PART ONE

Guys:

As this **two-part** reading shows us, not all immigrants from Europe received a warm welcome in this country. One example is that of the Irish immigrants who faced considerable discrimination (though not to the same extent as people of color have faced historically, and continue to face today). The important question that emerges here is how did the Irish (or the Italians, or the Jews, or the Russians, and so on) eventually come to be regarded as "Euro-Americans" (meaning "whites")? Notice, for instance, that the first cartoon depicts the Irish as culturally no different than African Americans.

The *political* process by which European ethnic minorities eventually (it took about **150** years) came to be accepted as "whites" is an example of a phenomenon called "the social construction of race" (meaning race is not a biological category but a *politically-determined* social category). An analogy that may help you to understand how the process came to work in practice—in order to sustain the class-based interests of the ruling class in this country—is that of a prison where the prison administration is the Euro-American ruling class, the European ethnic minorities are the *prison trustees*, and the rest of the prison population are what may be called the visible minorities (marked by skin color). (Question: what is a prison trustee?)

Here is another question for you to ponder: Supposing that there were no people of color in this country today? What would be the status of the various ethnicities that make up the Euro-American population? Remember, this is a capitalist country! So, some would be at the bottom and some in the middle and some above. Now, who would be where in this social structural hierarchy? Look at the cartoons below, they give you some idea. Subtext of this question: for a person to be to be a "white" person requires the presence of a person of color. A person cannot be a "white" person without the presence of a "black" person, and vice versa. If the identity of a person depends on the presence of another person, then one can legitimately argue that it is not an authentic identity; it is a fake identity!

Warning: make sure that you study the cartoons carefully and take notes; there may be questions on them on the upcoming test. In order to help you understand political cartoons better, please study the guide available **here**. (Those of you who would like to see more of these cartoons do a search under *images* in Google using these terms together: "Anti-Irish Cartoons.") So, now you know why history is important!
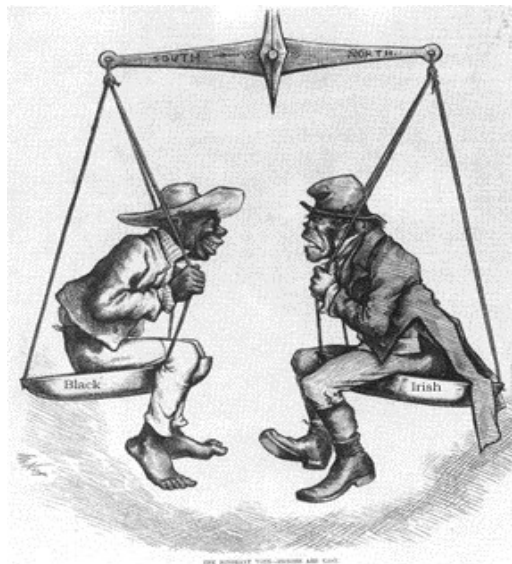
Source: http://www.victoriana.com/Irish/IrishPoliticalCartoons.htm

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Stereotyping of the Irish Immigrant in 19th Century Periodicals

by Christine Haug

Immigrating to the United States during the 19th century was not the magical solution for the majority of the newcomers. Many ethnic groups ran into prejudice in America; with stereotyping being a major problem. The Irish especially faced this problem in America, often being depicted as hot-headed, old-fashioned, and drunkards. During the 19th century, political cartoons were widely used to express the widespread negative opinions about Irish immigrants. Often the full stereotype meaning of the cartoon was subtle and could be missed by the casual reader, while other times it was cruelly obvious.

The Irish were stereotyped as uncivilized, unskilled and impoverished and were forced to work at the least desired occupations and live in crowded ethnic ghettoes. Irish immigrants often found that they were not welcome in America; many ads for employment were accompanied by the order "NO IRISH NEED APPLY." Throughout the 1800s, as hordes of technologically and agriculturally unskilled Irish immigrants settled in the major cities of the east, several anti-immigrant groups began to develop. Nativists reacted to increased Irish immigration with violent riots and increased demands for limits on immigrants' rights. These nativist groups considered the immigrants as a threat and regarded the Catholicism of the Irish as an alien and rebellious religion and culture. During the mid-nineteenth century anti-Catholic riots struck the major eastern cities and vandalism against Catholic institutions became such a common practice that many insurance companies refused to cover Catholic schools and churches.

Many nativists urged policies that would limit Irish political power and immigrants' rights to vote and to hold public office, to be passed. In 1849 The Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, a clandestine society of nativists, emerged; its members pledged to only support native-born Protestants for public office, to fight the Roman Catholic Church and to support an obligatory 21-year waiting period for naturalization. This society, later reformed into the American party, when asked about their anti-immigrant activities would simply reply "I know nothing," earning them the name the Know-Nothings. This party with its motto "Americans Shall Rule America" won many city and state elections throughout the 1850s and produced a multitude of political cartoons depicting the Irish as a barbaric civilization.

Cartoons for magazines such as Harper's Weekly featured cartoons by Thomas Nast and depicted Irish immigrants as ape-like barbarians prone to lawlessness, laziness and drunkenness. "St. Patrick's Day, 1867...Rum, Blood, The Day We Celebrate" shows a riot with policemen and ape-like Irishmen.

This cartoon printed in 1889, stereotypes the Irish as unmixable in America's melting pot.
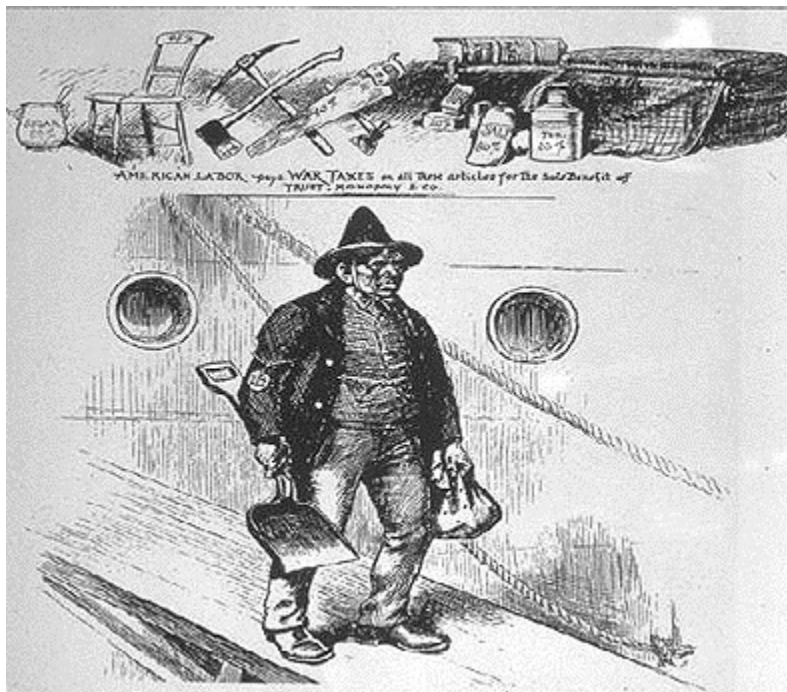
This cartoon was labeled "A Question of Labor" and was published in Harper's Weekly in 1888.

The Conscription Act of 1863 made all white men between the ages of twenty and forty-five years eligible for the draft by the Union Army. Blacks were not drafted or forced to fight and white men with money could legally hire a substitute. Lower-class whites (many of whom were Irish) resented the draft. This print shows the 1863 riot in New York City by a mob of lower-class whites (including many Irish).
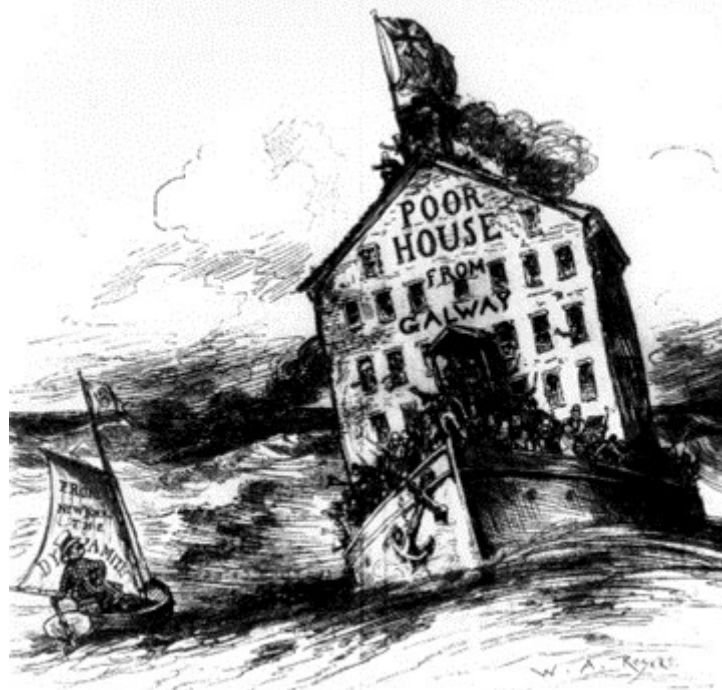
An 1850s cartoon showing a "poor house" of immigrants from Ireland.

An 1854 caricature of an Irish immigrant in Dublin.

Cartoon showing the Irish celebrate St. Patrick's Day, 1867.

Thomas Nast cartoon from 1870 expressing the worry that the Irish Catholics threatened the American freedom.
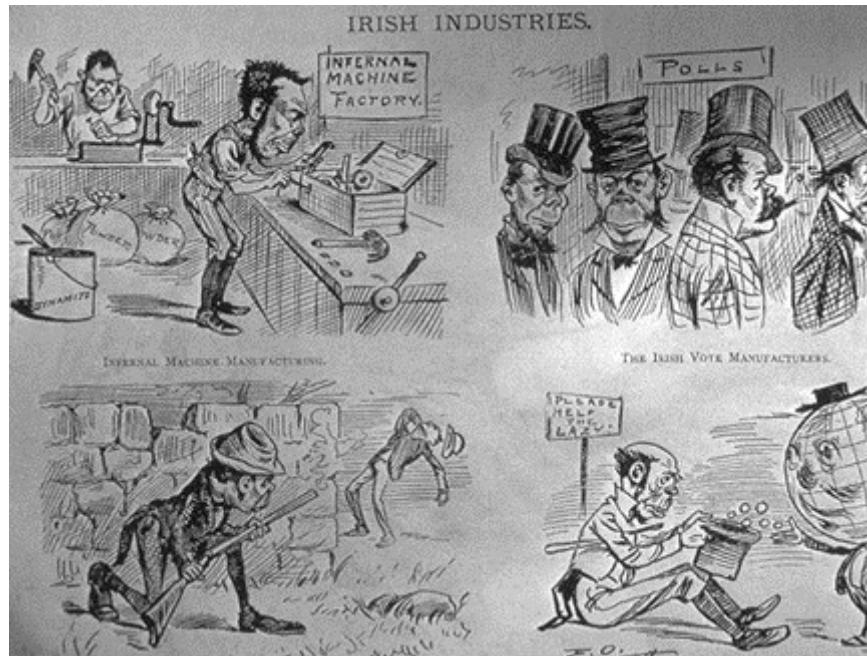

An 1854 Nathaniel Currier cartoon called "Taking a 'Smile'" picturing Irish drinking.

A cartoon from the 1850s by the "Know-Nothings" accusing the Irish and German immigrants of negatively affecting an election.
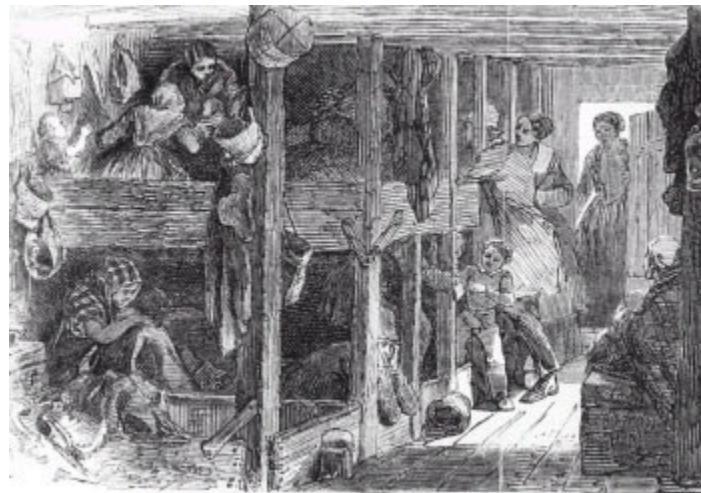
Harper's Weekly image of the "coffin ships" showing the cramped, unhealthy accommodations for the Irish immigrants.

These cartoons from an 1881 issue of Puck depict common held negative views of most Irish-Americans.

Author: Christine Haug
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PART TWO

Negative Stereotypes of the Irish
Gwen Sharp, PhD,
Oct 6, 2008

In the 1800s, the Irish (whether in Ireland, Britain, or the U.S.) were often very negatively stereotyped. In many cases the same negative characteristics attributed to Africans and African Americans (sloth, immorality, destructiveness) were often also associated with the Irish. In fact, some scientists believed the Irish were, like Africans, more closely related to apes than to other Europeans, and in some cases in the U.S., Irish immigrants were classified as Blacks, not Whites.

The next three political cartoons from the 1800s were found on the Nevada Department of Education website section about racism (as was the quote about the first cartoon).

This one is titled "The Workingman's Burden" and depicts "a gleeful Irish peasant carrying his Famine relief money while riding on the back of an exhausted English laborer." It might make a good comparison to how welfare recipients are viewed in the U.S.

3.

This illustration ran in *Harper's Weekly* magazine. Notice how the Irish are depicted as more similar to "Negros" than to "Anglo Teutonic" individuals, and both the Irish and Africans are caricatured as ape-like. It could also be useful for a discussion of scientific racism.

IRISH IBERIAN   ANGLO-TEUTONIC   NEGRO
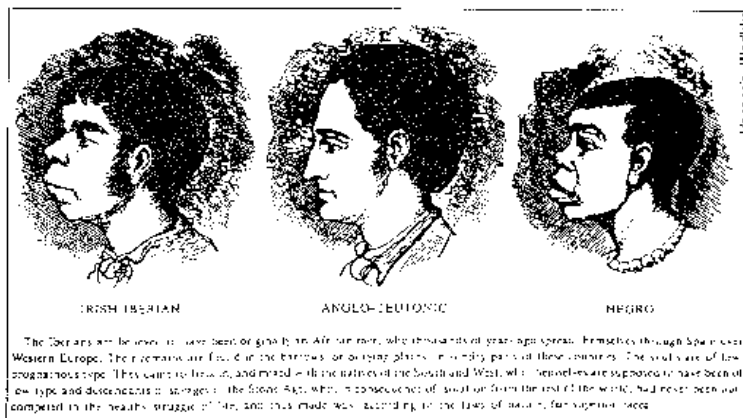
This cartoon, titled "Two Forces," shows a figure representing Britain protecting a weeping, frightened woman, representing Ireland, from a rampaging Irishman; notice his hat says "anarchy."

This image, found at the University College Cork website, depicts Daniel O'Connell, a leader of the Irish land reform movement, as an "ogre." He is ladling poor Irish peasants out of a pot labeled "agitation soup," and, presumably, cheating them out of money in the guise of helping them.

THE IRISH OGRE FATTENING ON THE FINEST PISANTRY.

Here we see the Irish depicted as a Frankensteinian monster in a cartoon that ran in *Punch* in 1882 (image found at the <u>website for a course</u> at the University of St. Andrews):

These next three all come from the <u>Center for History and New Media</u> at George Mason University. Here we see drunken Irishmen rioting and attacking police:

In this one, John Bull (representing Britain) and Uncle Sam look on as an Irish man engages in reckless destruction; notice the empty bottle in the lower right corner, labeled "drugs":

Here an ape-like Irish man, again drunk, sits on a powder keg, presumably threatening the entire country:

Finally, this one, published in 1882 (and found at the [Michigan State University Museum website](#)), is called "Uncle Sam's Lodging House" and shows an Irish immigrant causing a commotion while other immigrants (notice the beds are labeled Russian, German, Negro, etc.) try to sleep. The smaller caption under the title says, "Look here, you, everybody else is quiet and peaceable, and you're all the time a-kicking up a row!"

UNCLE SAM'S LODGING-HOUSE.
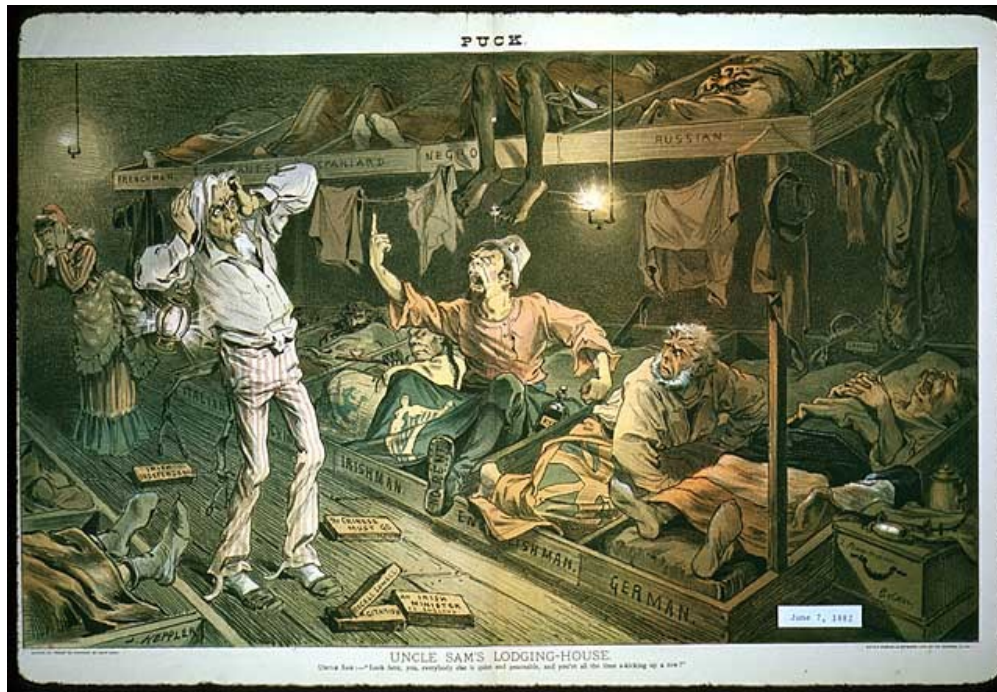
The message is, of course, that other immigrant groups (including Blacks) settle in and don't cause problems, while the Irish don't know how to assimilate or stay in their place.

You might compare these images to [this](#) recent post about how symbols of Irishness have lost any real negative implications, such that even politicians in non-Irish-dominated districts feel comfortable using them in campaign materials.
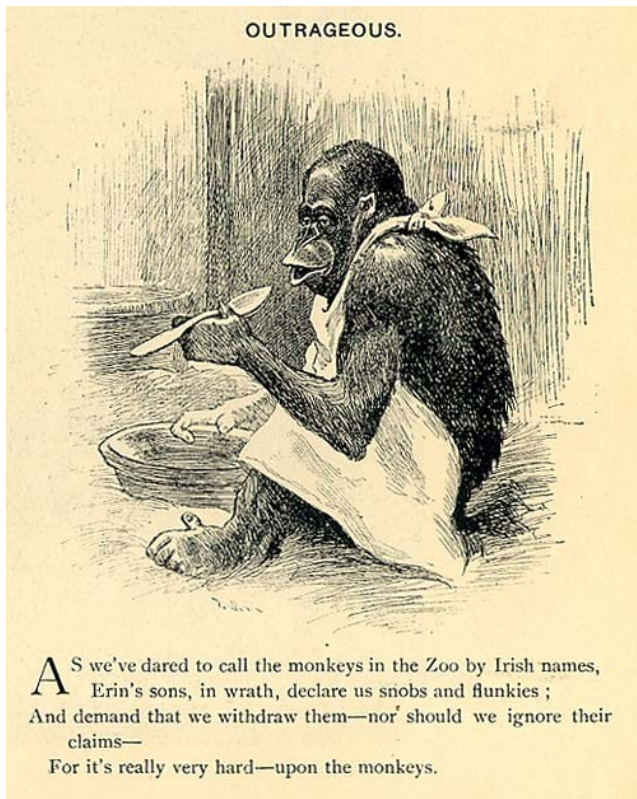
And yes, I know I've been posting a lot of stuff about race and ethnicity lately. I'm teaching a class on it this semester–it's the stuff that I keep coming across while writing lectures.

And I'm dedicating this post to my boyfriend, Burk, who decided to go on a date with me even though, when he asked if I'd have trouble dealing with his hard-drinking Irish-American family, I said I could handle that but wouldn't put up with any blubbering on about how *Angela's Ashes* is the best book ever.

NEW! This cartoon with poem was published in Life Magazine on May 11th, 1893. The poem is suggesting that the monkeys in the zoo are sad that they get called by Irish names.

Text: As we've dared to call the monkeys in the Zoo by Irish names, Erin's sons, in wrath, declare us snobs and flunkies ;
And demand that we withdraw them–nor should we ignore their claims–
For it's really very hard–upon the monkeys.

OUTRAGEOUS.

As we've dared to call the monkeys in the Zoo by Irish names,
Erin's sons, in wrath, declare us snobs and flunkies ;
And demand that we withdraw them—nor' should we ignore their claims—
For it's really very hard—upon the monkeys.

UPDATE: In a comment, Macon D asked how I address the ways in which Whites of some ancestries (Irish, Italian, etc.) often point to the fact that there was discrimination against those groups as a way of invalidating arguments about

systemic racism. The logic is that both non-Whites and some White groups faced prejudice and discrimination but European groups overcame it through their own hard work, and thus any other group could too. If they continue to experience high levels of poverty, unemployment, or any other social problem, it is due to their own lack of hard work, intelligence, or some other characteristic.

I do indeed discuss this argument at length whenever I teach about race. A great reading to address it is Charles Gallagher's **article** "Playing the White Ethnic Card: Using Ethnic Identity to Deny Contemporary Racism," p. 145-158 in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* (2003, Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, editors, New York: Routledge). The tone might put some students off, because it doesn't baby them or try to sugar-coat the issue of how Whites use their (often imagined) family stories of discrimination as a way to argue that systemic racism doesn't exist and that they got to where they are by their family's hard work, and nothing more. I know other professors often use the "How Jews Became White Folks" reading by Karen Brodkin, which also looks at this issue.

I also spend a good part of the semester looking at how government policies have had the effect of transferring enormous amounts of wealth into the hands of European immigrants and helping them accumulate resources over time–we look at the Homestead Act of 1862, the G.I. Bill (which Black veterans were often excluded from using), and how government subsidies for building suburban subdivisions were actively denied to groups wanting to build integrated communities. All these are examples of ways in which White Americans were aided in acquiring wealth and moving up the socio-economic ladder, while non-Whites often were explicitly excluded from these benefits.

I also point out that, while in these images the Irish are negatively stereotyped, it is clear that they are still viewed less negatively than, say, Africans or African Americans. If the Irish are the "missing link" between Africans and Caucasians…that still means they're considered more evolved than Africans–at least somewhat more fully human. So even at the height of discrimination against White European groups, that did not necessarily mean they were treated "the same" as, say, American Indians or Blacks.

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