to Roosevelt that concluded that “Aiken is possibly in America for other reasons; he is of the extreme left.” Soon this information made it into the briefings being prepared for State Department officials. Gray had also written to Washington that Aiken needed to become “more fully aware of the American situation,” in the hope that if Aiken could see that American and Irish-American public opinion was not supporting Ireland that de Valera would give up neutrality. ¹⁰⁰ Aiken contributed to the perception of being irrationally anti-British by asking to be referred to as “General Aiken,” a title he gained during the Anglo-Irish War. ¹⁰¹

Aiken’s mission took on an added importance for de Valera after Maffey told him on 14 March that Britain could not give a guarantee similar to the one that Germany gave about not invading Ireland. In de Valera’s official biography, he recalls that Maffey said that the time might come when Britain or America or both would be pressed to bring

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⁹⁹ He later became Minister of External Affairs for all but three years between 1951 and 1969.
¹⁰⁰ Donovan to Roosevelt, 11 March 1941, quoted in Raymond, “David Gray,” 68. Gray’s views of Donavan’s visit are in Gray to the Secretary of State, 10 March 1941, FRUS, 222; Gray to Welles, 7 March 1941, 841D.00/1306, RG 59, NARA.
¹⁰¹ See, for example, the flyer for Aiken’s address in Chicago on 27 April 1941, “Address by General Frank Aiken,” Aiken Papers, UCD, P104/3580.
“serious pressure” on Ireland. Maffey felt that he could not give de Valera a guarantee not to invade “without a mental reservation.”  

Faced with this knowledge, de Valera used his traditional St. Patrick’s Day message to the United States to set the stage for Aiken’s visit. He directed Americans seeking to understand Irish neutrality to look to George Washington’s declaration of neutrality in 1793. He then argued that the real problem was that at the start of the war the Irish and British governments had agreed that if Ireland agreed not to pursue independent shipping charters, Britain would then supply Ireland. Now that Britain was beginning to reduce those supplies, however, the hardship facing the Irish was that there was no longer any independent shipping charters available. Therefore, according to de Valera, “Both sides in blockading each other . . . were blockading us.” He also reiterated his stand that he would never allow Ireland to be used as a base of attack against Britain.  

Aiken arrived in New York on 18 March 1941 and spent some weeks touring U.S. military facilities while Brennan tried to arrange meetings for him with Roosevelt and the State Department. On 2 April, Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson pressed Aiken on the existence of cooperation between Ireland and Britain on security matters. Acheson wanted some assurances that any arms the United States gave to Ireland would not be used against the British. Clearly the British had not informed Washington about the Anglo-Irish military liaisons; to have done so would have weakened their argument about

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Ireland’s lack of cooperation in the war effort. Aiken and de Valera were also determined to keep the talks secret. They did not want the Germans to learn about them and use them as a pretext for invasion. Aiken, therefore, denied that there were any Anglo-Irish arrangements. Acheson then informed Aiken that he saw no way to sell arms to Ireland without there first being a prior arrangement with Britain for a defensive plan. Aiken said that Ireland would never abandon neutrality, but that it needed arms in order to defend its right to remain neutral. He told Acheson that neutrality as the “crown and symbol of Irish independence.”

Aiken, accompanied by Brennan, finally met with Roosevelt on 7 April 1941. Immediately prior to receiving the Irish representatives, Roosevelt met with Lord Halifax, the British ambassador, who told Roosevelt that Aiken was anti-British and hoped for a German victory. According to Brennan’s account of the latter meeting, Roosevelt talked for about twenty minutes about his love for Ireland and the Irish people. As Roosevelt was finishing up, his aide entered the room as the unofficial signal that the meeting was over. Aiken did not politely rise, though, and told Roosevelt that the position of the Irish toward Fascism should be clear to all, for Ireland was the only nation to defeat an internal fascist threat. All Ireland was asking was the opportunity to buy arms and ships to defeat any invader. Roosevelt interrupted with, “I believe in talking straight. You are reported as having said that it does not matter to Ireland whether

104 Acheson, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 2 April 1941, FRUS, 223-25.
105 Raymond, “David Gray,” 69; Fisk, In Time of War, 266. Maffey had written Halifax back in March that “it is important that he [Aiken] return in a chastened mood.” See Carroll, Ireland in the War Years, 102.
106 De Valera repressed the “Blueshirts,” the popular name of a quasi-fascist organization, the Army Comrades Association, in the early 1930s.
England or Germany wins the war.” When Brennan and Aiken both told Roosevelt that Aiken had never made such a comment, Roosevelt continued to lecture them on the global and Irish consequences of a German victory.

Aiken then asked the president if the Irish people would have his sympathy in case of aggression. Roosevelt replied, “Yes. German aggression.” When Aiken suggested that Ireland might also be the target of British aggression, FDR said that was preposterous, emphasizing “What you have to fear is German aggression.” Aiken then appended, “or British aggression,” at which point Roosevelt jerked the tablecloth for lunch that aides had just placed before him, sending the silverware flying across the Oval Office. When Aiken asked why the British would not guarantee it, FDR said he could get it the next day from Churchill. A few days later, Brennan asked Welles about the promise, but Welles told him that was a matter between Brennan and Roosevelt.107 Years later, Aiken said he knew right after the meeting that he would not be able to persuade Roosevelt: “Churchill had been at him to put the screw to us.”108

Roosevelt, however, realized that it would not be good public relations to deny everything the Irish asked for, but he was determined not to have Aiken’s mission be a success. On 25 April, the State Department told Gray to inform de Valera that the United States would negotiate with him, not Aiken, the transfer of two ships to Ireland. Gray was told to add that “the Government of the United States does not question the right of

108 Interview with Robert Fisk, December 1979, quoted in Fisk, _In Time of War_, 266.
neutrality,” but there is a difference between neutrality and a policy that “at least potentially provides real encouragement to the German Government.”

After his visit to Washington, Aiken continued the Irish effort to secure Irish-American opinion by touring the country over the next few weeks as a guest of the American Friends of Irish Neutrality. His standard speech began with the argument that a free and neutral Ireland was simply trying to purchase weapons to defend itself. Ireland would pay for those weapons in currency, not by bartering away “the sovereign rights of the Irish people” by giving up neutrality. “One of the first principles of democracy is that the people concerned shall have the right to decide for themselves the vital question of war and peace.” He stressed that Ireland’s position was not taken out of resentment over years of conflict with Britain. Apart from the continuing injustice of partition, according to Aiken, the countries were closer than ever. He closed by reiterating de Valera’s positions on the inability of small nations to control war and peace, and asked for his audience’s “moral support against aggression.” In his farewell, Aiken said that Ireland’s survival depended on neutrality, which in turn depended on the “moral support of . . . friends abroad.”

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109 Secretary of State to Gray, 25 April 1941, FRUS, 226-27; Walshe to de Valera, 1 May 1941, NAI, DFA, A24.
111 “Speech Made by Mr. Aiken at Boston on 18th April, 1941,” UCD, Aiken Papers, P104/3569.
112 “Mr. Aiken’s Farewell Speech,” 23 June 1941, UCD, Aiken Papers, P104/3583. The text of Judge Cohalan’s speech at the dinner is in UCD, Aiken Papers, P104/3572. Aiken made similar remarks to a national radio audience on CBS on 21 June 1941. See “Speech Delivered by General Frank Aiken,” 21 June 1941, UCD, Aiken Papers, P104/3576.
As instructed, Gray met with de Valera on 28 April to deliver the news about the sale of the ships. Gray began by criticizing de Valera’s St. Patrick’s Day message to the United States, specifically the part about Britain blockading Ireland. According to Gray, de Valera “flushed angrily and shouted that it was impertinent to question the statements of a head of state.” Gray’s response was that at the time of the Taoiseach’s statements that there had been considerable pressure from the “anti-British elements to whom he [de Valera] had chiefly appealed” that were trying to defeat Lend-Lease and “sabotaging” the Roosevelt administration’s efforts to aid Britain. Gray reported back to Washington:

I no longer hope to get anything from him by generosity and conciliation. He must be made to realize that it is possible that a situation is approaching in which if it be essential to survival his ports will be seized with the liberal sentiment of the world, that he will have only the choice of fighting on the side of Great Britain or Germany.\textsuperscript{113}

De Valera was torn between supporting his old friend Aiken and getting some badly needed ships. His first move was to have Brennan discuss the matter with Welles. When Welles again pressed Brennan on the issue of Anglo-Irish security cooperation, Brennan continued to deny that there was any. Welles argued that given that condition, the offer on the table was the best the United States could do. De Valera rejected it and told Roosevelt that Irish neutrality “has been a benevolent one, and consequently we have leaned on the side of helpful and sympathetic understanding.” Not content to lose the opportunity to gain a public relations boon among Irish Americans by showing support
for Ireland, even if it did involve only a relatively minor transaction, Roosevelt simply ignored De Valera’s rejection and told a press conference on 20 May that plans were being made to sell Ireland two ships. De Valera, content that his point had been made at the official level, quietly agreed to the sale.114

THE CONSCRIPTION CRISIS

Churchill’s devotion to the loyalists in Northern Ireland was, if measured in either war production or volunteers for the British armed forces, often unrequited. Lord Craigavon noted in May 1940 the “unsatisfactory position” of Northern Ireland with regard to recruiting. Craigavon could not have argued that the lack of recruits was the result of a massive and growing wartime economy, as by November 1940 the unemployment rate in the province topped twenty-one percent. In a December 1940 report by Harold Wilson, future British Prime Minister and then with the Manpower Requirements Committee, “at the end of fifteen months of war . . . Ulster, far from becoming an important centre of munitions production, has become a depressed area. . . . Ulster has not seen the construction of a single new factory.” In March 1941, Churchill

113 Gray to Secretary of State, 1 May 1941, FRUS, 229-32. De Valera noted that he wanted to express his displeasure at Gray “as vividly as I could.” See “Memorandum by E. de V. of interview with D. Gray,” 28 April 1941, quoted in Longford and O’Neill, De Valera, 381.
114 Welles, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 29 April 1941, FRUS, 228-29; Irish Legation to the Department of State, 15 May 1941, FRUS, 232-33; Brennan, Ireland Standing Firm, 51-56.
wrote of his concern about the “limited extent of Northern Ireland’s contribution to the nation’s industrial war effort.”

The first movement to introduce conscription in 1941 came from the Northern Ireland government, which hoped to use it to bolster the wartime contribution of the province. Churchill’s announcement in the House of Commons on 20 May that the government might extend military conscription to Northern Ireland raised a firestorm of protest. Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King wrote to Churchill that the move would have negative effects on Canadian unity. He also urged Churchill to talk with the American Ambassador to London, John Winant, on the possible effects of the move on Irish-American opinion.

Dulanty and Churchill met twice over the next few days to discuss the issue. The Irish argument was that Ireland was already helping Britain on many fronts, including allowing Irish men to enlist in British forces, and that conscripting Catholics in Northern Ireland would make it more difficult to maintain that level of involvement. The IRA would surely gain support, and the British would then be faced with a whole new set of problems. Churchill’s responded that if the Catholics did not want to be a part of the British Army they could just escape to Ireland, “we will put no obstacle in their path.” De Valera’s formal complaint included the argument that “there was no more grievous attack on any fundamental human right” than to make a person fight for a nation to which he

115 Fisk, *In Time of War*, 386-409. Maffey related his thoughts to Gray on 25 May 1941 that the Belfast air raids and the ensuing lack of recruits embarrassed the Northern Ireland Government. See Gray to Secretary of State, 25 May 1941, *FRUS*, 238.
 objected being a citizen. Churchill replied: “It makes my blood boil to think of your present position. Ireland has lost its soul.”

The strong arguments by de Valera and opposition leaders about the consequences of Churchill’s plans convinced Gray that in this instance both Irish and American interest converged, and he urged Roosevelt to try to restrain Churchill. Gray felt that conscription was a tool of the “weak and failing” Ulster government to provoke a crisis that would forestall any efforts to coerce it to leave the United Kingdom. Fine Gael leaders, whom Gray trusted much more than he trusted de Valera, convinced Gray that conscription in the North would lead to a number of problems, including draft riots and draft dodgers being welcomed in Ireland.

In the end, Churchill realized the folly of the proposal and on 27 May told the House of Commons that while Britain had the right to do so, enforcing conscription in Northern Ireland would be “more trouble than it is worth.” It was the prudent decision. If conscription had been carried out in Northern Ireland there would have been no end to the difficulties it would have brought on de Valera and to Anglo-Irish relations. Nationalist MPs from Northern Ireland had already drawn up a pledge they would have had all Catholics sign, calling on them to “resist conscription with the most effective means at our disposal.” It was also likely that the Irish Republican Army would get involved in rallying the Nationalist cause, creating further difficulties for de Valera. If the

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118 Dulanty to Walshe, 22 and 26 May 1941, NAI, DFA, P12/14.
119 Gray to Secretary of State, 24 May 1941, FRUS, 235-36.
120 Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., vol. 371 (1940-41), col. 1718.
121 De Valera’s official biographers note that “de Valera would have been compelled to take the part of the conscripted Nationalists.” Longford and O’Neill, De Valera, 385.
British resorted to imprisoning those resisting the draft, the prospect of hunger strikes, long a tool of Irish nationalists, would have become a rallying cry for the Irish and for Irish Americans.

DECLINING AMERICAN-IRISH RELATIONS

In spite of the two governments’ cooperation over the conscription crisis, American-Irish relations continued a steady decline during the summer and fall of 1941, while ironically, Anglo-Irish relations improved. The official and unofficial pressure from Britain to relinquish the Ports began to subside after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June. After German attention turned away from the British Isles and the American navy extended its patrols farther into the Atlantic, the British were able to minimize the shipping losses caused by the U-boat campaign. As a result, there was much less need for the Ports. In addition, the flap over the conscription crisis in May hammered home to most British policymakers and military leaders that any overt actions to gain the Ports without the support of the Irish government and people would be a disaster. Gray, however, believing it his mission from Roosevelt to keep up the pressure on Ireland, continued his assaults on de Valera and Irish neutrality.

A rare public debate in Ireland about neutrality probably encouraged Gray to think that his actions might bear fruit. On 17 July, James Dillon, the deputy leader of the opposition party Fine Gael, stated in the Dáil that Ireland should stand up to the Nazi tyranny. He argued that it was wrong for Ireland to “sell its honour and stake its whole

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material future on the vain hope that it may be spared the passing pain of effort now.”

The best option for Ireland was to find out what Britain and the United States needed in order to respond to the Nazi threat and then to give them “cooperation to the limit of our resources.” Dillon was not urging that Ireland enter the war, only that it move further in its cooperation with the Allies. He was certainly advocating giving Britain use of the Treaty Ports.

De Valera’s response turned the fire fighting analogy Roosevelt used to defend Lend-Lease on its head:

I was speaking to one person who happened to visit us here and he asked . . . “If a neighbour's house was on fire, surely you would allow the firemen to get up on your roof to put out the fire next door?” Of course we would, but that is not an analogy to what we are being asked to do. What we have been asked to do is to set our own house on fire in company with the other house. We have been asked to throw ourselves into the flames—that is what it amounts to.  

Gray hoped the British would exploit this first open rift in Irish support for neutrality. Churchill, however, had begun to understand the dangers involved in further pursuing action against de Valera. In August Gray wrote to Roosevelt that the British should cut off all supplies to Ireland in order to “explode this nationalistic dream of self-sufficiency.” Roosevelt did not indicate that he would pursue the matter with Churchill, but he did reply that “people, frankly, are getting pretty fed up with my old friend Dev.”

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123 Dáil Debates 84 (17 July 1941), 1864, 1913-14.
124 Dwyer, Irish Neutrality, 133; Roosevelt to Gray, 21 August 1941.
Gray then implemented a policy of unofficial pressure on Ireland. Over the summer and fall of 1941, he gave a series of “off the record” interviews with American correspondents about Axis espionage activities in Ireland. He sent a note in September 1941 to Joseph Walshe at External Affairs that outlined his talking points to the reporters. Gray had been telling the reporters that he had information from “several likely sources” that Germany had made a deal with the Irish Republican Army that in exchange for cooperation against the British, Ireland would be reunited and given two English counties “as a bridgehead for control of England.” He claimed that there were probably many agents in Ireland operating freely. In the United States, Gray argued that the activities of Irish Americans in defense of Irish neutrality were part of an Axis propaganda plan.

Walshe drafted a response to Gray that challenged his conclusions point by point, but he never sent it. Perhaps, given the tone of his draft, he either wrote it as a cathartic exercise or realized after the fact that sending it would have devastating consequences for Irish-American relations. He began by complaining that Gray’s assertions that the comments were off the record did not mitigate the harm they were doing to the bilateral relationship. Walshe complained bitterly that all of Gray’s points were “in the realm of assumption and opinion.” With regard to Irish-American activities, Walshe wrote:

> Is it possible that because they sympathise with the aspirations of this county to govern its own destiny, Irish-Americans must be branded by you as pro-German or anti-British? . . . The freedom of the human spirit about which

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125 “Notes on Axis Activities in Ireland,” 3 September 1941, NAI, DFA, A2.
126 Walshe to Gray, 11 September 1941. NAI, DFA, A4.
you spoke to me must provide for even Irish-Americans being Irish and American without being pro-German. . . . You can hardly mean to insinuate . . . that ex-President Hoover and a great many other distinguished Isolationsists are one whit less American than you are.

In conclusion, Walshe wrote that Gray’s entire account was merely “insinuation and innuendo” that was “founded on acknowledged ignorance.” Given Gray’s views, Walshe doubted that Gray’s “prejudices” would ever allow him to be an instrument of goodwill between the American and Irish governments.

Gray’s portrayal of German espionage in Ireland was off the mark. In the last few years historians begun to learn how large, extensive, and effective was the cooperation between the Irish and British intelligence agencies during the war. In the most recent and complete review of German intelligence efforts in Ireland during the war, Mark Hull concludes that the entire German espionage effort was an “absolute failure,” primarily because of “the system of brilliantly effective counter-intelligence operations run by both Ireland and Britain.” 127

The case of Walter Simon is a typical example of the quality of German intelligence activities in Ireland. 128 Simon traveled to Ireland in U-38, which had entered Dingle Bay on the night of 12 June 1940. After walking along a rusted railway track for several hours, Simon asked some locals about when the next train would be around. After having been informed that no train had run on the track for over ten years, Simon waited in a pub before taking a bus to Tralee, hoping to catch a train to Dublin from there. Simon

got drunk while he waited, explaining to all who would listen that the conditions in Ireland would improve as soon as Hitler landed. His actions and accent brought him to the attention of two plainclothes officers who followed him onto the train. Simon told the officers that he had been in Dingle, but had been in German-controlled Rotterdam before that. The officers asked, jokingly, if he was looking for the Irish Republican Army, and Simon asked them if they were in the IRA and if they knew any of the commanders. The officers called ahead to Dublin and the police arrested Simon when the train arrived.

CONCLUSION

De Valera, with some help from Irish Americans, successfully managed the first difficult years of Irish neutrality. His effort was a study in pragmatism, but it grew out of his desire to create a unique Irish identity against a history of dominance by Britain over Ireland. While Churchill certainly did not see it at the time, his efforts also aided Britain. If Ireland had joined the war, many, if not most, of the Irish volunteers going to the British Army would have stayed in Ireland, draining the British forces of troops, arms, munitions, and forcing them to extend air coverage to Ireland during in Battle of Britain. Before the United States entered the war, Irish Americans were willing to work hard to help de Valera and the Irish maintain their neutrality. All of that would change after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

CHAPTER 4

WAR, DEMANDS, NEUTRALITY, DISTORTIONS, 1941-1945

Personal. Private and Secret. Begins. Now is your chance, Now or never. ‘A Nation once again’. Am very ready to meet you at any time. Ends.¹

Churchill to de Valera
7 December 1941

This assertion of her neutrality is Eire’s first free self-assertion: as such alone it would mean a great deal to her. . . . She has invested her self-respect in it. It is typical of her intense and narrow view of herself that she cannot see that her attitude must appear to England an affair of blindness, egotism, escapism or sheer funk.²

Elizabeth Bowen

The relationships among the American, Irish, and British governments, as well as their interactions with Irish Americans, changed dramatically after 7 December 1941. No longer would Irish Americans organize around the issue of protecting Irish neutrality, with the American Friends of Irish Neutrality disbanding the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor. David Gray need no longer dance around the issue of one neutral pressuring

¹ Longford and O’Neil, De Valera, 393, which corresponds to the official record. See Canning, British Policy Toward Ireland, 310-14. In Churchill’s Second World War, he quotes the message as, “Now is your chance. Now or never! A nation once again! I will meet you wherever you wish.” (My italics.) See Churchill, Second World War, vol. 3, The Grand Alliance, 606. Churchill does not explain that it was not an offer to end partition.

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another neutral to enter the war. Winston Churchill could now present his appeals to Ireland in light of a worldwide struggle, no longer afraid of alienating American public opinion by antagonizing its Irish-American elements. Eamon de Valera no longer had a ready flank of Irish Americans to support his positions, but he did have an even more supportive Irish public committed to staying out of the war.

The American entry into the war also diminished considerably the strategic importance of the Treaty ports. The United States had gained considerable bases in Iceland, Greenland, and the Azores in 1941, and now the Allies could use those bases to take more active roles in the defense of the Atlantic. Taken together with the expansion of bases in Northern Ireland, improvements in code-breaking of U-boat communications, and the introduction of effective long-range anti-submarine aircraft, the new strategic situation meant that the Treaty ports were not nearly as important as before December 1941. The real concern of Anglo-American military leaders was that Ireland not be a base of espionage activities against Britain, which because of the close connection between the British and Irish security services, they knew that it was not.²

UNITED STATES ENTERS the WAR

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent state of war between the United States and the Axis powers shifted the power dynamics of the world conflict and of the relationships among the American, Irish, and British governments. In the early

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morning of 8 December 1941, after learning that Churchill had sent him an urgent telegram, de Valera assumed it was an ultimatum on the Treaty Ports and ordered the Irish Army to assume a heightened state of readiness.4 After reading the passage “A Nation once again,” both de Valera and Sir John Maffey felt it was Churchill’s renewed offer to unify the island if the Irish joined the war. De Valera rejected the supposed offer, just as had the offers of June 1940. He did not think that Churchill would or could deliver on any promise to unify the island because Churchill had given no indication of a willingness to pressure the Northern Ireland government to compromise.

There was, however, no such offer on Churchill’s mind when he sent it. He had used “A Nation Once Again,” which was the title of the anthem of the Irish Parliamentary Party years before, as a metaphor for Ireland’s entry into the war being a chance for Ireland “to regain her soul.” When alerted to the interpretation of Maffey and de Valera, Churchill wrote back that he “certainly contemplated no deal over partition,” adding that unification could only come with the agreement of Northern Ireland.5

De Valera outlined the Irish position in a speech in Cork one week after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He referred to the bonds that drew the Irish and American people together and that the attack on the United States brought “a source of anxiety and sorrow to every part” of Ireland. Despite this new development, de Valera insisted that Ireland could only remain “a friendly neutral.” He argued that, “our circumstances, our history, the incompleteness of our national freedom through the partition of our country, made

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4 NLI Dublin, Frank Gallagher Papers, MS 18,375. See also Longford and O’Neil, De Valera, 392.
any other policy impracticable.” The alternative would only divide the people and bring 
ruin to the country.⁶

In response, Roosevelt warned de Valera that the experience of the United States 
was that neutrals were not able to stay out of the war, and that neutrality merely allowed 
the aggressors the opportunity to name the time and place of their attack. He urged de 
Valera and the Irish people to ponder these “stern facts,” and to realize that their freedom 
too was at stake.⁷

The American press coverage of Ireland began to take a much more critical 
attitude toward Irish neutrality after the United States entered the war. The most 
comprehensive review of Irish neutrality and Irish-American relations in the influential 
press during America’s war years was The Nation’s entire supplement devoted to Ireland 
on 31 January 1942. As if to establish the legitimacy of its critique, the lead editorial 
began with a review of how The Nation played a role in publicizing de Valera’s calls for 
Irish independence during his stay in America in 1920. The consensus of the writers was 
that it would simply be a matter of time before Germany attacked Ireland, and that Eire’s 
best hope for survival would be to join the war before being attacked. De Valera, 
meanwhile, had been arguing that joining the war created the certainty of attack and 
destruction, with little hope of making a difference in the course of the war. Many of the 
articles recounted the long history of support that Irish Americans and American liberals

⁵ Quoted in Fisk, In Time of War, 280.
⁷ “Message of President Roosevelt to the Taoiseach,” received 23 December 1941, NAI, DFA/2.
gave to Irish independence and assumed that “rather than see tyranny triumph,” Ireland would eventually either enter the war with the Allies or provide the Allies direct aid, including the use of the Treaty ports.  

William Shirer, in his article on whether Germany would invade Ireland, speculated that one of the main reasons Hitler never attacked Ireland in 1940 to secure a base against Britain is that doing so would have brought the United States into the war.

Maxwell Stewart’s article on the perceived bias of Irish neutrality in favor of the Axis is emblematic of much reporting about Ireland during the war. He obviously could not know of the secret Anglo-Irish defense preparations, so his discussion about “the absence of coordination between north and south” was inaccurate. On the matter of espionage, the assumption was always that Ireland had numerous spies and that the German delegation was actively and effectively aiding them. Writing about British defense drills, Stewart claims that “it is almost certain that the maneuvers were witnessed by enemy agents” who then slipped back to Dublin so their reports could be forwarded to Berlin by diplomatic pouch. The next week, the Nation’s lead editorial was entitled “Irresponsible Neutrality,” and ended with the argument that Ireland’s stance was only cementing partition, because after the war the British and Americans would never offer a sympathetic hearing for independence as long as Ireland had been “indifferent to the continued freedom of 46,000,000 English, Welsh, and Scots.”

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U.S. TROOPS in NORTHERN IRELAND

During the course of their meetings in December 1941 to plan grand war strategy, Roosevelt and Churchill agreed to have American troops relieve British troops in Northern Ireland. 12 There is no record that either anticipated the level of reaction from de Valera, but Gray knew immediately that de Valera would protest. Even though the 1937 Irish constitution recognized that the de facto control of the Irish government did not extend to the six counties of Northern Ireland, it still claimed that the national territory included the whole island. Gray knew the Irish government was unlikely to allow the stationing of another nation’s troops in Northern Ireland to go unchallenged.

The American troops arrived in January 1942 and de Valera’s protest quickly followed. He was careful not to lodge an official protest with the American government, probably realizing that it would be ignored, and instead released a press statement that focused on the continuing injustice of partition. While the Irish had no quarrel with the United States, he argued that “no matter what troops occupy the Six Counties [Northern Ireland], the Irish people’s claim for the union of the whole national territory” would continue. As he hoped, the New York Times ran the protest in its entirety. 13 In a later letter to Roosevelt, de Valera contended that that the landing of American troops without first

11 “Irresponsible Neutrality,” The Nation, 7 February 1942, 152.
12 There is some confusion about who broached the idea. In his version, Churchill writes that Roosevelt mentioned the plan and that he welcomed it. George Marshall’s notes reflect that Roosevelt “agreed with Churchill” on the importance of the troop substitution. See Prime Minister to War Cabinet and C.O.S. Committee, 23 December 1941, in Churchill, Grand Alliance, 664-65; and Forrest Pogue, George C. Marshall: Ordeal and Hope, 1939-1942 (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 268.
consulting the Irish government amounted to the United States “taking sides” in the dispute over partition.\textsuperscript{14}

It fell to Gray to explain to de Valera the American position, which was that the U.S. government felt no need to consult with any government about stationing its troops in the legal territory of an ally. Gray further explained that had the American government notified de Valera and he made a public protest that went unanswered, his political fortunes would have been damaged with no gain.\textsuperscript{15} Gray later made it clear to Frank Aiken that the Irish government’s protest about the troops “cost the Irish Government whatever sympathy American majority opinion may have cherished for the Irish viewpoint” on partition. In effect, Gray told him that partition was no longer on the table in American-Irish relations.\textsuperscript{16}

Gray, however, was not yet ready to intensify the pressure on Ireland completely. He was very concerned in February 1942 about continued German propaganda that the landing of American troops in Northern Ireland was the first step toward an American invasion of Ireland on behalf of Britain. Eager to find ways to bolster Irish opinion of the United States, Gray wrote to Washington on 14 February that some “token concessions highly publicized,” such as limited arms sales, might reduce some Irish hostility.\textsuperscript{17} The United States did not send the arms, but FDR did send de Valera a note explicitly stating that the American troops were not in Northern Ireland to prepare for an invasion of

\textsuperscript{14} De Valera to Roosevelt,” 20 April 1942, \textit{FRUS}, 761.
\textsuperscript{15} Gray to the Secretary of State, 30 January 1942, \textit{FRUS}, 753-54.
\textsuperscript{16} Gray to the Secretary of State, 21 March 1942, \textit{FRUS}, 759-60.
\textsuperscript{17} Gray to the Secretary of State, 14 February 1942, \textit{FRUS}, 758.
Ireland. According to Brennan’s account of a meeting with Roosevelt in June, Roosevelt “said he was sorry Mr. DeValera had made the statement he did but, of course, he knew he had to make a protest if only for appearance sake.” Brennan replied that it was not for the sake of appearances, but that “we all felt deeply about partition.”

Another of Gray’s strategies to counter German activity in Ireland was the weekly publication of *Letter from America*. Its first issue came out on 30 October 1942 and was published throughout the war. It was a subscription newsletter, sent out the Irish mail to about 15,000 subscribers by 1945. The first issue had a quotation from Al Smith to New York’s Irish regiment, “the fighting Sixty-Ninth,” “American boys of every faith are fighting today for the same principles that freedom-loving and devout Irishmen themselves have fought for throughout the years.” The Irish censor’s office limited the news about the new publication. For example, on 20 November, the following was returned by the censor to the *Irish Times*: “Richard Watts . . . Press Attache to the U.S. Legation in Dublin, is proving a success issuing a free weekly news “Letter from America” is very popular and effective.”

The newsletter concentrated on general war news, Voice of America radio broadcasts, and a heavy dose of articles on Irish-Americans involved in the war effort. Typical profiles included people with Irish surnames like Capt. Mike Moran and Rear Admiral Daniel Callaghan. The 4 December 1942 issue printed the full text of the

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18 “Message from President Roosevelt to Mr. de Valera,” 26 February 1942, NAI, DFA/A53.
19 Brennan to Walshe, 10 June 1942, NAI, DFA/P12/6.
20 Full set available in Irish Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks, Director of Intelligence Files, Dublin, G2/X/1092.
statement of the American Catholic hierarchy on the American war aims. In the final issue on 20 April 1945, the editor wrote that the two reasons for the publication had been to “make it clear it to you that the moral forces of right and armed might of the United Nations” would prevail and “to combat lying German propaganda which has endeavoured to misrepresent to you every essential fact in recent history.”

As the concerns about the American troops in the north were dying down in the summer of 1942, mostly because de Valera realized that a weak, unofficial protest was his only viable option, another potential flashpoint in British-Irish-American relations developed. Six Irish Republican Army members killed a Belfast policeman during a street battle in June, and the court had scheduled their hangings for 18 August. Brennan called on Welles a few days before the scheduled executions to ask for American help in appealing to the British government to commute the sentences. Brennan stressed that the reactions to the executions by the Nationalists in the north would create serious problems for the British authorities, as well as for the Irish government’s efforts to rein in the IRA in Eire, and that the ensuing street clashes might endanger American troops in Northern Ireland. In addition, there was a growing sense in Ireland that “Germany was the real danger to Ireland and not Great Britain,” according to Brennan. British executions of Irish nationalists could jeopardize that trend. Brennan must have made a persuasive case because later that same day, Hull asked the American Ambassador in London, John Winant, to call on British officials to discuss the case.

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22 Letter From America, 8 January 1943; 15 January 1943; 4 December 1942; 20 April 1945.
23 Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom, 15 August 1942, FRUS, 764.
During Winant’s discussion in London, Hull began to receive a flood of letters and calls about the possible executions. After some standard appeals, the British court set a new execution date of 2 September, giving Winant and the convicted more time. Hull wrote to Winant on 25 August again urging the British government to commute the sentences. House Majority Leader McCormack and “many others in both houses” had approached Hull about the case. Hull wrote that “there is no question that Irish circles in this country are very active and that very wide and unquestionably undesirable publicity would be given to the executions if carried out.” Gray agreed that “hanging six for one would shock public opinion.” Perhaps as a consequence of American interest, five of the six had their sentences commuted, and only one, Thomas Williams, was executed. His death led to some sporadic rioting and the death of another police officer.24

Soon after that potential crisis passed, two developments in the fall of 1942 brought the stationing of American troops in Northern Ireland again to the center stage in Irish-American relations. In October, Cardinal McRory, the Catholic Primate of All Ireland and based in Northern Ireland, publicly condemned the presence of American troops and the continuation of partition. In response, Gray wrote to him that the American people reacted with “shock and surprise” when de Valera had protested earlier in the year and that McRory’s recent comments would only serve “to intensify the unhappy impressions” that Americans had toward Irish neutrality.

24 Secretary of State to Winant, 25 August 1942, FRUS, 765; Gray to the Secretary of State, 26 August 1942, FRUS, 766. Fisk, In Time of War, 325-26. One of the five spared was Joe Cahill, who later became a leader of the Provisional IRA in the late 1960s and early 1970s. See Cronin, Irish Neutrality, 152 and Coogan, The IRA, 500.
A few weeks later, Irish officials protested the guide issued by American military authorities to American troops in Northern Ireland. The portion of the *Pocket Guide to Northern Ireland* that caused particular concern to the Irish government is as follows:

Eire’s neutrality is a real danger to the Allied cause. There, just across the Irish Channel from embattled England, and not too far from your own billets in Ulster, the Axis nations maintain large legations and staffs. These Axis agents send out weather reports, find out by espionage what is going on in Ulster.

When approached by Brennan over the offending passage, Welles implied that the Axis powers did in fact have large staffs in Dublin.\(^5\) A few weeks later, Welles told Brennan that the War Department had certified that the information in its files substantiated the claims in the *Pocket Guide*.\(^6\) The War Department’s assurance about the size of the legations is curious. The German mission was under constant British and Irish surveillance, and both security services knew the mission did not have a large staff had already determined that Hempel was avoiding espionage. Hempel also had little motivation to use the mission as spy center. He considered Irish neutrality an advantage to Germany and assisting in espionage efforts or making contact with the Irish Republican Army would only serve to bring Ireland into the war.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) Estero to Dublin, 16 November 1942, NAI, DFA 205; “Aide-Mémoire,” 16 November 1942, *FRUS*, 771. “Estero” was often the codeword used by the Irish legation in Washington.

\(^7\) “Godfrey Memoir,” UCD, Bryan Papers, P71/138, pp. 193-94. John Godfrey was the chief of British Naval Intelligence during World War II. See also Duggan, *Neutral Ireland and the Third Reich*, 160-67.
The inaccuracies and stereotyping of the *Pocket Guide* might have originated in a July 1942 Office of War Information intelligence report. It concluded, with a heavy dose of conjecture, that “information on the strength of the combined forces in Ireland, together with other military secrets, has allegedly been sought by IRA members, who may be cooperating with Nazi agents.” The report linked the IRA in Ireland with the “thousands of IRA members” in Boston, mostly in the police force, and in New York, most conspicuously among “city employees, utility workers, waterfront workers.” Even when not members of the IRA, the report concluded that Irish Americans, especially in Boston, at best did not understand the nature of the war:

There is a pronounced tendency among the Irish in Boston to see the war in terms of narrow, sectional problems. The development of a foreign policy with which they are out of sympathy has been accompanied by an estrangement between the Administration and certain prominent Irish political leaders. [Joe Kennedy] . . . [There is a] possibility that liberal elements of the clergy in Boston might be persuaded to foster a clearer understanding among the Irish of the war’s true implications.

It is possible that Gray might have been an additional source that the War Department relied upon. As far back as April Walshe told him that he had “a very exaggerated idea about German agents and activities in Ireland.” In a handwritten note on his memorandum about the meeting, Walshe commented that Gray’s “spy mania has driven him to letting down his own nationals in favor of the Bs [British].” There had been a series of exaggerated and unsubstantiated press reports about the size of the

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28 Office of War Information, Bureau of Intelligence, Report #40, 24 July 1942, NARA.
29 Dublin to Nunan, 20 April 1942, NAI, DFA/2.

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embassies in Dublin, but it would have been very easy to have Gray or the British actually check on the Axis legations. If the War Department had done so, it would have discovered that the German and Japanese legations contained no more than a dozen people total. If the War Department really had information to the contrary in its files, and there is no indication of any, than it was incorrect.\textsuperscript{30}

An even more bizarre reading of the situation in Dublin came up at about the same time. John D. Hickerson, the Assistant Chief of the Division of European Affairs in the Department of State, contacted Brennan to clarify reports that “hundreds of Japanese tourists” were in Ireland and posing a “great danger to the interests of the United States.” Brennan told Welles that the Irish government was “deeply irritated” and complained that the request proved that the American government was “misinformed about Ireland” and that it blindly believed every false accusation about Irish complicity in Axis espionage. In spite of this irritation, Brennan asked Dublin to report the total number of Japanese in Ireland. The answer was four: the Japanese Chargé d’Affaires, his wife, the Japanese Consul, and a stranded sailor.\textsuperscript{31}

Brennan charged Leo McCauley, the Consul General for Ireland, to lead the rebuttals to the press reports about Irish neutrality and Axis espionage. Summing up the state of these reports in the fall of 1942, McCauley took note of the number of articles falsely claiming that the staff of the German legation numbered over one hundred, that

\textsuperscript{30} I found no evidence in my research, and there appears to be no relevant citation in any of the secondary sources I consulted.

\textsuperscript{31} Welles, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 25 November 1942, \textit{FRUS}, 772. In his notes of the meeting, Brennan writes that Welles called the query from Hickerson “absurd and fantastic.” Brennan to Walshe, 25 November 1942, NAI, DFA 219/313.
German submarines were refueling in Irish ports, and that Irish neutrality was only based on a long-held grievances with the British. McCauley repeatedly directed reporters to the investigations by the *New York Times* and *The Times* of London that refuted the reports about the German legation, the British government’s denial about the refueling of submarines, and the repeated statements by de Valera that Irish neutrality was based on Ireland’s desire “to preserve her independence and integrity.”

NEUTRALITY, IDENTITY, PRESSURE

All of the conflicts with Gray and the British and American governments only served to reinforce for de Valera the value that Irish neutrality had in his dream of creating an Irish identity that was sovereign, independent, rural, and Catholic. In the midst of fighting off pressures to join the war, he turned explicitly to his identity forming project in his St. Patrick’s Day address of 1943. Perhaps motivated by the fiftieth anniversary of the Gaelic League, he began with the admonition that more people should learn Irish and use it daily. He continued by describing an Irish life “that we all dreamed of,” where people would live the life that God desired they live: “satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted . . . to the things of the spirit.” The “fields and villages” (he did not mention cities) would be filled with joy, community spirit, respect for elders, athletic contests, and “the laughter of comely maidens.” In many respects, the practical matters

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that took up his time during the Emergency were but tools to preserve the Irish nation so it could realize his dream.  

Gray, however, was becoming even more determined to end Irish neutrality. Even with the direction of the war clearly favoring the Allies in 1943 and the British less and less concerned with the Ports because of the success in the Battle of the Atlantic, Gray was eager to find more effective means to pressure Ireland into the war, or at least to make de Valera relinquish the Treaty ports. When he became convinced that he would not succeed, he became determined to devise ways to discredit de Valera and distort the nature of Irish neutrality. He hoped that sufficient wartime pressure would sour American public opinion on Ireland so much that Irish Americans could not disrupt a postwar Anglo-American partnership by agitating against partition.

Gray laid out his plans on these matters in a long memorandum in May 1943. Gray argued that considerations about Ireland’s and Irish-Americans’ activities in the postwar world required that the Allies force Ireland to take a clear and convincing stand with regard to the war, above and beyond the myriad representations and explanations of neutrality heretofore offered by de Valera. While placing specific demands on Ireland might produce real military advantages for Britain and the United States, the real advantage of the request rested on its ability “to clarify Eire’s position in the post-war period.” For Gray, the three main Anglo-American interests “gravely prejudiced” by Irish neutrality were: the “withholding” of the ports, the maintenance of Axis Missions

(“espionage centers”), and the constitutional claim to *de jure* sovereignty over Northern Ireland. It was this final point that Gray felt de Valera would use during the war to impede the Allied war effort and after the war to sever the Anglo-American alliance.

Gray started from the premise that because there had not been a specific request forwarded to Ireland for the use of the Treaty Ports, after the war the Irish government could claim rightly that they never relinquished the Ports because they were never asked to relinquish them. Without that direct veto of an Allied request, Gray was concerned that Ireland might point to number of Irish volunteers serving in the British military as a cause for concessions on partition, “benefits to which she . . . [is] not entitled on the basis of her attitude during the war.” In the postwar world, Gray argued that an insufficiently stigmatized and isolated de Valera would use the “alleged wrong” of partition to drive a wedge between Britain and the United States, using the “sympathies and support of Irish-American groups to this end.” In Gray’s thinking, this was not a possibility, but an eventuality unless the Allies took concrete steps to prevent it by embarrasing the Irish government during the war.

Gray concentrated his argument on the practical arguments put forth in defense of Irish neutrality. While he conceded that “prudence” might have played a role in Irish neutrality in 1939 and 1940, by 1943 neutrality was “entirely voluntary and gratuitous” and could “only be interpreted as a neutrality for material profit or a neutrality insensible to the moral issues of the war.” What he failed to account for fully was how neutrality,

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34 “Memorandum by the Minister in Ireland on Recommendations for the Adoption of a Joint Anglo-American Economic Policy toward Eire Shaped With Reference to Political Considerations,” 14 May 1943.
for de Valera and increasingly for the Irish people, fostered a fundamental Irish identity, separate from Britain.

Gray put forward two proposals to pressure de Valera on the Ports and neutrality. The first involved using economic pressure to erode Irish popular support for neutrality. Gray argued that the Allies had the moral and legal right to withhold food and supplies to non-belligerents (“separatist nations who refuse to take responsibility for the common survival”) if that action advanced the interests of the Allies. It is difficult to argue that the Allies had a responsibility to feed or supply Ireland if that action would have put undue burdens on their efforts to prosecute the war, but that effect is much different than an effort to punish Ireland during the war in order to forestall its potential political efforts in the postwar world. Gray felt, however, that gradual economic coercion alone would not work.

Gray’s second proposal was to move quickly, before de Valera developed his “skillful and mischievous intrigue,” by making three demands, with the Irish refusal of any of them leading to the cessation of all shipping of raw materials. While the economic impact of the refusal might not change the policy, in Gray’s view, the open refusal would do the real damage to Ireland’s postwar hopes. The three demands were to lease the Treaty Ports and other locations as needed to the Allies, remove the Axis Missions, and clarify Ireland’s position with regard to the British Commonwealth of Nations. Gray also argued that it would be a helpful if the British enforced conscription in Northern Ireland.

Although he admitted this would cause bloodshed, he argued that “new bloodshed could hardly increase the political capital manufactured out of the executions of 1916.”

Gray concluded by stressing the importance of bringing to the notice of the American public the “unfair and destructive” policy of de Valera and of obtaining a conclusive verdict of disapproval by American public opinion. Doing so, he argued, would remove the pressure of the Irish question from Anglo-American relations and the ability of Irish Americans to inject themselves into the postwar discussions through American politics. He ended with a question:

Can Eire as a geographical strategic keystone in the common defense of the British Isles and as the controlling area for the protection of Anglo-American communications again be permitted the right to refuse cooperation in time of crisis and endanger our existence?

Gray pointed to Robert Brennan’s April 1943 article in the New York Times as one example in support of his claim that the Irish planned to lobby against partition after the war. In the article, Brennan claimed that all of the attacks on Irish neutrality, including historian Henry Steele Commager’s March article in the New York Times, were based on the “fallacy that the other nations went to war on moral issues.” In supporting the morality of the Irish position, Brennan argued that throughout the 1930s Ireland had advocated a vigorous international system to deter aggression, but that none of the major powers helped. He also wondered why the moral outrage of the world had not been directed at Britain for years for implementing partition.35

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Brennan’s article and his wider efforts to rally Irish-American public opinion had some early results. Irish-American organizations around the country held meetings about Irish neutrality for St. Patrick’s Day, 1943. Speaking at the dinner of the Charitable Irish Society in Boston, Fr. Edmund Walsh, the vice president of Georgetown University, defended the right of Ireland to remain neutral. Noting the “severe criticism voiced in certain circles,” Walsh said that the United States could not “deny to Eire the same principle of self-determination of peace or war which the powerful United States maintained for so long.” If there were an invasion of Ireland by Britain, he continued, “by the cold logic of reason . . . [the Allies] would have to ask themselves how such aggression differs from Hitler’s ‘preventative occupation’ of Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Luxembourg.”

Soon after sending the memorandum, Gray went to the United States for consultations, visiting with Roosevelt in Washington and Hyde Park. In July, he visited a series of Irish-American leaders in an attempt to gauge their potential response to postwar appeals on partition. During Gray’s visit to Detroit, Archbishop Edward Mooney agreed that the appeals would have some currency among Irish Americans. Gray met with Frederick Sterling, who had preceded Cudahy as the American Minister in Ireland, and Sterling agreed as well. Gray was scheduled to meet with Joseph P. Kennedy, but it turned out to be the same day that the former Ambassador learned that John F. Kennedy was reported missing after the sinking of PT 109. On 14 August, he discussed Ireland

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36 Copy of speech enclosed in Estero to Dublin, 12 May 1943, NAI, DFA/2.
with Churchill and Roosevelt at a dinner in Hyde Park. No records exist of that meeting, but in a 1971 letter, Averell Harriman noted that Churchill “seemed unimpressed” with Gray’s plans to coerce Ireland into the war.\footnote{Gray stayed in the White House during his time in Washington. Sean Nunan, “Note on Meeting with Gray,” 20 August 1943, NAI, DFA/2.}

Roosevelt, however, agreed with Gray that something had to be done to put de Valera on the record with regard to the Ports.\footnote{} Cordell Hull, in an effort to make the demand not appear as if the United States were simply trying to “pull the British chestnuts out of the fire,” asked the War Department to review the military aspects of the demand for Irish bases. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff George Marshall responded that air bases would not be of any advantage, but that naval bases might be of some benefit once it was possible to route shipping to the south of Ireland. The use of naval ports in Ireland, however, would not be a sufficient cause to reroute the shipping. Based on this finding, Roosevelt approved a draft proposal in September 1943 that called on de Valera to give \textit{secret} approval allowing the United States to use temporarily the Ports should the need arise.

The British cabinet had a mixed reaction to the draft, as did the Canadian Minister to Ireland, John Kearney. Some in the cabinet felt that if de Valera agreed to the request, which they felt was unlikely but possible, he would be in an even more powerful position to request the end of partition at the conclusion of the war. Others felt that as long as de Valera was supporting the Allies as much as possible under the strict public reading of neutrality, it served no useful purpose to take a harsh approach with him that in all
probability would have no direct benefit to the war effort. Kearney was baffled by the
machinations in the note designed for later consumption by the American public. He told
Maffey that he agreed to the need for the note only because he had “in the forefront of my
mind the winning of the war.”

Gray was not pleased with the State Department’s draft, but for very different
reasons. He felt that the request, couched in terms suggested by the War Department
about the possibility of using the Ports at a later date, would allow de Valera to declare
that he could not possibly accede to such a request without knowing what other
conditions might be in place at some future time. Gray became concerned that the note,
as drafted, would “inevitably lead us into a position where we get neither the promise of
the desired facilities nor the record of a refusal.” Without a more specific demand, Gray
felt that Irish-American “pressure groups” would bring “ceaseless agitation, disorder, and
growing bitterness” into American politics and Anglo-American relations after the war.
Gray also sensed that British interest in the Ports and Irish neutrality was waning, but
discounted it because the British also failed to anticipate the 1916 Easter Rising.

When the British still had not approved the draft message by December, Gray
drafted another note that was designed to put de Valera firmly on the record. Gray’s draft

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38 Harriman to the Author, 1 July 1971, in Cronin, Washington’s Irish Policy, 170.
39 Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, 29 June 1943, FRUS, 142-43; Hull, Memoirs, 1356-57.
40 Kearney to Robertson, 15 October 1943, quoted in Cronin, Washington’s Irish Policy, 173; Winant to
Secretary of State, 19 September 1943 and 8 October 1943, FRUS, 152-53, 158; Secretary of State to Gray,
5 October 1943, 9 November 1943, FRUS, 155-56, 160.
41 Gray to Secretary of State, 28 September 1943 and 1 October 1943, FRUS, 153-55. Gray’s obsession was
taking full hold by late fall 1943. He was also telling Washington that de Valera might incite an uprising
similar to 1916 in order to have the British execute the “ring leaders,” thus generating American sympathy.
called for Ireland to expel the Axis delegations and deleted the secret demand for future use of the Ports. Gray argued the legations maintained “highly organized” espionage rings that, despite any Irish successes in countering them, were by their nature “impossible to suppress.” As the Axis powers did not have any military bases or planning within the area, allowing the Axis missions to remain amounted to aiding them while not aiding the Allies, a decidedly unneutral act. It is this draft that became the “American Note” that influenced Anglo-Irish-American relations in 1944 and that Gray hoped would diminish the political influence of Irish Americans in the postwar world.

THE AMERICAN NOTE CRISIS

In early 1944, Brennan received a tip that “an indictment” was being drawn up that would use false evidence of widespread Nazi espionage and lax efforts to counter it by the Irish government as a pretext for an Allied assault. Brennan never revealed the source of the information, but the information did prompt him to force a meeting with Donovan at the Office of Strategic Services. After Donovan told him that the American government knew that there were “a great many Nazi agents working in Ireland,” Brennan asked him for a list of them so that the Irish could arrest them. Donovan refused,

42 Gray to Secretary of State, 13 December 1943, FRUS, 164. The official British rejection of the first draft came on 22 December 1943 through Winant, see “Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Roosevelt,” 29 December 1943, FRUS, 168. See also Hull, Memoirs, 1357. It is possible that Churchill gave Roosevelt the information at the Second Cairo Conference in early December 1943. See “Editorial Note” for Tuesday, 7 December 1943, FRUS, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943, 750. Winant went with Churchill to Cairo and they talked about the Irish bases en route. See Winant to the Secretary of State, 22 December 1943, FRUS, 853. Winant talked with Roosevelt in Cairo on 25 November, 26 November, and 3 December: “The President’s Log at Cairo, November 22-26, 1943,” and “The President’s Log at Cairo, December 2-7, 1943,” FRUS, 298-99, 656.
saying it was the job of the Irish to round them up. Brennan concluded after the meeting, “Wild Bill no more believed his own propaganda that [than] the sources from which it all emanated in Dublin. Their grievance was not that Ireland was overrun with spies, Nazi or otherwise. Their grievance was that Ireland was not in the war.”

There was a high level of coordination between the American and Irish security services during the war, notwithstanding Gray’s repeated mischaracterizations of Irish support for the Allied efforts in general and success in countering Axis intelligence operations in particular. Gray knew as early as January 1942 that the Irish and British militaries were maintaining secret contacts and that the Irish authorities, under de Valera’s specific direction, were releasing Allied airplanes and crews. He also knew of the Irish-American military liaisons that were taking place across the Ireland-Northern Ireland border. These working relationships were so successful that the War Department later recommended the award of decorations to Dan McKenna, the Irish Army Chief of Staff.

Gray, however, was not interested in being second fiddle when it came to being the information conduit to Washington, especially any information that would contradict his opinion of Irish actions, or at least his representations to Washington or the press about Irish actions. In July 1942, the Office of Strategic Services sent Ervin “Spike” Marlin to Ireland to check on the stories of Nazi spies running rampant throughout Eire.

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43 Brennan, Ireland Standing Firm, 75-76.
45 Gray to the Secretary of State, 30 January 1942, FRUS, 753-54.
46 Fanning, Independent Ireland, 124.
Posted under the cover of an economic adviser to the American legation, Marlin found nothing and reported so to Gray. In an oral history interview in 1978, Marlin said that Joseph Walshe had told him that there were over fifty thousand British supporters in Ireland who were “straining at the leash” to report anything about German spies. Marlin said that he found no spies or spy centers, and that “once they [the Irish government] realized it was in their interest to keep us informed, they were very good to us.” He told Gray that Irish security arrangements were satisfactory, and Gray asked for him to be recalled.47

The British Cabinet agreed to let Gray deliver the Note over the objections of MI-5, the British security service. The official history, released in 1999, reveals that the leaders of MI-5 felt that “there would be very little, if any, security advantage” by removing the legations. They argued that the efficiency of the cooperation between Britain and Ireland might be weakened because of the public pressure on de Valera and that, as the services had successfully comprised all Axis communications, the infusion of new covert agents might not be noticed for some time.48

After getting approval from the British, but with the State Department proviso that “no publicity is contemplated at present,” Gray delivered the Note to de Valera on 21


February. De Valera’s official biographers write that his immediate reaction was that the Note was an attempt to infringe on Irish sovereignty and that “Irish independence of action had to be preserved despite outside pressures.” Gray reported to Washington that de Valera’s first words after reading the Note were: “Of course our answer will be no; as long as I am here it will be no.” He asked Gray if it were an ultimatum, to which Gray replied that as the Note contained no “or else” that it was simply a request from a friendly state. When de Valera told Gray that the German Minister had not acted improperly, Gray said that while he could not confirm any espionage in Dublin, but as it had happened in other neutral capitals the Allies could not take that risk. Three days later, Walshe cabled Brennan in Washington:

Taoiseach told Gray there is no question whatsoever of yielding to this pressure. It would be the first step to war and the end of democratic rule here. It is an act of aggression which would involve the loss of our independence if not resisted. There is no basis whatever for the allegations.

De Valera turned to the Canadian High Commissioner in Ireland, John Kearney, to act as an intermediary between the parties and ask for a withdrawal of the Note. The Taoiseach turned to the Canadians because he believed they had a similar interest in establishing the principle of the independence of Dominions. The Canadian government waited until 10 September 1939, seven days after Britain had done so, before declaring

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49 Winant to the Secretary of State, 10 February 1944 and Stettinius to Gray, 17 February 1944, FRUS vol. 3, 1944, The British Commonwealth and Europe, 219-20; “ Copies of American Note, British Note and Irish Reply,” NAI, DFA/A53
50 Longford and O’Neill, De Valera, 404-5; Gray to the Secretary of State, 21 February 1944, FRUS, 221-22.
51 Dublin to Washington, 24 February 1944, NAI, DFA/A53.
war themselves. De Valera hoped that Ottawa would therefore be wary of seeing Ireland pressured into abandoning neutrality. De Valera also approached the Australians, but Australia never officially responded.\textsuperscript{52}

Kearney met with Gray on 25 February and told him that the Canadian Government felt that an appropriate response would be to have all the governments mark the Note secret. Gray told Kearney that there was never any intention to inaugurate a propaganda campaign against de Valera, but that the American government could not agree to a limitation on its future actions with regard to publishing the Note. Failing to get approval, the Canadian government declined to continue to act as an intermediary, but did ask officially that both the British and American governments keep the Note secret.

Gray and the State Department, however, had no intention of keeping the Note secret because its whole rationale was to put de Valera on record as publicly refusing a request to assist in the war effort. This was especially important as the final preparations for a cross-Channel invasion of France were being completed. John Hickerson from the State Department told Brennan:

\begin{quote}
The principal sanction which may be expected if the Irish Government refuses our request will be the undying hatred on the part of mothers if they feel that military information was sent by the Axis representatives from Dublin that
\end{quote}

contributed to the German preparations to repel an allied attack.\textsuperscript{53}

Gray also brought this possible scenario, which could only happen if the Note became public, to de Valera. Gray informed him that he heard that rumors about the Note were floating around Dublin, but that if the story became public it would not come from the Americans, nor he said he believed from the British. Gray went on, “We have no desire to see you crucified by a press campaign . . . but if you give it out and a storm breaks that is your affair. It is a matter of indifference to us.”\textsuperscript{54}

In his formal reply of 7 March, de Valera confirmed his initial rejection of the Note. In a veiled reference to Gray’s activities, De Valera wrote that Irish officials doubted that the U.S. government had accurate information about the nature of Irish neutrality and the efforts of the Irish government to “safeguard American interests.” He then outlined the series of actions that helped the Allied cause, concluding with the argument that the Irish position on neutrality would not be developed out of fear of others’ reactions.\textsuperscript{55}

It was not long before a firestorm of public debate began about the Note and the Irish response. The State Department began to get inquiries about the Note on 8 March, the full story broke in the press two days after that, and the State Department published the Note the next day.\textsuperscript{56} The response was immediate, receiving banner headlines across

\textsuperscript{53} Gray to the Secretary of State, 25 February 1944; “Memorandum of Telephone Conversations,” Hickerson, 28 February 1944; “Winant to the Secretary of State,” 28 February 1944, \textit{FRUS}, 225-30.

\textsuperscript{54} Gray to Secretary of State, 1 March 1944, \textit{FRUS}, 230-31.

\textsuperscript{55} “Reply to American Note of the 21\textsuperscript{st} February,” 7 March 1944, NAI, Taoiseach, S13450A.

the country. “Call for St Patrick! The snakes are back in Ireland,” declared a Dallas Morning News editorial. Repeating the standard inaccurate assessments of Irish counter-espionage, the Atlanta Constitution ran an article that stated that Ireland was “notoriously loose” in stopping Axis spying. The New York Times repeated the inaccurate reporting that the Axis missions could send secret reports out through their diplomatic pouches, although later editions did include the official Irish statement that neither mission had a diplomatic bag and that all cable traffic had to be routed through London. The front page article also stated that “the personality of David Gray evidently played a considerable part in the exchanges.”57 In a follow-up article the next week, the New York Times did discuss the “highly efficient secret service” that the Irish military maintained. In a strange twist, however, the article also described independence as de Valera’s “ruling fetish” and that Itchi Hashi, the Japanese Consul in Dublin, was a “ladies’ man” who had recently been seen in a bar with “an Irish girl” who was soon going to be working as a dietician at the allied base in Foynes in Northern Ireland.58 Perhaps the most understated assessment came from the BBC which claimed that “Eire as a Dominion of the British Commonwealth has an unquestionable legal right to do what she has done.”59

Churchill took a public position that echoed the State Department’s earlier warnings to Brennan. “If a catastrophe were to occur to the Allied armies which could be traced to the retention of the German and Japanese representatives in Dublin, a gulf would be opened between Great Britain on the one hand and Southern Ireland on the

Churchill of course knew about the planning and schedule for what would become Operation Overlord, the cross-channel invasion of France. In the event of failure, the Irish refusal in could have been used as a convenient scapegoat.  

The overwhelming criticism of the Irish position was not reflected in the American Catholic press. Brennan passed along to Dublin reports from Commonweal and The Pittsburgh Catholic as examples of a more nuanced argument against the Irish position and of support for Irish neutrality. Commonweal’s editorial of 24 March remarked that “there can be no question . . . as to the sincerity and conscientiousness with which the de Valera government in its neutrality has sought to prevent Axis espionage.” While agreeing that de Valera had a legal right to allow the missions to stay, the editorial also called for Ireland to “sacrifice a certain measure of sovereignty” for the good of the world. In The Pittsburgh Catholic, the editorial tried to counter the “headlines, the editorials, the statements, the slurs and the insinuations that have appeared in the last few days.” It went on to discuss the Irish counter-espionage efforts, the number of Irish volunteers serving in the British armed forces, and how Ireland could not have affected the outcome of the war. Speculating on the real reason for the Note, it concluded, “What part of the Allied military command’s strategy is involved in raising this Irish issue at the

59 Quoted in To Win the Peace, 136.  
60 Parliamentary Debates, 5th ser., vol. 398, (1944), col. 36.
present moment, the general public does not know—and neither do the ‘experts’ who are doing the cause of national unity so much harm by their ignorant comments.”

In an effort to convince the State Department that the Axis missions posed no security threat, on 18 March de Valera met with Irvine “Spike” Marlin, whom de Valera knew was an American intelligence officer. Col. Dan Bryan, the head of the Irish security service, joined them. During the meeting, de Valera showed Marlin the text of a 16 March *New York Herald Tribune* article that stated that “for security reasons,” the American Note did not contain all the evidence that the American government had about the transmission of military intelligence from the Axis missions to Berlin and Tokyo. De Valera told Marlin that if “any information we gave to him in confidence, as part of our secret arrangement for securing the safety of American interests in this country, were used for the purpose of trumping up a case against us, there would be a catastrophic breach” in Irish-American relations. Marlin agreed that the Irish anti-espionage activities were so “completely successful” that there was no need for him to even be stationed in Ireland. Marlin suggested to de Valera that the State Department did not check Gray’s reports of espionage with the Office of Strategic Services.62

American public opinion formed quickly once the news broke about the Note. A Gallup Poll conducted from 17 to 22 March 1944 found that 75% of the respondents had heard about the request to force the Axis representatives to leave Ireland and 66% of those felt the United States should “do something further.” In another poll a few weeks

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61 NAI, Taoiseach, S12450A.  
later only 60% of the respondents had “heard or read about the United States request to Ireland that it expel Axis representatives.” Of those who said yes, 69% favored stopping all trade with Ireland if it continued to refuse to submit to American demands.  

Gray enjoyed the press attention to the Note, indeed it had been the major intent of submitting it. There is some uncertainty about who leaked the news of the Note, but Gray felt that it must have been someone from Fine Gael who sat on the Irish Defence Conference.  

He saw no need to follow up with any official actions, for “the general condemnation of De Valera by our press will have its effect without our taking further official measures.” He argued that the best strategy at that point would be to have the United States government make some token release of extra supplies to Ireland to give “this Legation a popular standing as a friend of the Irish people.” Appearing sorrowful and not angry about de Valera’s decision would take away his plans to appeal to the “Irish-American front.”

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64 Dwyer, *Irish Neutrality*, 190. It is highly unlikely that an opposition member of the Defence Conference leaked the story because de Valera never brought the Note to them. See “84th Meeting of the Defence Conference,” 22 March 1944, UCD, Aiken Papers, P104/3534. On 14 March, De Valera seems to have believed Maffey’s suggestion that the “beans were spilled” in Dublin by a member of Fine Gael. Four days later, however, he was arguing vigorously with Maffey that he was “nearly tired of hearing that argument” and that the British and American governments must have conspired to release it because the “first positive” announcement came from the BBC at 6:00 pm on 10 March. See de Valera, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 14 March 1944; and “Sir John Maffey-Sanctions,” 18 March 1944, NAI, DFA/A53. The *New York Times* 10 March edition, however, had a 9 March byline stating that “reports circulated tonight” about a demand to remove the Axis missions and that Britain had approved the Note. In later years, De Valera tempered his suspicions and his official biographers write that he was “unable to resolve whether the leakage was a deliberate attempt to increase the pressure on him or not.” Longford and O’Neil, *De Valera*, 407. It is probable that Gray had been pumping the primer for the story even earlier. In a 6 March story in the *New York Times*, “Allies Fear Spies in Neutral States,” James Reston wrote that “Eire is in a particularly embarrassing situation.”

65 Gray to Secretary of State, 15 March 1944, *FRUS*, 240-41.
In late March, Churchill and Roosevelt discussed delivering another note to de Valera stressing the need to remove the Axis legations, but on the advice of Gray and Maffey they choose not to do so. Gray felt that press reaction to the Irish refusal of the initial Note had already soured American public opinion on Ireland. Maffey contended that a second note would only antagonize de Valera to the point where he might terminate some of the covert aid the Irish were providing. The British also did not want to have FDR push the Irish too far, out of fear that it might initiate some minor political problems for him among Irish Americans.66

While Roosevelt and Churchill would soon be preoccupied with the invasion of France, de Valera was left to salvage what he could from the public relations disaster in the United States following the news of the Note. In 1944, he published *Peace and War: Speeches by Mr. de Valera on International Affairs* as evidence that from 1932 to 1938 Ireland worked diligently through the League of Nations to preserve the peace. The book was an effort to remove the sting of the allegation that Ireland and de Valera did not care about the morality of the international situation. The Taoiseach was determined to stress that he had led the calls for international cooperation and resolve during the 1930s, but that the great powers did not. The war, then, was the result of the inaction of the great powers. This argument fit into one of the basic public arguments about the need for Irish neutrality, that once the war began, there was nothing little powers could do to influence

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the outcome. De Valera was also arguing, though, that Ireland had done all it could before war broke out.67

In a behind-the-scenes effort to placate the American government, Walsh went to London in April 1944 to meet with U.S. intelligence officers. He offered to allow the United States again to station agents in Dublin to check directly on the status of Ireland’s counter-espionage efforts and to conduct their own. Gray rejected the proposal out of fear that de Valera would gain favorable publicity for the measure after the war and that if the Axis mission did in fact learn of the European invasion plans, the presence of American agents would have exonerated the Irish government.68

THE END of the WAR

Two incidents at the end of the war would prove to be influential in Anglo-Irish-American relations after the war. The first was de Valera’s visit to the German Minister upon learning of Hitler’s death and the public relations debacle that followed. The second was the public exchange of allegations and incriminations between Churchill and de Valera in the immediate aftermath of the war. Both of these developments would have long-lasting resonance in postwar Anglo-American-Irish relations.

When news of Hitler’s death broke in Dublin, de Valera paid an official sympathy visit to Hempel on 2 May 1945. Fewer than six hours after the visit, Brennan sent Dublin

68 The impetus for this overture probably came from de Valera, as he brought up that option in a meeting with Marlin on 18 March 1944, de Valera, “Most Secret,” National Archives, DFA/A53. Hull knew about the offer. See Hull, Memoirs, 1359.
the first reactions from the United States. “Radio Commentator announced item in bitter and caustic tone.” The Washington Post editorial of 5 May discussed the moral issues of the visit in light of the war and neutral countries. “Can it be that the moral myopia they imposed upon themselves in the face of danger has now blinded them to all ethical values? Or is it that a preoccupation with protocol has atrophied their emotions? In sober truth, there could be no real neutrality in this war.” The New York Times declared that if de Valera claimed the visit was required as the obligation of protocol for a neutral nation, then “there is something wrong with the protocol, the neutrality, or Mr. de Valera.”

Many Irish Americans wrote directly to de Valera to express their dismay at his actions. Teresa Fitzpatrick, the circulation manager for the Atlantic Monthly, wrote that she knew that in keeping Ireland neutral during the war that the Irish people were acting in the best interest of the country, but that she was dismayed that de Valera “could have expressed regret at the death of a man who violated every code of decency.” Angela Walsh from New York wrote that she was “horrified, ashamed, humiliated.” Referring to the news of death camps, she continued, “Have you seen the living dead, de Valera?”

In an attempt to help Brennan deflect some of the criticism, de Valera wrote to him explaining the visit:

I could have had a diplomatic illness but, as you know, I would scorn that sort of thing. . . . So long as we retained our diplomatic relations with Germany, to have failed to

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69 Washington to Dublin, 3 May 1945, 9:41 pm, NAI, DFA/P98. News of the visit made the front page of the New York Times, right under “Berlin Falls to the Russians; War in Italy Ends,” 3 May 1945.
70 Washington Post, 5 May 1945.
72 Teresa S. Fitzpatrick to de Valera, 11 May 1945; Angela D. Walsh to de Valera, 3 May 1945, NAI, DFA P98.
call upon the German representative would have been an act of unpardonable discourtesy to the German nation and to Dr Hempel himself. During the whole of the war, Dr Hempel’s conduct was irreprouachable. He was always friendly and invariably correct—in marked contrast with Gray. I certainly was not going to add to his humiliation in the hour of defeat.  

It is important to note the personal nature of de Valera’s defense, and that contrary to the many reports around the world, he did not visit the German legation, but Hempel’s residence. The Irish Press report of 3 May stated that the Taoiseach “called on Dr Hempel, the German minister, last evening, to express his condolences.” The Irish Times ran a similarly worded report, but under the headline, “Callers at German legation.” The visit, however, was made at the Hempel residence. The subtleties about the personal nature of the visit and its location naturally got lost in the wider implications of paying respects over the death of a man who had caused so much death and destruction.

Walshe and Brennan tried in vain to develop a public relations strategy to stem the criticism. Walshe immediately started looking for some international cover and telegraphed Irish missions around the world to send notice of what other governments had done. He was most concerned about Switzerland, and was disheartened to learn that the Swiss had done nothing in regard to Hitler’s death because they never received


\[74\] “Interview with Eva Hempel,” in Duggan, Neutral Ireland and Third Reich, 243. The misstatement about the location of the visit will likely take some time to correct in the literature. For example, see the incorrect statement in Carroll, Ireland in the War Years, 160.
official notification of it. Brennan’s proposed response to the criticism was to call attention to the fact that the German representative to Washington attended Roosevelt’s 1941 inauguration at the invitation of the Secretary of State, even after Germany had invaded Poland, Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, Holland Belgium, and France. Brennan realized, however, that this would not be very effective after the world’s discovery of the extent of Hitler’s massacre of millions of European Jews and others. There was simply no effective way to defend de Valera’s actions. Dermot Keogh’s analysis is on the mark in describing de Valera as “myopic and naïve” and that he visited Hempel “without deep reflection on its wider implications.”

De Valera fared much better in the second major development at the end of the war that had postwar implications, his very public exchange with Churchill about the nature of Irish wartime neutrality. In his victory speech of 13 May 1945, recalling the dark days of the Battle of Britain, Churchill said:

This was indeed a deadly moment in our life and if it had not been for the loyalty and friendship of Northern Ireland we should have been forced to come to close quarters with Mr de Valera or perish for ever from the earth. However, with a restraint and poise to which, I say, history will find few parallels, His Majesty’s Government never laid a violent hand upon them though at times it would have been quite easy and quite natural, and we left the Dublin Government to frolic with the Germans and later with the Japanese representatives to their hearts’ content.

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75 Dublin to Cremins, and Cremins to Dublin, 4 May 1945, NAI, DFA P98.
76 Brennan to Dublin, 5 May 1945, NAI, DFA P98.
Churchill later remarked to his son that “perhaps I should not have made” the comments about Ireland, but that “in the heat of the moment” he just could not tolerate the thought of a neutral Ireland gaining the advantages of freedom won by the defeat of the Nazis.\textsuperscript{79}

De Valera waited three days before he responded in a national radio address.\textsuperscript{80}

After thanking God for sparing Ireland from the devastation of war, he told the country that he knew what he would have said twenty-five years earlier, but that the occasion and the development of Anglo-Irish relations over the years demanded another response. He said that while Churchill could be excused for being taken up with the excitement of victory, he could not. In an expression of Kantian philosophy, de Valera remarked:

\begin{quote}
Mr Churchill makes it clear that, in certain circumstances, he would have violated our neutrality and that he would justify his action by Britain’s necessity. It seems strange to me that Mr Churchill does not see that this, if it be accepted, would mean that Britain’s necessity would become a moral code. . . . It is quite true that other great powers believe in this same code—in their own regard—and have behaved in accordance with it. This is precisely why we have the disastrous succession of wars.
\end{quote}

Then, in a masterful stroke, he commended Churchill.

\begin{quote}
It is, indeed, hard for the strong to be just to the weak. But acting justly always has its rewards. By resisting his temptation in this instance, Mr Churchill, instead of adding another horrid chapter to the already bloodstained record of the relations between England and this country, has advanced the cause of international morality an important step.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Irish Times}, 5 February 1979.

\textsuperscript{80} “Taoiseach’s Broadcast to the Nation,” 16 May 1945, NLI Dublin, MS 33,460/G/4/13.
The response to the speech was tremendous and created a lasting positive impression of neutrality in Ireland. All of the Irish papers commended de Valera’s philosophical and moral support of Irish neutrality. The speech took a pragmatic policy that was a means to protect Ireland and a vehicle to promote and Irish identity and infused it with an overriding sense that Ireland took the moral high ground during the world conflagration.

IRISH AMERICANS in the WAR YEARS

The Irish-American search for identity, such an integral aspect of Irish-American culture during the 1920s and 1930s, fell victim to the overriding concerns of the war between 1941 and 1945. Chapter five of Kevin Kenny’s recent synthesis of Irish-American history ends in 1940 and chapter six is titled “Irish America Since the Second World War.”81 Irish Americans joined the rest of the nation by serving in the military or participating in some other way in the war effort. One negative aspect of Irish-American culture did persist, however, during the war. Father Charles Coughlin continued to expound his anti-Semitic views by defending Nazi policies and did maintain a slight amount of support from Irish Americans, at least in New York.82

Though Irish Americans did not create many cultural works during the war, they were popular characters in the nation’s wartime movies. Irish-American heroes from World War I formed the core of popular movies such as *The Fighting 69th* (1940) and

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81 Kenny, *American Irish.*
82 Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict,* 125.
Sergeant York (1941). James Cagney won an Oscar for his performance as George M. Cohan in Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942). Later during the war, Irish-American heroes of World War II began to appear on screen, most notably in The Fighting Sullivans (1944). The movie recounted the story of the five Sullivan brothers who served together on the USS Juneau and died when the Japanese torpedoed the ship in November 1942. Most of the movie recounted the brothers’ family life before the war, described as “Irish American through and through.” The most popular Irish-American movie during the war that did not deal with war themes was A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, the 1945 film version of Betty Smith’s novel about growing up in a poor Irish-American family.  

CONCLUSION

David Gray was the prime mover of events in Anglo-Irish-American relations during the period of American involvement in World War II. His motivation, however, was not the advancement of war aims, but to forestall the efforts of Irish Americans to play a role in postwar domestic politics and to discredit Irish neutrality and de Valera enough to prevent the Irish from interfering in postwar Anglo-American relations. Eunan O’Halpin has summarized Gray’s role accurately and succinctly: “The problem was that he did not let his lack of knowledge of the workings of Irish-Allied security relations prevent him from pronouncing forthrightly on their inadequacy.”  

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83 Curran, Hibernian Green, 87-93. The Sullivans’ fate led the U.S. Navy to prohibit brothers from serving on the same ship.
The fruits of Gray’s distortions, aided without doubt by de Valera’s unfortunate visit to Hempel at the close of the war, would bear fruit later. Irish Americans, along with most Americans, had made deeply held impressions of Irish actions during the war, and as a result disengaged further from Irish affairs until the violence in Northern Ireland in 1968. De Valera, ever eager to advance a sense of Irish identity, even at the risk of cementing partition, would turn again to the constitutional machinations he had set aside during the Emergency. He looked to Irish Americans for support, but they did not look back.
CHAPTER 5

IDENTITIES, DISTORTIONS, CONSEQUENCES

You didn’t have to think of who you were. Everyone around you was the same. We all went to mass together. We all went out on Monday night to a novena and had a Coca-Cola afterwards. Everybody you knew was Irish; everybody that you went to school with. We didn’t know very many Protestants.¹

“Phyllis”

Mr. De Valera . . . maintained a neutrality which served only Hitler’s objectives. . . . The Eire conception of neutrality permitted Axis missions to be maintained with their spy apparatus and secret wireless within the periphery of the allied defense. Throughout the war Dublin was a lighted city, serving as a beacon to guide German bombers proceeding north to attack Belfast.²

David Gray
1956

In the years following World War II, Irish Americans and the Irish continued their quests to establish their unique identities. For Irish Americans, removed from the economic and spiritual dislocations of the Depression and renewed by the general

¹ “Interview with Informant 152,” in Reginald Byron, Irish America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204. Phyllis” was born in 1922.
prosperity after the war, their quest would be significantly different than of previous
generations. No longer renewed by the influx of large number of immigrants, the number
of second-generation Irish Americans would decrease rapidly in the postwar years. The
absence of these new members would mean that Irish America would have to find
different means of crafting and maintaining its identity without the rejuvenating influence
of the experiences of those born in Ireland. For the Irish government, its quest for an Irish
identity at home and in the eyes of the world would have to be carried out against the
legacy of wartime neutrality. That neutrality had achieved special status in Ireland, but it
left the nation’s relations with the United States in a terrible condition.

THE END of GRAY’S TENURE

David Gray continued to serve as the American Minister in Ireland until June
1947. Troy Davis, the only historian to complete a full review of postwar Irish-American
relations, argues that “the continued presence of Gray himself” and Gray’s “personal
antipathy for de Valera and his obsession with discrediting the Irish in the United States”
were the major factors influencing American policy immediately after the war.³

One of the clearest examples of Gray’s attitude is his informal postwar
propaganda campaign among Irish Americans. In early January 1946, Gray began a letter
campaign, unapproved by the State Department, to the newest American Catholic
cardinals: Francis Spellman in New York, Edward Mooney in Detroit, and Samuel Stritch
in Chicago. He later sent copies of the letters, and an accompanying memo entitled “The United States and Irish Partition,” to John Hickerson at the State Department. He wrote to Hickerson that he also planned to send the letter and memo to prominent Irish Americans, including Joseph P. Kennedy and Senator James Murray.

Considering his audience, Gray did not mention his concern that Irish Americans would attempt to obstruct the postwar Anglo-American relationship in an effort to end partition. He framed the letters and memo around a warning that any attempt by Irish Americans to lobby for Ireland would ultimately fail and bring about an anti-Catholic reaction in the United States. Specifically, he argued that should Irish American Catholics raise the partition issue in the United States then Northern Ireland Protestants would also enter the debate. If the Protestants, appealing to the predominantly Protestant American public, successfully made a case that Catholics in Ireland and the United States were trying to force them into joining an implicitly Catholic nation, then the mission to end partition would not only fail, but it would foment an anti-Catholic backlash. In his letter to Joseph Kennedy, he took a stern tone, writing that “you Americans of Irish descent will have to learn” that Ireland is closer to Britain and that the Irish “think and feel” more like the British than the Americans. In July 1946, Gray wrote to James Farley, who was a former Postmaster General and one of de Valera’s friends, asking him to speak with de Valera to caution him to avoid an antipartition campaign in the United States.4

3 The research for this chapter owes much to the groundbreaking and still only monograph examining postwar American-Irish relations, Troy Davis’s Dublin’s American Policy: Irish American Diplomatic Relations, 1945-1952 (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1998).
4 Gray to Hickerson, 3 January 1946, 841.00; “Confidential Letter,” Gray to Kennedy, 17 January 1946; Davis, Dublin’s American Policy, 39.
IRISH AMERICANS and IRELAND in POSTWAR AMERICA

An active postwar coalition between the Irish government and Irish-American groups, with its main focus on driving a wedge between Britain and the United States to end partition, the development Gray feared the most, never emerged. Rising tensions of the Cold War, rather than Gray’s attempts to distort Irish wartime neutrality, made the Irish government reluctant to start an anti-partition campaign. Although some Irish-American groups like the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic continued to forward resolutions to Congress and the State Department in 1946 and 1947, they did so without the assistance of the Irish government.

One of the newest postwar Irish political parties, born from the economic drift of the postwar years, was Clann na Poblachta (Family of the Republic). Seán MacBride, the former IRA Chief of Staff, quickly became the standard bearer of the new party. Tim Coogan has described the creation of Clann na Poblachta in 1946 as the “most important break in ‘physical force’ Republicanism since the creation of Fianna Fáil” twenty years earlier.\(^5\) In many ways, Clann na Poblachta was more Fianna Fáil than Fianna Fáil. MacBride was able to put forth more recent republican credentials than de Valera, and the party embraced a radical social program grounded in Catholic social teaching. The latter enabled the party to appeal to a dissatisfied electorate concerned about economic conditions, while the former allowed those impatient with the continuation of partition to register their complaint. Bernadette Whelan has succinctly summarized Ireland’s postwar
economic situation: “By 1947 the continuation of war-time dislocation was manifested in rationing, rising inflation, falling living standards, frequent strikes, unemployment and emigration.” Fearful of the growing support for Clann na Poblachta in by-elections in 1946 and 1947, de Valera called for general elections in February 1948.

Fine Gael leader James Dillon and de Valera debated the issue of Irish Americans and partition in 1947 after the election season started. Fine Gael did not want to run against de Valera in an election based on each party’s republican credentials. Urging de Valera not to stir up Irish-American passions, Dillon told de Valera to “give up living in his salad days” because “the world has changed greatly since he was careering [careening] about the American Continent 25 years ago.” True and patriotic Irish Americans, Dillon argued, saw that it was “Bolsheviks” who were trying to disrupt the Anglo-American alliance and that any effort by the Irish to do the same thing, even for a different purpose, would be tainted by the same brush. Dillon then went on to highlight the difference between the amount of energy Fianna Fail put in to an anti-partition campaign compared to the level of rhetoric it used to describe the campaign:

**Mr. Dillon:** The . . . Minister for Posts and Telegraphs . . . announced here that a short-wave radio station was to be established for which the ex-ambassador in Washington had been brought home as director, and it was to be largely employed for the purpose of communicating to the people in America the facts about Partition.

**The Taoiseach:** That was never stated.

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7 *Dáil Debates* 106 (20 June 1947), 2336.
Mr. Dillon: Now, you cannot have it both ways. Do not go bleating to our people in this country that you are going to bust everything about Partition wide open with your propaganda, and then start trying to persuade those in a position to know what you are up to that you have no intention of that kind. You cannot have it both ways; you cannot go on living a lie.

The Taoiseach: That is stupid—you are stupid, and worse. 8

When it was his turn to take the floor, after a long debate where Dillon and others called many Irish-American activists communists, de Valera seemed resigned to abandon any active role for Irish-American groups in any immediate anti-partition campaign. He said that for partition to end, there needed to be “a concurrence of wills” between the people of Ireland, the people of Northern Ireland, and the members of the British Parliament. 9

De Valera’s Fianna Fáil won only forty-one percent of the vote in the February 1948 elections and lost its majority in the Dáil. The opposition parties then banded together, united only by their opposition to de Valera’s rule, to form the nation’s first Inter-Party government. In an unlikely pairing, MacBride, late of the IRA, became the Minister of External Affairs, and John Costello of Fine Gael, the pro-Treaty party, became Taoiseach. It was Costello, who might have been hoping to prop up the bona fides of Fine Gael with regard to Irish nationalism, who made the most dramatic announcement by the government. It was not until de Valera was out of office that he took the anti-partition campaign to the United States again. The trip was part of a larger

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8 Ibid., 2339.
9 Dáil Debates 107 (24 June 1947), 79.
post-election effort on the part of Fianna Fail and the new governing coalition to weaken each other by taking on the mantle of Irish republicanism.

THE IRISH REPUBLIC

In September 1948, in a surprising move during an official visit to Canada, Costello announced the intention of the government to repeal the External Relations Act, the last link with the Crown and the Commonwealth, and to establish an Irish Republic. There is some indication that the governing parties had discussions about this move, rejected by de Valera when fashioning the new constitution in 1937, but by most accounts Costello’s announcement came as a surprise even to MacBride.  

The move to become a republic was merely symbolic. In any real sense, short of simply upsetting the British for no cause and even further retarding the possibility of a reconciliation and “concurrence of the wills” with the people of Northern Ireland, the announcement of the Republic served no purpose. De Valera had effectively created a republic with the 1937 constitution.

The government introduced the Republic of Ireland Act in the Dáil on 8 November 1948. The Act repealed the External Relations Act of 1936 and, although it

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10 There has been much debate about what prompted Costello to make the announcement. There had been several snubs to Irish independence during this visit, including several toasts to the King and the heads of state of sovereign nations, but not Ireland, and the placing on Costello’s table at a formal dinner a replica of the cannon used by Protestants during the siege of Derry in 1689. Costello described the cannon as “one of the guns used against our people.” For a review, see Ian McCabe, A Diplomatic History of Ireland, 1948-49: The Republic, the Commonwealth, and NATO (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1991), 40-44.

11 In January 1948, De Valera drafted a revision to the External Relations Act that would have removed the British monarch from the diplomatic activities of Ireland. His draft also referred to the country as the “Republic.” See “The Presidential (International Powers and Functions) Act, 1948,” UCD, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh Papers, P51/2.
did not change the official name of the state, it declared that “the *description* of the State shall be the Republic of Ireland.” It became law on Easter Monday 1949, on the thirty-third anniversary of the Easter Rebellion.\(^\text{12}\)

British reaction to the creation of the Irish Republic, thereby officially taking Ireland out of the Commonwealth, was swift. Prime Minister Clement Atlee gave the Northern Ireland government assurances that partition would not end without formal approval from the parliament in Belfast. The British Parliament within two months passed the Ireland Act of 1949, which declared that Ireland ceased to be part of the crown’s dominions and that “in no event will Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be a part of His Majesty’s dominions and of the United Kingdom without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland.”\(^\text{13}\)

**IRELAND and POSTWAR SECURITY**

In the first year or so after the war, American policymakers were largely unconcerned about Ireland. When they did deal with Ireland, they focused their efforts on retaliating for Irish neutrality during the war. Such was the case when it came time to decide whom to invite as charter members of the United Nations, and Ireland did not receive an initial invitation. The United States government felt that Ireland’s wartime neutrality did not warrant it a seat. By the end of 1945, however, as the growing Soviet-American split was taken into account, U.S. policymakers began to change their attitudes


\(^{13}\) “The Ireland Act, 1949,” in ibid., 821-25.

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toward Irish admission. Such would be the pattern for American policymakers as they attempted to find a place for Ireland in the new postwar security arrangement that was starting to be defined by the antagonism between the United States and the Soviet Union. By May 1946 the War Department’s intelligence review focused on the importance of all Western European countries in the confrontation with the Soviet Union. By April 1949, a Central Intelligence report concluded that Ireland was “potentially a valuable ally” and that “the denial of Ireland to an enemy is an unavoidable principle of United States security.”

After being denied a charter invitation, de Valera was reluctant to have Ireland apply for membership in the United Nations until he was sure that Britain and the United States would support its efforts. In March 1946 the U.S. State Department completed a review of membership for neutral nations that reinforced the commitment of the Potsdam agreements to include former neutrals in the organization. Prompted in part by a desire to admit pro-Western nations to counter the anticipated applications of pro-Soviet nations (Albania had recently applied), the American and British governments approached de Valera in July 1946.

14 Davis, *Dublin’s American Policy*, 42.
17 The formal invitation came from Norman Archer, the acting British representative in Ireland, see NAI, Taioseach, S14106A.
The month before, de Valera delivered a long speech in the Dáil about possible Irish membership in the United Nations. In a debate over the final Irish payments due to the League of Nations, de Valera called that body “one of the, or perhaps greatest, experiment in international cooperation the world has ever known.” The failure of the League, according to de Valera, was that the members “were not willing to face war and to wage war in order to prevent war.” He then argued that the new organization did not seem to protect the rights of smaller states as well as the League had been designed to do, but that smaller states would benefit under the new organization if larger states had learned the lessons from the recent war.\footnote{Dáil Debates 101 (26 June 1946), 2430-32.}

Soon after getting the official invitation from the British, de Valera started the process of bringing the application before the Dáil.\footnote{Dáil Debates 101 (26 June 1946), 2430-32.} He stressed that membership in the UN meant that Ireland was accepting the responsibility to fight when called upon. Neutrality, by itself and apart from participation in an effective world body, was only an option if the larger powers allowed it be one. Referring to the recent war, de Valera said that Irish neutrality rested on “the concurrence of wills of perhaps two people,” Churchill and Roosevelt.\footnote{Dáil Debates 101 (26 June 1946), 2430-32.} While not perfect, de Valera argued that the UN represented the best hope of maintaining Ireland’s neutrality and that agreeing to participate in wars to defend the goals of the UN charter would be Ireland’s best hope to maintain its identity.

Ireland’s application to the United Nations eventually was a casualty in the growing Soviet-American split. When Ireland did forward its formal application in 1946,
the Soviet Union vetoed it, along with the applications of Portugal, Austria, Finland, Jordan, and Ceylon. Soviet Foreign Minister Andre Gromyko publicly argued that the veto was justified because Ireland “brought no assistance to the United Nations” in the war, but the Soviets were using Ireland’s and the other nations’ applications as bargaining chips to admit Bulgaria, Hungary, and other pro-Soviet states. Ireland would not gain entry into the United Nations until 1955, as part of a package deal between Washington and Moscow.21

Gray and Brennan were no longer serving in Dublin and Washington when the Irish and American governments were discussing Marshall Plan aid. Brennan left the Irish diplomatic corps in March 1947 to become Ireland’s Director of Broadcasting. Seán Nunan, the longtime Irish Consul General in Washington and New York, took his place. In Dublin, George Angus Garrett replaced Gray in July 1947. Garrett was an investment banker from Wisconsin and was friends with an earlier American representative in Dublin, Frederick Sterling.22 Both of the new envoys would work to repair the damaged American-Irish relationship.

From the perspective of the American government, there was a tension in postwar strategies concerning Ireland. On the one hand, as evidenced by the reluctance to include Ireland in the initial organization of the United Nation, there was a desire to punish

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19 Boland to Moynihan, 10 July 1946, NAI, Taoiseach, S13750A. The Cabinet discussed the application on 12, 16, and 19 July. See “Cabinet Minutes,” NAI, Taoiseach, S13750A.
20 Dáil Debates 102 (25 July 1946), 1467.
Ireland for its wartime neutrality. During the late 1940s, however, that desire had to be balanced against the need to formally include Ireland in the West as the fears of the Cold War began to take hold. Given the unstable postwar economic situation in Ireland that Garrett felt could lead to communist activity, and the desire to have a financially secure Ireland serve as a trading partner and food supplier to Britain, American policymakers decided to include Ireland in the European Recovery Program (ERP).

For the Irish government, the invitation to participate in the ERP was an opportunity to regain some international standing, badly wounded because of the public face of neutrality, and to gain some badly needed economic assistance without having to turn to already economically ravaged Britain. It was glad to take part.

Some of the same fear of postwar instability and possible Soviet aggression that were behind the motives for the Marshall Plan came into play with the creation of the North American Treaty Organization. Fine Gael leaders, in power as part of the power-sharing government, were much more likely than de Valera to pursue membership in such a western military alliance. The staunch anti-communism of the Irish people and of the Irish Catholic hierarchy also would be likely forces in favor of joining the coalition. Hoping that all this would bring the Irish government on board, in April 1948 the NATO governments made an informal inquiry to Ireland’s representative to Canada. At first the Irish government made no official or informal response. But by July, it began to make

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23 Hearne to Boland, 15 April 1948, NAI, Taoiseach, S14291.
it clear that the ending of partition was the price of its participation. If the Irish
government truly believed it could end partition by withholding Irish participation in
NATO, its ministers were clearly not able to read the international situation. What is
more likely is that neutrality was so clearly a part of Irish identity after the war that no
government could abandon it, even for an effort that had the support of so many its
people. As a consequence, Ireland did not have a relationship with NATO until it joined
NATO’s Partnership for Peace initiative on 1 December 1999.

POSTWAR IRISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY

The economic boom following World War II allowed many Irish Americans,
along with many other Americans, to move out of urban neighborhoods and into the
bulging suburbs. The G.I. Bill, mortgage financing, and highway construction fueled
this exodus. Irish Americans, however, did not leave the cities at the same rate as other
Americans. There was still a sizeable percentage of Irish-Americans living in the major
cities of the Northeast through 1980.

Part of the explanation for this decreased mobility may lay with the fact that Irish
Americans in 1950 remained at the bottom of the economic ladder compared to other pre-
1890 immigrant groups. Both first- and second-generation Irish Americans were
advancing at a slower rate than other groups. In some urban areas it was even worse. In

24 See the remarks of Minister of External Affairs Seán MacBride in the Dáil, Dáil Debates 112 (20 July
1948), 903-11.
25 Róisín Doherty, Ireland, Neutrality and European Security Integration (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002),
21.
Boston, for example, in the 1950s and 1960s Irish Americans lacked behind all other white groups in many economic categories.\textsuperscript{27}  

The steady influx of Irish immigrants that had always rejuvenated and energized the Irish-American community began to diminish even before the war. The Great Depression made Britain the preferred destination of Irish emigrants in the 1930s. By 1950, there were more Irish-born people in Britain than the United States. There were almost 500,000 first- or second-generation Irish in New York City in 1940; by 1960 there were just over 300,000. For most of the 1950s, the Irish did not even fill fifty percent of their yearly quota of visas to come to the United States.\textsuperscript{28} The consequence was that Irish-American writers began to look even more deeply into the uniquely American aspects of the Irish-American experience.

Charles Fanning has characterized the Irish-American authors who wrote autobiographical novels in the 1940s as “regional realists.” Much of their work focused on recreating in fiction the Irish-American neighborhoods, families, and social structures that surrounded them. In spite of the economic rise of Irish America, the recurring themes of alcoholism, domestic violence, economic hardship, and what Fanning describes as “working-class-Irish emotional inarticulateness” form the backbone of these works. Many of these postwar authors drew their influence from the earlier works of O’Hara and Farrell. Pete Hamill, the author of several Irish-American novels set in the 1950s, claimed

\textsuperscript{27} Kenny, \textit{American Irish}, 227-28.  
\textsuperscript{28} Mary E. Daly, “Nationalism, Sentiment, and Economics: Relations Between Ireland and Irish America in the Postwar Years,” \textit{Eire-Ireland} 37 (Spring/Summer 2002): 76; Kenny, \textit{American Irish}, 226.
that Farrell taught him “to look with pity and terror and compassion at the people we
knew and at ourselves, . . . to speak in some way for those who have no voices.”

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CONCLUSION

Three issues—the assertion of its identity, the recognition of that identity by others, and the promotion and development of exchanges with other nations—are basic aspects of any country's relations with the world. . . . As a people we have certain fairly clear concepts of right and wrong in human relations. . . . We owe these moral values largely to basic religious beliefs which permeate our culture. But we also have certain distinctive attitudes and sympathies which are shaped by our view of our own history—among them a strong fellow-feeling for any people who struggle to maintain their identity against greater force.¹

Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs Patrick Hillery
18 April 1972

The awareness of being Irish came to us as small children, through plaintive song and heroic story. . . . As children, we drew in a burning hatred of British rule with our mother’s milk.²

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn

History has a central role in the identities of the Irish and of Irish Americans. As Hillery and Flynn suggest, it serves as the backdrop against which identity is created and sustains that identity across generations. Historical understanding becomes then a vehicle to infuse group memories with the core elements of “peoplehood.” For Eamon de Valera,

¹ Dáil Debates 260 (18 April 1972), 384, 389.
the mission to create a rural, Gaelic, and independent Irish identity permeated much of his public life. He wanted to forge a new Irish identity that allowed the relatively new nation to find a place in the world apart from Britain and apart from the history of British domination. In doing so, he often turned to Irish America for support. In turn, Irish Americans brought with them across the Atlantic their understanding of Irish history, and saw themselves as exiles because of British misrule of Ireland. That sense of displacement led them to be deeply concerned about Irish political affairs in the first part of the twentieth century. After Ireland’s independence, however, Irish Americans became less concerned with the nationalism that was still very much a part of de Valera’s world, even though they never felt entirely at ease with their place in American society. The strategic importance of the island of Ireland during World War II would become a focal point to bring together both groups’ search for identity.

It is not an easy task to develop insights into the creation and development of Irish-American identity, in part because of the somewhat amorphous nature of ethnic identity in general. Even so, what historian Mathew Jacobson has described as the “diasporic imagination” and the “shared cultural imagery” of Irish Americans offers a window into what Irish Americans felt about themselves, their relationship to Ireland, and their place in American society. How Irish Americans represented themselves in novels and comics and how the larger society represented them in films and songs and plays compose the elements that defined the public aspect of their ethnic identity. That identity

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then became an “inner geography” for Irish Americans as family, social groups, and educational institutions reinforced it.³

Irish-American identity, however, never became fully enmeshed with the wider American society’s values; Irish America never fully assimilated. Even after Irish Americans began to move up the economic ladder and to encounter fewer instances of overt hostility for their race or religion, as a group they never felt completely at home, culturally, in the United States. The loud and public displays of patriotism, at first efforts to prove their worth as Americans, did become real reflections of Irish America’s love for their country. Even so, their ambivalence about their place in the nation’s life became a constant theme of their novelists and cartoonists.

For the Irish, the early years of the twentieth century were a time of searching for a cultural identity. Irish nationalists’ efforts to strengthen the Irish language and Irish sportswere part of a wider effort to establish the justification for Irish independence. If there were a uniquely Irish identity that the world could recognize, the leaders hoped, then perhaps the Irish people and the nations of the world would force the British to give Ireland its independence. During World War I, those committed Irish nationalists forced the issue during the Easter Rising of 1916.

After independence and civil war, de Valera led the Irish on a path to find a political identity for Ireland in the world that would encompass that earlier effort to define an Irish cultural identity. Throughout the 1930s he worked to separate Ireland from

Britain economically, diplomatically, culturally, and territorially. When the Second World War broke out, de Valera felt that given the nature of the Irish strategic position, the continuation of the partition of the island, and the relatively recent and unfinished efforts to create an Irish identity in the world, neutrality was the only viable option for Ireland. That neutrality became a target for British and American officials wishing to either bring Ireland into the war or at least allow its territory to be used by the allied armed forces. Those efforts, especially those by Churchill and the British, combined with de Valera’s spirited defense of Irish neutrality that put a practical policy on par with a moral imperative for small countries, helped make neutrality itself an integral part of Irish identity for the rest of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

So much of the history of Ireland and Irish America in the early and mid-twentieth century is intertwined around issues of identity that to understand deeply either history requires an examination of both. This study hopes to serve as the first attempt to make sense of those connections. Much remains to be done.
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