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# Irish and German Immigrants of the Nineteenth Century: Hardships, Improvements, and Success

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**Irish and German Immigrants of the Nineteenth Century:  
Hardships, Improvements, and Success**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the economic and social reasons that are attributed to the high emigration rate in Ireland and in Germany during the nineteenth century, and how the lives of these groups turned out in the United States. As a result of economic deterioration and social inequality, pessimism became prevalent in Ireland from the 1840s onward and in Germany from the 1830s onward. Because the United States was perceived as an optimistic avenue for advancement, thousands of Irish and Germans emigrated their homelands and fled to America in search of a better life. During the first few decades upon their arrival in America, these groups faced massive discrimination by nativists; cultural barriers propagated negative stereotyping, which in turn created a nativist environment that excluded anyone of foreign nationality. The Irish and German immigrants found themselves fighting hard to overcome their oppression in America. By creating a cohesive social network among people of their own kind, whether it was through politics, religion, or in business, these immigrants challenged the social stigmas that were attached to their status. They were able to develop themselves fruitfully through hard work and determination. As the Irish and German immigrants started to expand in the American labor market with their skills, and magnify the social climate of what it meant to be an American, they were steadily elevating up the social ladder. When these groups were increasingly assimilating into the United States, they were no longer being identified as outsiders. Instead, they and the future Irish and German generations have melted their immigrant status and molded their American-Irish and American-German identity. Though the Irish and Germans developed a more successful life in America than in their homelands, they simultaneously contributed to something bigger: They helped built America.

This paper seeks to prove that the Irish and German immigrants of the nineteenth century were able to live a better life in America than in their native lands. The two chief reasons that led a great number of Irish to emigrate Ireland, which are the Great Potato Famine of 1845-52 and religious persecution which occurred throughout the 1800s, is discussed first. To show how the potato crop contributed to drastic impoverishment, specific emphasis is given to the scientific procedure of how the blight unfolded. Emigration statistics exemplifies the high scale of suffering in Ireland, particularly from 1840 to the 1850s. A transition is then drawn to analyze the lives of the Irish in the United States. It is established how the Irish were presented with economic opportunities, but faced terrible discrimination based on their low social status as poor immigrants. Through their continuous spread of an unwanted religion (Catholicism), and utilization of Tammy Hall politics, the Irish acquired power. Their defensive reactions further enabled the Irish to advance socially. In examining the second group's primary reasons for emigration, this paper focuses on the economic downturn in Germany, and how the influence of American advertisements impacted emigration altogether from the 1830s onward. The variation of German immigrants' occupations in America is detailed as well as their success in the cultivation of land. Like with the Irish immigrants, obstacles that the Germans encountered, such as their language barrier and suspicions with their religion is addressed. The Germans' persistence in their fierce antagonism of their involvement in organizations enabled them to counter the prejudices against them. Their assimilation and accomplishments in America stem mainly from major contributions that they have made that are well known today. With both groups, the common result boils down their success in America. The paper concludes that despite the hardships, the Irish and German immigrants not only achieve a better life here than in their

homelands, but their incredible contribution to the American society serves as a success story both to their lives, and the foundation of the United States of America.

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## List and Figures

Irish Emigration During Famine	
Year	Emigration
1846	92,484
1847	196,224
1848	173,744
1849	204,771
1850	206,041

<sup>1</sup>(Figure 1)

German Immigration: 1832 to Civil War	
Year	Immigration
1832	10,000
1834	17,000
1837	24,000
1845	1,250,000

<sup>2</sup> (Figure 2)

## Introduction

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<sup>1</sup>Wittke, Carl, *We Who Built America The Saga of the Immigrant* (Cleveland: Western Reserve University, 1939), 131.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 187.

“I had always hoped that this land might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong.” –George Washington

Washington’s expectation was practical. In the following decades from this nation’s founding, people from all over the world heavily immigrated to America, the Irish and the Germans being two of many groups. Confronted with inconceivable economic and social hardships, and no hope for a positive future in Ireland and Germany, the Irish and German people fled their homelands abundantly during the nineteenth century. In establishing their lives in America, they found exactly what they sought: Opportunities. In America, the Irish and German immigrants quickly obtained jobs and advanced economically. Despite finding the solutions to their problems, they did not anticipate encountering social discomfort. With the rampant rise of nativism, the Irish and German immigrants struggled to assimilate into the American society. They, however, overcame this. These immigrants seized on the notion of America as representing the land of the free and home of the brave, and made it a living and breathing reality. Rights that America guaranteed served as the ultimate weapon; the freedom to organize, to associate, and express oneself were essential to the Irish and German immigrants’ success. In the face of dual adversity, the economic and social hardships in their homelands and the cultural barriers that they encountered in America, the Irish and German immigrants of the nineteenth century nevertheless were able to better their lives in America due to their great utilization of opportunities that America presented.

## **Literature Review**

For the past two hundred years, the lives of the Irish and German immigrants of the nineteenth century in the United States has been studied by numerous historians. Historical scholarship on this topic is mainly attributed to the time period in which the work has been written, whereas modern research delves deep in to the past, and seeks to provide answers to the unanswered through the use of modern technology (i.e. utilizing census reports, preservation of documents, letters, and museums). Carl Wittke's book *We Who Built America* portrays the struggles that the Irish and German immigrants faced in their homelands and in America. Although Wittke makes note of these groups' contributions to the United States, that is in showing how their labor was integral to building America, he does not draw a clear distinction that the Irish and Germans' contributions are derivative of the opportunities that America presented at the time. Furthermore, the process of transitioning from the Irish and Germans' impoverishment or lack of opportunities thereof to their success in America is often overlooked or goes uninvestigated by historians. It is imperative that when we give a person or group the title that they have "became successful," that we investigate and analyze that process. Depictions of how the Irish immigrants were a lower breed of humanity, and how the German immigrants were smart and thrifty are often over exaggerated by historians. Only a number of sources, such as the Tenement Museum in New York City and letters written by immigrants themselves, objectively synthesize the Irish and German immigrants' experiences in the United States. Throughout Ireland's history, the scientific process of how the blight unfolded has often bred speculation. Daly Douglas not only does an excellent job in clarifying this in his article, "The Leaf that Launched a Thousand Ships," but he also superbly details how the blight precipitated Ireland's Great Hunger. For decades and even today, Tammany Hall has always been viewed in a negative light precisely because of the rampant corruption that pervaded its politics in the

1800s. Although Carl Wikke explains how the Irish operated the political machines, John Bodnar's book, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*, explicitly underscores how Tammany Hall was essential to the Irish's elevation of power in the absence of a strong central government, and I would like to add, amid their branded status of inferiority. Wittke, however, does a great job in integrating letters in his book from both Irish and German immigrants that detail their economic prosperity in America. The economic stability of the Irish and Germans in America is also portrayed through the extrapolation of statistics that are provided by The Library of Congress and the United States Census Bureau.

Historical analysis in general almost always associate improvement and success with large-scale monumental events, such as the Blacks fighting for and achieving equal rights during the Civil Rights Movement. Traditional sources that cover the lives of the Irish and German immigrants in the United States most often do not consider these groups' struggle, improvement, and success as monumental because from the outset their social mobility was deemed as a miniature component of history in comparison to other historic events. Some modern primary sources, however, do not give into this perception.

The Irish Outsiders tour provided by the Tenement Museum is one source that not only exhibits sequential progression of the lives of immigrants, but it also greatly highlights and gives significance to the factors that contributed to their improvements, such as the impact of Tammany Hall politics. In essence, although the common trend in almost all sources that were used for this thesis emphasized that the Irish and German immigrants struggled but were successful in the end, future sources on this topic ought to either clearly show *how* these groups were able to better their lives or give special attention to the factors that are attributed to their

improvements even if those factors are unconventional or deviates from the traditional large-scale movements.

### **Methodology**

A combination of primary and secondary sources were used for this thesis although the latter was more often used than the former. Reasons that are attributed to emigration in Ireland and Germany are explained by using secondary sources; Carl Wittke's book, *We Who Built America*, is mostly used for this section but also throughout this paper. Douglas C. Daly's article, "The Leaf That Launched a Thousand Ships," was used to explain the scientific aspect of how the potato rot spread throughout Ireland. The documentary, *The Story of the Irish Emigration*, directed by Paul Wagner was used to help provide a detailed and visual insight on the lives of the Irish emigrants especially during the Great Famine years. Stanley Nadel's book, *Little Germany Ethnicity: Religion, and Class in New York City 1845-80*, was used for two major sections on the German immigrants because it does an excellent job in explaining the economic downturn and land scarcity in Germany. The information from Frederick Luebke's book, "*Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration*" will thoroughly explain the hardships the German immigrants encountered when in America. Among these secondary sources are almost two dozen other secondary sources that includes other books, articles, journals, and internet scholarly peer reviewed sources. Primary sources include letters written back home by Irish and German immigrants, historical data retrieved from the Tenement Museum, first hand observations of the dwellings at the Tenement Museum, and an email message from the historian Kerby Miller that details the pro-assimilative factors of the Irish immigrants. Both the Irish and Germans' success in America will be analyzed using a blend of different sources.

This paper will address the following research areas: how the Irish and German immigrants of the nineteenth century were able to find economic stability in the United States by the type of jobs they labored in and through their occupational mobility; the types of cultural barriers the Irish and German immigrants encountered in America, and the steps they took to overcome them.

### **The Irish, Why they Left?**

During the mid-1800s, Ireland experienced a big wave of emigration. With no hope for survival in Ireland, destitute farmers, the poor, and even youths of both sexes sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, for weeks and sometimes months, to make their way to the United States in search for a better life.<sup>3</sup> The conditions on the ships they sailed in were unsanitary and congested. Mortality was common on these so-called coffin ships. Although emigrants were aware of the dangers of sailing to America, they believed that it was worth the risk. According to Carl Wittke, in proportion to its population, people emigrated Ireland more than any other country. More than four and a quarter million Irish immigrants came to the United States from 1820 to 1920.<sup>4</sup>

Ireland, as a conquered territory, had many problems during this period, which are chiefly attributed to the mass and accumulating emigration rate of the Irish people. The people of Ireland despised not only foreign rule by the British, but a foreign church which their conquerors tried to establish among them.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the people of Ireland suffered from a system of landholding and trade restrictions, which damaged their economy and denied them of the incentive to improve their status.<sup>6</sup> For instance, several banking establishments in Cork and Munster

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<sup>3</sup> Adams, Forbs William, *Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1932), page 210.

<sup>4</sup> Wittke, 129.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

collapsed.<sup>7</sup> Hence, not only were the Irish people deprived from exercising basic rights, but a future optimistic outlook was farfetched given the situation at the time. Furthermore, the prime factors that drove the Irish out of Ireland consisted of “fruitless rebellions, periodic famines, primitive agriculture methods, unemployment, low wages and high rents, and intermittent civil wars among various factions.<sup>8</sup>” Agrarian failure as well as tithes and rents under the Whiteboys,<sup>9</sup> a secret agrarian organization, thereby created a state of peasantry in Ireland. Therefore, the conditions that led the Irish to emigrate were due to social and economic hardships. The Irish perceived the United States as the promised land of good hope and prosperity that guaranteed them opportunities that they were deprived of in Ireland.

### ***The Great Hunger of 1845-52: “An Gorta Mor”***

From 1815 onward, Ireland witnessed a progressive decline of its farming class. Ireland’s Great Potato Famine also known as the Great Hunger of 1845-1852 (*An Gorta Mor*) fueled the Irish emigration during this period. The Great Potato famine was caused by “late blight, a disease of potatoes that swept across Ireland like a scythe.”<sup>10</sup> How this blight came about is intriguing and worth noting.

The prevalence of the potato crop in Ireland dates back to the mid-1500s. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the potato began to become an important crop in Ireland and by the eighteenth century it was the main staple diet.<sup>11</sup> Potatoes during this time made sixty percent of their food supply of about 8.1 million people, with some 3.3 million Irish relying on it almost

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<sup>7</sup> Adams, 131.

<sup>8</sup> Wittke, 129.

<sup>9</sup> Adams, 129.

<sup>10</sup> Daly Douglas, “The Leaf that Launched a Thousand ships,” *Natural History* 105, no. 1 (1996): 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

exclusively.<sup>12</sup> Potatoes were especially accommodating to the poor because they were an incredibly inexpensive crop and easy to harvest. For example, an acre of land produced enough potatoes to supply a family with ten pounds of potatoes a day for a whole year.<sup>13</sup> The average per capita consumption of potatoes was significant: In agricultural areas it was ton a year, or more than five pounds a day, and as much as fourteen pounds a day for adult males.<sup>14</sup> Given that potatoes were grown abundantly and were accessible to almost every family, it is evident that harvested potatoes could not just feed an average family, but was also enough to make them full.

It is obvious that the Irish overly depended on the potato crop. Due to the “lack of raw minerals, investment capital, and a skilled labor force,” Ireland relied mostly on agriculture with potatoes being their staple crop.<sup>15</sup> For instance, in the 1840s, over two-thirds of the work force depended on agriculture, and potatoes provided over fifty percent of the population with an adequate and healthy diet.<sup>16</sup> Laborers were even compensated in potatoes or sometimes in the use of land to grow them.<sup>17</sup> What also is attributed to this overdependence is the fact that the potato was better adapted than other staple crops to the cool, wet conditions in Ireland, thus making it more productive and more dependable.<sup>18</sup> When the potato crop failed, it took a toll on the entire nation. Because of the Irish’s exclusive reliance on the potato, they did not have any back up food to overly depend on. The potato crop could be stored for only a few months by

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>13</sup> “A Brief History of the Potato in Ireland,” *Social Education* Vol. 64, No. 5 (2000).

<sup>14</sup> Daly, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Home for the Heart, *American Immigration Law Center*, Internet, available from [http://www.aifl.org/exhibit/ex\\_irishim.htm](http://www.aifl.org/exhibit/ex_irishim.htm), accessed 17 March 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine Impact, Ideology and Rebellion* (New York: Palgrave, 2002),

<sup>17</sup> Daly, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 3.

digging a pit, filling it with potatoes, and covering them with moss or leaves.<sup>19</sup> It is important to underscore that this was a time period when no food preservation existed, for example refrigeration. Hence, the damage to the crop created mass starvation given that those potatoes that were stored would eventually be “vulnerable to mold,<sup>20</sup>” and that the potato crop failed overall.

The process of how the potato blight came about is significant. It was the late blight that caused the destruction of the crop, which is caused by a fungus. *Phytophthora infestans* was on the potato crop, in which its spores germinated on the leaves and stems as well as the soil.<sup>21</sup> It is known that the destruction done by the disease occurs late in the growing season, hence the name. Dark spots are signs that indicate the initial infection, when the fungus’s invasive, threadlike hyphae have penetrated the hosts’ plant’s epidermis.<sup>22</sup> Subsequent to this spread, in wet conditions, a downy growth appears on the affected leaves, and when the fungus emerges it develops sporangia, which then discharges numerous asexually produced zoospores.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the leaves and stems deteriorate, and the plant dies. This blight led to one of the most disastrous famines in history. Every fungal lesion per leaf could generate 300,000 offspring every five days, and each of those, 300,000 more in turn.<sup>24</sup> Within a few days, late blight could wipe out a potato field. The rapid destruction of the crop could not have been prevented or ceased immediately because the fungus would rapidly multiply overnight.

The blight had devastating consequences on the people of Ireland. The magnitude of the suffering was enormous for such a small country. Many either died from hunger triggered by the

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<sup>19</sup> “A Brief History of the Potato in Ireland.”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Daly, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 4.

blight itself, or as they tried to emigrate on the coffin ships. There were awful smells that pervaded the countryside.<sup>25</sup> The smells came from the decaying plants as well as from the unburied bodies of the deceased. The latter occurred as a consequence of the uncared-for and unable to care for themselves individuals who were weakened by hunger and then killed by famine fever, which was a “lost-bourse relapsing fever and especially louse-borne typhus [...]”<sup>26</sup> In addition to the vicious blight that was fueled by the potato rot, large amounts of food were shipped out of Ireland and into Britain.<sup>27</sup> These conditions led many to immigrate to the United States. The ships they came with were generally overcrowded and undermanned. Sometimes there were not enough cargo to carry those who wanted to sail to America. In 1827, Irish immigration to America was around 20,000.<sup>28</sup> As the years progressed, this number increased significantly, but during the Irish famine immigration mounted to startling totals. Figure 1 depicts the emigration rate in Ireland from 1846 to 1850. The statistics indicate that every year following the famine emigration rates increased significantly. It is especially noteworthy that in the immediate years of the famine, between 1846 and 1847, close to 104,000 Irish people emigrated. This supports the idea that the famine itself created not just a devastating blow to the Irish economy, but it also gave rise to a pessimism; there was no hope for a better and improved Ireland. The census of 1850 reported 961,719 Irish in the United States, and by 1860, the total had reached 1,611,304.<sup>29</sup>

### *Religious Persecution*

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Daly, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Wagner, *Out of Ireland: The Story of the Irish Emigration*, directed by Paul Wagner (1995; n.k: Shanachie Entertainment, 1997.), DVD.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 131.

Ireland during the nineteenth century was known to be a religiously-oriented society, in which Catholicism was especially central to Irish national identity. Because the Irish society was devoted to its Catholic faith, and included the church in all aspects of their lives, the church was greatly influential and powerful. However, the strong role of Catholicism in Ireland was increasingly breeding opposition by the British Empire. The government was concerned with the church's capacity to influence behavior, and particularly that the Church's hierarchy was encroaching upon the faith and morals of the Irish people.<sup>30</sup> The government's concern was enforced largely through Penal Laws, in attempting to impede the Catholic faith. The level of oppression is noteworthy: Irish Catholics were forbidden to hold public office, vote, practice law, open or teach in a school, manufacture arms, or hold a post in the military or civil service.<sup>31</sup> It was also common that Catholic farmers would be evicted from lands that were once owned by their ancestors.<sup>32</sup> The English clearly had no compassion for the people they ruled over; instead, their cruelty towards the Catholics were acts as a result of their own greed. Stripping the Catholics away of basic human rights were indicative of the Irish Catholics lack of liberty in Ireland. As a result, from 1845 to 1855, approximately 1.8 million Irish people, who were mainly Catholic farmers and laborers, emigrated Ireland.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Other Reasons for Emigration***

Besides the famine and religious persecution as major reasons for such a high scale of emigration, there were also other factors why people left Ireland. Under British rule, the people of Ireland struggled to survive day to day. For instance, the standard wage per day was sixpence

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy White, "Catholicism and Nationalism in Ireland: From Fusion in the 19th Century to Separation in the 21st Century," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 4(1) (2007): 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ignatiev, Noel, *How the Irish Became White* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), 34.

<sup>32</sup> Home for the Heart.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

including one meal and eightpence per day without food.<sup>34</sup> The poor, at most, ate nothing more than potatoes, a little milk, and occasionally fish. People rarely ate meat because it was so scarce; many families never saw it from one year to the next.<sup>35</sup> Not only did they eat poorly, but their housing was also inadequate. The dwelling of a peasant where he raised his children was “filthy, damp, cold, and smoky.”<sup>36</sup> It was common for families to live in one room of the house, and in some cases with the family’s pig. Many areas of Ireland, including the slums of Dublin, was stricken by poverty, disease, and filth in the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup>

Denial of certain privileges in Ireland made it a fertile recruiting country for immigrants. Education was impossible for hundreds of families, possibly due to the high poverty rate. Political privileges were also denied.<sup>38</sup> The British forced the Catholic Irish to practice their religion in secret.<sup>39</sup> They also placed a financial strain on the Irish. The Irish people had the burden of paying tithes for the support of a Church establishment which Irish Roman Catholics hated.<sup>40</sup> Often times the lands of the Irish were confiscated, and sometimes they even had to pay rent for their own land.<sup>41</sup> When six million Roman Catholics refused to pay tithes to the Church of six hundred thousand Protestants, their properties were subject to seizure.<sup>42</sup> Under British rule, Ireland during this time suppressed emancipation for the Irish in many ways.

### **Life in the United States for the Irish: *Economic Opportunities***

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<sup>34</sup> Wittke, 129.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>39</sup> Wagner.

<sup>40</sup> Wittke, 130.

<sup>41</sup> Wagner.

<sup>42</sup> Potter, George, *To the Golden Door The Story of the Irish in Ireland and America* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown & Company), 78.

The majority of Irish immigrants in the United States started out as unskilled laborers. The reasons for this was because their problems at home transferred and became attached to their status as they entered America. Almost all of the Irish who fled their homeland were poor and uneducated. They had no trade and lacked particular skills.<sup>43</sup> With no visible means of support, Irish immigrants took any jobs they got, which were primarily in cities close to the ports they had arrived at. For example, three thousand Irish were employed on the Erie Canal alone as early as 1818. The Irish labor was integral to almost every canal built in the United States before the Civil War.<sup>44</sup> The Irish immigrants paved the streets themselves and received low wages.<sup>45</sup> The United States went as far as to send money to Ireland to recruit the Irish to work here for cheap labor.<sup>46</sup> Women took jobs as servants and in service areas.<sup>47</sup> Other Irish immigrants worked in mill towns and in lumber industries in New England. Many wanted to proceed Westward, but being poverty-stricken confined them in the New England states. Many Irish immigrants also despised the Blacks because they had to compete with them for low paying jobs. In rare instances, contractors for internal improvement projects recruited them in the labor market of the East and brought them to the West and South.<sup>48</sup> In general, however, because capitalism during this time had little or no regulation, Irish immigrants were often exposed to exploitation.<sup>49</sup>

The working conditions in the United States which the Irish labored in were harsh. Newspapers reported that those who were employed in canals and railroad construction projects

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<sup>43</sup> Wittke, 131.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>45</sup> Wagner.

<sup>46</sup> Wittke, 131.

<sup>47</sup> Wagner

<sup>48</sup> Wittke, 134.

<sup>49</sup> Wagner.

were treated “like slaves.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, although Irish employment were heavy in these fields, the newspapers friendly to the Irish immigrants warned them to stay from these fields.<sup>51</sup> The wages of the Irish was low; it was usually \$1 a day but often less. Because their wages were not fixed, they were paid partly in whisky and “store pay,” or merchandise, sold at high prices.<sup>52</sup>

Besides having to work hard to develop their lives in the United States, many Irish immigrants perceived life in the United States as better than compared to Ireland. For instance, they received low pay for their labor but were still content living here. Letters that were written home by Irishmen as early as 1830 emphasized that, in American, meat, flour, and gin are cheap and that “there is no complaining on our streets” [...] “if a man likes work, he nees not want for victuals.”<sup>53</sup> This shows that even though the Irish faced economic hardship, they still had had opportunities to better themselves in America. Another letter written by an Irish immigrant in 1850 stressed the cheapness and abundant availability of land in America. He remarked, “On arrival I purchased 120 acres of land at \$5 an acre. You must bear in mind that I have purchased the land out, and it is to me and mine an estate for ever [...]”<sup>54</sup> His experience demonstrates that Irish immigrants were able to become successful in America, and success was presented as a permanent dream rather than a temporary or nonexistent one in Ireland. Furthermore, context implies to us that farmers wrote these letters, that is, the Irish farmers in America who were once deprived of its own farm land in Ireland.

### **The Irish’s Social Experience in America:**

#### ***Living Conditions***

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<sup>50</sup> Wittke, 136.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>54</sup> “25f. Irish and German Immigration,” *US History*, Internet, Available from <http://www.ushistory.org/us/25f.asp>, accessed 2 April 2014.

Initially, most of the Irish immigrants lived in impoverished conditions. Because many came to the United States as poverty-stricken individuals, they took any affordable housing they found, most of which were squalor dwellings. They lived in crowded tenements, frequently with twenty or more families living in one house.<sup>55</sup> An example of the horrific living conditions of the Irish is noted at the Tenement Museum in New York City. During the 1860s, a Catholic-Irish family, the Moores, dwelled at 97 Orchard Street.<sup>56</sup> Their entire dwelling is equivalent to what is today a standard bedroom. With their kitchen and bedroom all congested in one tiny area, there was no ventilation.<sup>57</sup> These living conditions had disastrous health consequences. The mortality rate among the children of the Irish poor was alarmingly high. Diseases, such as cholera epidemics, always ravaged immigrants living in hovels in the western and eastern sections of New York City than in other communities.<sup>58</sup> Sadly, the Moore's daughter, Angus, died as a result of such diseases and malnourishment.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the harsh living conditions the Irish faced in America, the lives they had over here were better than what they left in Ireland due to the abundance of opportunities. During the 1840s, many viewed emigrating from Ireland as a "flight from poverty."<sup>60</sup> Due to the severity of the famine more than one million people died of starvation and famine related diseases.<sup>61</sup> As a result, migrating to the United States was a better option for the Irish at the time because food was available here and their lives could prolong longer than in Ireland. The English government,

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<sup>55</sup> Wittke, 134.

<sup>56</sup> Irish Outsiders, Tenement Museum.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Wittke, 134.

<sup>59</sup> Irish Outsiders.

<sup>60</sup> Bodnar, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Kenny, Kevin, "Irish Immigrants in the United States," U.S Department of State, accessed March 2, 2014,

<http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2008/03/20080307131416ebyessedo0.6800043.html#axzz2uJa1LKkI>

which presided over Ireland, also did not provide opportunities to expand the economy. Instead, the economy was almost exclusively agrarian “catering for its own growing population and for the rapidly increasing British market.”<sup>62</sup> Ireland was in lack of a reliable real wage system.<sup>63</sup> This not only exemplified the inefficacies of the government, but it also provided little or no incentives for people to work. During the mid-1800s, America was experiencing acceleration in economic growth, which expanded both domestic and foreign markets in manufacturing and agriculture.<sup>64</sup> Contrary to Ireland, living in the United States was more suitable because economic opportunities here paved the way for self-improvement; the Irish who lived in urban squalors at least had the chance to save up their money and move to better comforting areas whereas in Ireland poverty was deemed permanent.

### *Discrimination*

Irish immigrants during the 1800s endured racial discrimination and negative stereotyping, particularly the Irish Catholics. Competition from Irish labor was resented by other workers. Certain areas attempted to restrict the sale of lots in order to keep out Catholic purchasers, and the sign “No Irish Need Apply,” were posted on some factories.<sup>65</sup> According to the Irish Outsiders Tour by the Tenement Museum, it is known that the British had a part in this type of discrimination.<sup>66</sup> Anti-Irish jokes were also common during this era. Jokes towards the Irish were told in a mocking fashion with the use of the Irish accent; it often portrayed the Irish

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<sup>62</sup> Mokyr, Joel, and Cormac Ó. Gráda. 1988, Poor and getting poorer? Living standards in Ireland before the Famine, *Economic History Review* 41, no. 2: 209-235. Historical Abstracts, EBSCOhost, accessed February 24, 2014.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Bodnar, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Wittke, 137.

<sup>66</sup> Irish Outsiders.

as lazy and incompetent.<sup>67</sup> Based on their transferred social status from Ireland as poor immigrants, the Irish were the least likely to have power to object to such ridicule.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, because the Irish immigrants were “the first group that was really poor,” they were being depicted as a completely “separate race.”<sup>69</sup> People in America viewed the Irish differently in a negative light, even scrutinizing their physical attributes and determining that it set them off from the other races.<sup>70</sup> This level of discrimination by the American society created many obstacles for the Irish immigrants. The negative stereotyping prevented the Irish from acquiring non intensive labor jobs, and further ostracized them from the mainstream society.

The Irish fought hard to overcome the negative social stigmas that were attached to their status. They integrated themselves in the American society through their various and heavy participation in many areas. They served during the Civil War and flaunted their American patriotism and Irish heritage. For instance, they carried green flags alongside American colors during the war.<sup>71</sup> As the Irish population continuously increased in the United States, they started to take advantage in exploiting their political power. The Irish organized themselves and created a voting block known as the “Green Machine.”<sup>72</sup> St. Patrick’s Day, which is an Irish religious holiday on March 17<sup>th</sup>, became increasingly prominent in America after a group of Irish soldiers marched in lower Manhattan in 1762.<sup>73</sup> In 1848, one official New York City St. Patrick’s Day

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<sup>67</sup> Rolston, Bill. 2003, Bringing it all back home: Irish emigration and racism, *Race & Class* 45, no. 2: 39-53. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, accessed December 31, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Wagner.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Wittke, 165.

<sup>72</sup> “History of St. Patrick’s Day,” *History.com*, Internet, available from <http://www.history.com/topics/st-patricks-day>, accessed 18 March 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

was created as a result of several New York Irish Aid societies' efforts in the previous years.<sup>74</sup> Today, St. Patrick's Day is not only recognized as a national holiday, but the parade is one of the longest and widely celebrated in many states. Approximately three million spectators attend the St. Patrick's Day parades.<sup>75</sup> This shows that the Irish were gaining recognition for their heritage and were being accepted in the American society. Hence, although America initially presented the Irish with great challenge, they were able to break away from their once stereotypical and dehumanizing image by proving their self-worth in the public sphere.

### *Ties to the Roman Catholic Church*

When the Irish left Ireland for the United States, they brought their religion with them. Similarly as when they were in Ireland, Irish immigrants went to and viewed the church as solutions to their problems. In the new land, the church gave the Irish "a measure of dignity at a time when he was often made to feel that he was a lower breed of humanity."<sup>76</sup> The role of the Church was significant in other areas of the Irish immigrants' life: it provided parochial schools, dispensed charity in many forms, and provided the counsel of priests for hardships immigrants faced in their new environment.<sup>77</sup> As more and more Irish immigrated to the United States, there was a rapid expansion of the Catholic Church. It has been estimated that there were thirty thousand adherents of the Roman Catholic faith in the United States in 1790. By 1830, the Church claimed 600,000, and by 1860, 4,500,000 members.<sup>78</sup> By 1852, there were Catholic newspapers in nine of the leading cities and Catholic publishing houses in Baltimore,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Wittke, 151.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 152.

Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.<sup>79</sup> As a result of the fast paced immigration rate of the Irish in the United States, the Church not only served as an important religious institution for them, but it created great social agency, and thus the religion became widespread.

In the 1840s, nativists staged rallies against the Catholic Church in Philadelphia. It was speculated that they chose the heart of the Catholic turf because they had a desire to provoke the Irish.<sup>80</sup> Even though they were faced with a tremendous amount of religious intolerance, the Irish Catholics fought back. Noel Ignatiev's book, *How The Irish Became White*, notes that in a nativist riot in 1843 local Catholics intervened, breaking up the rally by heckling and throwing rocks and garbage.<sup>81</sup> The nativists staged another rally three days later. The Irish again did not give up. It is known that they actually waited for the nativists, and this time weapons were fired.<sup>82</sup> These riots alarmed the city of Philadelphia. Ignatiev denotes that one reason for such alarm was "the willingness and ability of the Catholics to defend themselves."<sup>83</sup> Although violence is not always an ideal response to hostility, the Irish retaliation shows how they were standing up for themselves in fighting against the anti-Catholic agitation. Upon a personal contact with Dr. Kerby Miller, who is scholar on Irish immigration, he states that:

"In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Yankee establishment realized that the Irish immigrants' religion, Catholicism, was counter-revolutionary, and the Church and its clergy (and parochial schools) were bulwarks of capitalism and conservatism. From that point on, anti-Irish and anti-Catholic agitation was, for US political elites, merely an occasional and insincere tool to mobilize the elite's "useful idiots" at election time."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>80</sup> Ignatiev, 153.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>84</sup> Miller, Kerby, email message to historian, April 28, 2014.

Miller's words underscore how the Irish being accepting into the American society was destined to occur regardless of their negative image during that time. The nativist agitation had no choice but to forego their revolutionary tendencies because the Catholic Irish vote was integral to American politics.

### *Politics and Political Machines*

During the 1850s, many Irishmen were associated with Tammany Hall politics in New York City. They represented Democratic ideologies, more so because the "Irishmen had little in common with the 'Anglomen and monocrats' who supported Federalists and Whigs."<sup>85</sup> As early as 1820, Tammany Hall composed of Irishmen.<sup>86</sup> They operated in Tammany Hall by buying votes such as providing jobs and housing to immigrant families in exchange for their vote.<sup>87</sup> Tammany Hall was seen as a corrupted political machine. Political bosses stuffed ballot boxes, "fixed" arrests for petty violations of the law, and paid the rent of the poor when the landlord threatened eviction.<sup>88</sup> However, during that time they also had a reputation for being faithful to their Irish counterparts that faced hardships in America, particularly "basing their politics on personal loyalty to friends and relatives in the absence of a strong central government structure."<sup>89</sup> The Irish obtaining social and economic opportunities in the United States during that time was a product of the social cohesion generated by the Irish who were politically powerful. Tammany Hall not only, provided communal services to poor Irish immigrants in helping them overcome their struggles and developing their lives in the United States, but it paved the pathway for the Irish to achieve political power.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>87</sup> Clock, Gerard, American Urban History Class. Fall 2012.

<sup>88</sup> Wittke, 157.

<sup>89</sup> Bodnar, 203.

## **Irish Immigrants Assimilation and Accomplishments in the United States**

As the years progressed, the Irish immigrants were no longer seen as mere immigrants. Rather, they had assimilated into the American culture and became “thoroughly Americanized.”<sup>90</sup> An observer notes that in the second generation, “the Irishman has disappeared,” and the “children of Irish decent have generally lost their distinctive marks of their origin.”<sup>91</sup> One reason that is attributed to their social and economic elevation in America was that many Irish men and women were being educated.<sup>92</sup> History considers that Tammany Hall led to this since Irish politicians were gaining an incredible amount of power and leverage as they ran political machines.<sup>93</sup> As a result, being the voice of the Irish political world, Tammany Hall served as the foundation for the future success of many Irish immigrants and those of Irish decent.

The Irish went from having common labor jobs to white-collar jobs.<sup>94</sup> During the 1850s, Irish immigrants sent, at minimum, \$1,000,000 a year, and many prepaid tickets to their friends and family in Ireland.<sup>95</sup> This shows that as the Irish were moving up the social ladder in America, they were helping their fellow loved ones back in Ireland to advance in their lives as well. Alexander T. Stewart remarks that in less than twenty years “the lucky Irishman became the owner of the finest store in the world and one of the largest real-estate owners in New York.”<sup>96</sup> The Irish in the future generations made significant political gains. The vastness of opportunities in America was further broadened by the New Deal during the 1930s. New Deal

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<sup>90</sup> Wittke, 175.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>92</sup> Irish Outsiders.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Wittke, 175.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 175-176.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 176.

appointments enabled Irish politicians to obtain federal positions as well as judgeships.<sup>97</sup> These appointments, in turn, ushered the future success of Irish-American elected officials such as Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and President John F. Kennedy.<sup>98</sup> The fact that both Daley and Kennedy were products of Irish immigrant laborers and that both were able to obtain prestigious white-collar jobs signifies that the American dream is feasible if one is willing to work hard.

The Irish advanced both socially and economically. The transformation of the Irish labor is significant in that the construction jobs they once did is now done by newer immigration groups, such as the French-Canadians, Italians, and Poles.<sup>99</sup> Many went into clerking, bookkeeping, and business or has become a traveling salesman.<sup>100</sup> This advancement counters the preconceived notion of the 1800s that the Irish would never advance but would instead “become the first permanent working class in the United States.”<sup>101</sup> According to the United States Census Bureau, as of 2009, the median income for Irish-Americans was \$56, 383.<sup>102</sup> The poverty rate among this group is 10%, which is lower than the rate of the 14% Americans.<sup>103</sup> The statistics tell that the economic life of the Irish has significantly transformed in that their salaries represent the average white collar Americans’ rather than that of the second class citizens’.

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<sup>97</sup> “Immigration...Irish,” *Library of Congress*, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/alt/irish8.html>, accessed March 2, 2014.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Wittke, 177.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>101</sup> Kenny, Kevin, “Irish Immigrants in the United States,” U.S Department of State, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2008/03/20080307131416ebyeessedo0.6800043.html#axzz2uJa1LKkI>

<sup>102</sup> “Irish-American Heritage Month (March) and St. Patrick’s Day (March 17): 2011,” *Census.gov*, Internet, available from [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/cb11ff-03\\_irishamer.pdf](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/cb11ff-03_irishamer.pdf).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

Socially, the Irish overcame the pressure to forego aspects of their culture that nativists once imposed on them. They made an impact on the American language: Numerous Irish words and phrases have been absorbed in our everyday speech; whiskey, galore, and hooligan are such examples.<sup>104</sup> Nativists often attacked the Irish religion (Catholicism) and perceived it as a threat to their way of life. This anti-Catholicism sentiment was ultimately put to rest when John F. Kennedy was elected President. He said, “I am not the Catholic candidate for President. I am the Democratic Party’s candidate for President, who happens to also be a Catholic. I do not speak for my church on public matters – and the church does not speak for me.”<sup>105</sup> Kennedy’s words and his victory in being elected president demonstrates that the Irish did not have to give up their religion in order to be successful in America. The Irish are considered to be one of the most prosperous ethnic groups today in the United States, which they significantly excel national averages on education levels, occupational status, income, and home ownership.<sup>106</sup> Although the Irish encountered early obstacles, they were able to successfully overcome them and mold their Irish-American identity.

### **German Emigration, Why They Left: *Economic Downturn***

The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 took a toll on Germany’s economy. The adoption of the Napoleonic administrative reforms in the Confederation of the Rhine related directly to the urgent need of the new states to meet the pressuring financial and manpower requirements of the French war machine.<sup>107</sup> The debts and costs of years of war, occupation, and

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<sup>104</sup> Wittke, 178.

<sup>105</sup> Kenny.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Aaslestad, Katherine, and Karen Hagemann. “1806 and Its Aftermath: Revisiting the Period of the Napoleonic Wars in German Central European Historiography,” *Central European History* (Cambridge University Press / UK) 39, no. 4: 547-579, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed April 27, 2014), 560.

new imperial obligations were demanding to the economy overall.<sup>108</sup> The two decades after 1830 represented the earliest mixtures of German emigration during the modern era.<sup>109</sup> A combination of trade crises and agriculture disaster led thousands of individuals from Baden and Wutrtmberg to emigrate.<sup>110</sup> Like in Ireland, the potato rot also occurred in Germany. A shortage of the potato crop developed in 1842, and grain prices rose as a consequence. Grain prices increased by 250 to 300 percent in two years and potato prices rose 425 percent from 1845-47.<sup>111</sup> Severe weather conditions also contributed to bad harvest, causing food prices to surge.<sup>112</sup> Hunger riots became widespread, and emigration rates surged in the 1840s.<sup>113</sup> Artisans, who did not grow their own food, abundantly emigrated because they were especially vulnerable to famine.<sup>114</sup> Although foreign imports were numerous in German markets, the German industry was unable to compete.<sup>115</sup> Though people from all over Germany migrated, the Rhine represented the main highway out of Germany to the New World.<sup>116</sup> There was no hope in the 1850s as no economic relief was brought about. Germany experienced bad harvest annually, and the artisans suffered more severely from the crisis than before.<sup>117</sup> Bankruptcy also became common among craftsmen. For example, the bankruptcy rate among craftsmen rose from one in 250 in the 1840s to one in

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 560.

<sup>109</sup> Bodnar, 13.

<sup>110</sup> Nadel, Stanley, *Little Germany Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City 1845-80*, (Urbana:University of Illinois Press, 1990), 16.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>112</sup> Siegmar, Muehl, "German Emigration to North America. 1817-18: The Gagern-FurstenWarther," *Yearbook of German-American studies*, 37 (2002): 53-77.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>115</sup> "Waves of German Immigrants," *The Advocates for Human Rights*, Internet, available from, <http://www.energyofanation.org/4e667f77-e302-4c1a-9d2e-178a0ca31a32.html?NodeId=>, accessed March 2, 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Nadel, 17.

<sup>117</sup> Nadel, 18.

seventy-six in the 1850s, which is a tripling of the rate.<sup>118</sup> Bankrupt artisans consequently immigrated to America. For the Germans, having the tools necessary in order to achieve a prosperous economic future was ideal. With the growing fragmentation of the German economy, this vision could not be molded into reality. Consequently a stratified wave of emigrants was produced. It comprised of almost entirely “middle class”: Small farmers and independent artisans.<sup>119</sup>

### *Land Scarcity*

Land was one of the most important things that the Germans valued, and families took pride in ensuring that their sons acquired land. During the 1830s, the population in Germany was rapidly rising in the countryside. As a result, prices were keeping pace, especially the price of land.<sup>120</sup> Certain German states also had the rule of impartible inheritance (*Anerbenrecht*) which meant that an owner’s parcel of land was to go to the eldest son (or sometimes the youngest, as the case may have been).<sup>121</sup> However, this rule was modified to include the division of land among all heirs in the Southwestern German states, the Hesse, and the Rhineland.<sup>122</sup> Small farmers encountered difficulty when trying to set up their sons with viable farm land. Plots in general also became too small to support a family.<sup>123</sup> The scarcity of land in Germany during this time led many farmers to sell out their land altogether and immigrate to the United States.<sup>124</sup> The threat of losing land for those who already owned land, and the news of the already land scarcity

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>119</sup> Bodnar, 115.

<sup>120</sup> Nadel, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Luebke, C. Frederick, *Germans in the New World Essays in the History of Immigration* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 161.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>124</sup> Nadel, 17.

for future potential landowners propelled the people of Germany to exit Germany for the sake of trying to avoid being absorbed in a state of peasantry and an unstable economic future.

### *Advertisements*

As the economic situation worsened in Germany, German emigration became increasingly fostered by American advertisements. “American Letters” advertising land were distributed throughout Germany.<sup>125</sup> Because the primary cause of German immigration was economic, these letters portrayed the United States as a solution to German’s economic issues. The United States was the promise land of cheap and good soil.<sup>126</sup> Sometimes certain states in the United States sent agents abroad to entice people to immigrate to America. For example, Maryland sent an agent to Germany in 1865 and printed a pamphlet depicting its advantages for German colonists.<sup>127</sup> With the scarcity of land in Germany, these pamphlets represented an optimistic alternative for many Germans. Figure 2 depicts the number of German immigrants in the United States from 1832 to 1845. The rising number of German immigrants tells that the United States represented a different but welcoming economic order to the Germans.

### **Life in the United States for the Germans: *Settlement***

The German immigrant found home in many areas of the United States. Those who were poor mainly remained in New York State, and there they created many establishments.<sup>128</sup> Toward the end of the 1850s, German immigrants in New York City was estimated to be about 100,000 with twenty churches, fifty schools, ten bookstores, and five printing establishments.<sup>129</sup> Many German immigrants also migrated to the West. In the 1850s there was a heavy

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<sup>125</sup> Wittke, 187.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>127</sup> Wittke, 107.

<sup>128</sup> Wittke,

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 195.

predominance of single males who immigrated to the United States;<sup>130</sup> due to the scarcity of land in Germany, heading out West in the United States was seen an optimistic prospect for land opportunity.<sup>131</sup> German immigrants heavily settled in wooded areas in the eastern and north central counties of Wisconsin where they were able to purchase farms from Irish and American pioneers;<sup>132</sup> this story was common among German immigrants wherever they settled in the Middle West. German immigrants preferred wooded areas for farming because “it was a sign of superior soil.”<sup>133</sup> Many avoided the Southern states because of slavery, and some even went as far as California to establish themselves as artisans and in farming groups.<sup>134</sup> The Germans place of settlement in the United States occurred as a result of their careful planning when they were in Germany, and more so as a response to the problem of land shortage in certain German states. The German establishments within their settlements was further an indication of how they were adjusting themselves in the American society, that is, by building a solid foundation in order to accommodate their fellow Germans in coping in their new environments.

Even though the majority of German immigrants established their lives in America according to their plans, some immigrants lacked such arrangements. Impoverished immigrants who came to America with little or nothing did not have money to pay for their passage. Indentured contracts served as a form of repayment. In a letter written back to Germany by a young German aristocrat who studied German-Immigrant life in America, Moritz von Furstnwarther, notes that “As soon as a ship arrives in America the captain leaves it to make it known to newspapers. Artisans and farmers [...] then make their appearance to look for such

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<sup>130</sup> Nadel, 26.

<sup>131</sup> Clock.

<sup>132</sup> Wittke, 198.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 199.

people they can use. They pay the captain the fare and take them into work and service.”<sup>135</sup>

Although the indentured system was not ideal, it had its advantages, particularly social and economic. Immigrants were able to learn the English language, become familiar with local customs, and acquire skills during service time.<sup>136</sup> As we will see later, this helped the German immigrants in their assimilation. In some situations, when German immigrants chose to work for his employer beyond his required contract time, he had the opportunity to acquire his own land to begin farming.<sup>137</sup>

### *German Economic Opportunities*

The German immigrants worked in a large array of occupations. It is known that they “did not merely enter the economy as isolated individuals—they colonized it.”<sup>138</sup> Friedrich Kapp, who was a German-American politician calculated the German immigration from 1819 to 1871 at 2,358,709, and estimated that this represented an actual importation of money to the amount of half a billion dollars, and a potential productive capacity of over one and three quarter billion dollars.<sup>139</sup> This reinforces the idea that Germans’ journey was planned, and that they had money to invest in America. Many of these jobs they labored in were small specialized trades such as furriers and brewers, and others were tailors and shoemakers.<sup>140</sup> Other occupations in which Germans composed the largest ethnic group were food dealers, peddlers, and musical instrument makers.<sup>141</sup> Unlike in Germany, German women in America worked and were not solely dependent upon their husbands as a source of income. Women worked in factories, as domestics,

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<sup>135</sup> Siegmar, Muehl, 67.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>138</sup> Nadel, 62.

<sup>139</sup> Wikke, 187.

<sup>140</sup> Nadel, 62.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 62.

and seamstresses.<sup>142</sup> The German immigrants also had to compete with the Irish immigrants for jobs. These two groups continued to divide the expanding immigrant sector of the economy. For example, in 1880 half of the Germans worked in manufacturing while half of the Irish were in general labor or service in New York City.<sup>143</sup> Skilled German workers had a tendency to dominate the same trades, which means that they remained in major manufacturing centers that matched their skills.<sup>144</sup> The unskilled German immigrants were more inclined to seek work in cities “where the Irish didn’t already dominate,” which was usually by migrating to the West off the heavily Irish coastal cities.<sup>145</sup> This shows that the Germans had a willingness to get the best jobs possible, and to eliminate any competition that would in way hamper their economic paths that they were about to embark on.

Moritz von Furstenwarther determined that Germans’ employed in America were better off financially in America than in Germany by studying their finances. According to his observations in America, artisans could earn about \$1.50 per day.<sup>146</sup> A high demand for German maids could earn \$1.25 to \$1.50 weekly with board. If they had cooking and other skills, they could earn up to \$2.00.<sup>147</sup> It is imperative to stress that in today’s society a person is unable to survive with these wages but in the mid-1800s this was more than enough for a person to make a living. Furstenwarther concluded that the German artisan in America “lives better on a third part of his earnings than he does in Germany with it all.” In this unique land, all industry and trades

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<sup>142</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press), 124.

<sup>143</sup> Nadel, 64.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>146</sup> Muehl, 68.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 68.

are independent and free from all restrictions of craft guilds and government regulation.<sup>148</sup> Due to the soaring prices in Germany, it was extremely difficult for Germans' to live and find work. The production and consumption of goods therefore could not service its' people at a normal rate in Germany. America was not only in need of people to build its country, but its profit driven market gave the German immigrants a double incentive to labor and build a productive life here.

As many German immigrants strove to successfully develop themselves in the United States, they were perceived as hard workers. It was common for German immigrants to seize on a prospective economic opportunity when they saw one. In states where there were waste places that needed to undergo cultivation, German settlers were regarded as valuable acquisition in such.<sup>149</sup> For example, in 1833, a German farmer noted that he purchased a 150 acre farm in Missouri, with thirty acres cleared; a crop of corn, wheat, oats, potatoes, cotton, and pumpkins standing in the held; and one horse, ten cattle, eleven sheep, about fifty hogs, chicken, bees, plows, harness, and implements all for \$1,000. He also stated that, "I have just finished house which cost me \$45.00."<sup>150</sup> Not only were they hardworking, but German immigrants were also frugal. They were particularly irritated by the wasteful methods of the American pioneer, and frowned upon their lazy neighbors, "who sat all day around the hearth 'spitting into the fire,' whittling a piece of wood in utter silence, or going hunting or visiting while his fences were decaying and the livestock played havoc with his crops."<sup>151</sup> While much of the America pioneers did not save for emergencies, German farmers especially were thrifty. They were, in essence, ambitious to get ahead.

### **The Germans' Social Experience in America: *Language Barrier***

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>149</sup> Wittke, 204.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 204.

Despite the German's quick success in America and their ability to assimilate faster than the Irish, they encountered struggles with their language. Several institutional efforts to eliminate the German language were made. Opposition of allowing the German language to assimilate in the United States were championed through the enactment of laws in school. During the early nineteenth century, it was common for German immigrants to arrange with school boards to have subjects be taught in German or in both German and English; school laws were even passed to uphold this. As time progressed, however, Anglo-Americans felt that the spread of the German language was un-American and would disrupt the American way of life. By insisting that English is the only language that should prevail, they created instruction laws to be binding on this notion in states such as Wisconsin, Illinois, Louisiana, and Iowa.<sup>152</sup> The Bennett Law of 1889, for example, "made attendance in public or private schools compulsory for children and defined a school as one in which the common subjects were taught in the English language."<sup>153</sup> Although such restrictive laws were later repealed, the German immigrants of that era extremely faced obstacles with their language that was particularly threatening to their assimilative powers in the United States.

### *Suspicion of the Germans' Religions*

Like the Irish immigrants, the Germans, who brought their religion with them to the United States, were confronted with opposition by the English. Although German immigrants were from many different religious backgrounds, the majority practiced Lutheranism and Catholicism. Similarly to most immigrant groups, religion not only represented a way of life, but it was integral to their coping process in their new environments. The Puritan heritage in America during that time were inclined to make religion a matter of right behavior, which was

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<sup>152</sup> Luebke, 32.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 32.

expressed in Sabbatarianism, temperance movements, and other reformist tendencies.<sup>154</sup> This was pressuring for the Germans because it was not what they expected upon coming to America. Puritanical xenophobic suspicions about the Germans religion placed the immigrants in a position where they had to defend themselves. Such fear was also translated during the 1850s into the politics of a group called the Know Nothingism.<sup>155</sup> This group was a nativist movement that were antagonistic towards the Catholic Irish and Germans.<sup>156</sup> Only native-born Protestants were allowed membership, and their nativist tendencies were facilitated by their slogan “Americans must rule America.”<sup>157</sup> The Germans responded to this hostility by developing a common German ethnic identity grounded on cultural characteristics shared by peasants, artisans, and laborers from several German states of the Rhineland.<sup>158</sup> Despite the negativity, German Catholics not only continued to practice their faith, but they “displayed fierce antagonism against anything that seemed to infringe upon their rights.”<sup>159</sup> German Lutherans in America also overcame the discrimination against their faith by intensifying the social cohesion amongst themselves. They organized themselves in large congregations, and adhered closely to the German language.<sup>160</sup> Lutheran and Catholic Germans’ response to the prejudices against their faith illustrates their efforts to counter discrimination against immigrant groups in America. It also demonstrates their genuine interest in facilitating the American notion of freedom and equality for all; it is such breaking of religious intolerance that contributed to the society we have today, a society that unifies people regardless of race or religion.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 575.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 169.

## *Customs*

The German immigrants remained faithful to their native customs when in America. It is known that their Continental viewpoint was different and often clashed with the prevailing Puritanism viewpoint. Because of this conflict, there was a source of friction with Native Americans, and violent attacks against the German element during the nativist agitation before the Civil War occurred.<sup>161</sup> Not only just their viewpoints, but the habits of the German immigrant remained the same. They loved beer, Sunday picnics and dances, and theatrical performances. Their recreational amusements were further established in organizations. For instance, German organizations dedicated to music, art, drama, sharpshooting, bowling, and card were established.<sup>162</sup>

The German culture assimilated in the United States as incoming German immigrants remained loyal to their roots. It is known that the German immigration group seemed to have “swallowed up the other groups” by the 1860s.<sup>163</sup> They brought their language with them and their lifestyle.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, their drinking beer habit conflicted with Sunday closing laws as beer gardens developed across cities.<sup>165</sup> Similarly to the Irish’s St. Patrick’s Day, one significant occasion of the German culture that was adopted in the United States was “German Day.” This was a once a year celebration of the German heritage, which included masquerade balls, outing, speechmaking, and singing among the German community.<sup>166</sup> The German immigrants also brought the German Christmas celebration with them to the United States. For example,

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<sup>161</sup> Wittke, 206.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 209.

observing the holiday as church festivals and adopting the German Christmas tree<sup>167</sup> were German customs that are now molded into the American culture, most significantly the latter. Even though the Germans embraced a new and foreign life in the United States, they were able to preserve their German national identity. Nativism, which was prominent during this era, did not impede the establishment of the German culture in the United States.

### **German Assimilation and Success in the United States**

In the United States, German immigrants and their children experienced occupational mobility. Because German immigrants came to America with an incredible amount of skill, they were able to quickly entrench themselves in the labor market. They were especially prominent in manufacturing. Skillful Germans were able to start full scale manufacturing concerns in the 1870s and 1880.<sup>168</sup> They established plants to manufacture carriages, fireproof safes, soap, and beer.<sup>169</sup> In Poughkeepsie, forty-nine percent of skilled Germans elevated to white-collar positions.<sup>170</sup> Second generation Germans made significant contributions to American business. They established factories, tailoring, banking, butchering, brewing, and cigar making businesses in Western states.<sup>171</sup> They also took over jobs in carpentry. From 1850 to 1860, the proportion of German carpenters increased from twenty-eight to fifty-four percent whereas American-born carpenters dropped from forty percent to twelve percent.<sup>172</sup> This shows how the Germans not only were able to rapidly establish themselves in economic sectors, but also how they began to dominate in certain occupational fields. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century the rise of machine competition in Germany resulted in the loss of every job. For example, linen

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>168</sup> Bodnar, 173.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 173.

weaving wiped out the cotton industry.<sup>173</sup> However, with their incredible skill to produce inexpensive ready-made clothing, they successfully thrived in the retail business in America. About ninety percent of all ready-made wholesale clothing and eighty percent of the retail business was controlled by German Jews towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>174</sup> Industrialization was thereby more accommodating to the German immigrants in America than in Germany. Although the German immigrants came to America to improve their lives, they simultaneously and inadvertently contributed to the success of American business as well.

A great number of German immigrants became successful farmers in the United States because they came with skillful farming experience from Germany. With their methodological and frugal agriculture practices, they contributed to building the American economy. The Germans were willing to invest the labor and capital necessary to keep productivity high.<sup>175</sup> As a result, they diversified agriculture in the United States, which included cotton, strawberries, grapes, potatoes (sweet, rye, and white) and much more.<sup>176</sup> During the nineteenth century, German immigrants started no less than 672,000 family farms.<sup>177</sup> This number of farms covered a total of 100,000,000 acres.<sup>178</sup> The Germans' extraordinary success in farming in America is thereby viewed in light of their utilization of resources that America had, which is in comparison to what Germany lacked at the time. Not only did America provide land opportunities, but it also provided the means for acquiring land. Purchasing land from the government was one way, and

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<sup>173</sup> Luebke, 162.

<sup>174</sup> Beitrage, Ihre; Neuen Welt, Zum Werden der, *Three Hundred Years of German Immigrants in North America* (Federal Republic of Germany: Library of Congress), 77.

<sup>175</sup> Bowers, Douglas E, "AMERICAN AGRICULTURE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF GERMAN-AMERICANS." *Journal Of NAL Associates* 9, no. ¼ (1984): 5.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>177</sup> Beitrage, Ihre; Neuen Welt, Zum Werden der, 76.

<sup>178</sup> Wittke, 204.

it was the cheapest and safest way.<sup>179</sup> The government had land offices where people could go to, and they would sell an acre at a cost of \$2.00, with 160 acres the minimum purchase.<sup>180</sup> By generating profits from their plots and reinvesting, the Germans were not only accelerating capitalism, but they were advancing their Americanism.

The Germans agriculture practices simultaneously promoted the conservation of the environment. With their diversified farming and extensive cultivation of land, the Germans contributed to preserving the soil. For example, in Franklin County, Tennessee, they revived the worn out soils.<sup>181</sup> By ensuring that the lands are well taken care of, they maired the fields and carefully rooted out stumps and stones.<sup>182</sup> The German-American farmers concern for the conservation of natural resources, and the interest they had for the family farm “has been an enduring legacy that can still be appreciated today.”<sup>183</sup>

An imprint of the German culture still exists today through food adoptions. Germans made substantial contributions to the food industry. Labels such as Blatz and Miller are products of the German brewing business that still exists. Names of food products that are of German root, such as frankfurter and sauerkraut, are foods that Americans today cannot go without on the Fourth of July or even during a regular lunch day in the city.<sup>184</sup> The pretzel, Hausfrau, and pumpernickel were incorporated with their original German spelling into the American dictionaries.<sup>185</sup> This shows that America not only have been accepting towards the Germans’ culture over time, but their way of life has also become an addition the American way of life.

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<sup>179</sup> Muehl, 68.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>181</sup> Bowers, 9.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>184</sup> Beitrage, 77.

<sup>185</sup> Wittke, 231.

## **Results and Discussion**

Conducting research for this thesis has enabled me to uncover the prejudices towards the Irish and German immigrants of the 1800s. I learned that the prejudices of the time are not wholly indicative of the historical reality of these groups' experience. The belief that the German immigrants were all of the middle-class, and more skillful than the Irish immigrants is a misrepresentation and overgeneralization; the results of Furstnwarther's fieldwork revealed this. What I also discovered is that though each groups' reasons from emigrating were fairly different, their experiences in America were similar. Both the Irish and German immigrants struggled to assimilate into the American society. No one group had it easier than the other. Because the measures that they took to overcome the unfair treatment against them were either small scale or idiosyncratic in nature, the Irish and German's advancement were deemed insignificant; is important that we, as the modern generation, do not implicate this view. These measures should be viewed by the history field as well by the outside world as a macro level triumph in light of understanding the theoretical refinement of the Irish and German immigrants' status. Further on the qualitative end, the Irish and German immigrants' steps to success, though not ideal by the mainstream society, were taken mostly due to their marginalization. We as a society need to free ourselves from our own biases and mainstream way of thinking in order to grapple and understand this.

If I had the opportunity to approach this thesis differently or expand on it, I would visit more museums both domestically and internationally. Due to the destructions caused by Hurricane Sandy, The Ellis Island Museum at Ellis Island, New York is currently closed. If it were open, I would have explored their databases that comprises information about late 1800s immigration. If time would permit, I would also visit the German-American Heritage Museum in

Washington D.C that opened in March 2010. To obtain a first-hand Irish perspective on the Great Potato famine, visiting the Donaghmore Famine Workhouse Museum in Donaghmore County Ireland would be ideal.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis focused on the transitioning from hardships to improvements to success of the Irish and German immigrants of the nineteenth century. With the enormity of mass starvation that was fueled by the vicious blight, and exploitation by the hands of British rule, the people of Ireland wanted to escape by all means. Despite the dangers of sailing to America, the Irish believed that it was worth the risk, in that what they were about to encounter would be no worse than what they were leaving behind. To the Irish people, America represented freedom, good hope, and prosperity. The German immigrants also embodied this preconception but they were mainly propelled to emigrate because America was portrayed as having the economic opportunities that they lacked. Both of these groups quickly found jobs in America. The types of occupations in which they labored in, however, were vastly different from one another. The Irish immigrants experienced more occupational mobility than the German immigrants because they started off as common laborers whereas most German immigrants came to America with incredible skill and they tended to dominate the same trades. Although many German immigrants were of the middle class, some were impoverished; they went into indentured servitude upon arrival in America. In general, all aspects of the Irish and German immigrants' finances in America was deemed as better than what they escaped. Letters highlight that despite their low wages, the Irish and German immigrants were able to purchase plenty, particularly the former with food and the latter with cattle and land.

In spite of attaining economic stability, both the Irish and German immigrants' culture were challenged by nativists. The Irish immigrants, who were confronted with racism, were portrayed as being too incompetent to rise up the ranks in the American society due to their alleged degenerated moral standards. Their low status were further exacerbated by suspicions with their ties to Catholicism. The German immigrants were also ostracized because they practiced unwanted religions. In addition, the German language was deemed as disruptive to the American way of life. With all of these oppositions towards the Irish and German culture, the Irish and German immigrant's assimilative powers were threatened. Notwithstanding these hardships, however, their lives were not replicated to mirror their struggles back in their homelands. In employing the First Amendment right that United States Constitution guarantees, these groups were able to invalidate themselves as targets of discrimination. Through their creation of unions and utilization of Tammany Hall, the Irish immigrants were practicing their right to organize, and simultaneously capitalizing on their opportunities to get ahead. Similarly, when their language and religions were threatened by obstruction, the German immigrants practiced their right to organize by intensifying the social cohesion among themselves in order preserve their German national identity. The result of these struggles are all encompassing of the steps that the Irish and German immigrants took to improve their lives and better their status.

As time progressed, the Irish and German immigrants' improvements were evolving into evident success. Their transition in the labor market to white collar positions, as well as how imbedded their cultures has become entrenched into the American society all signify their success in their pursuit of economic stability and social integration. In order to get a broader outlook on this topic, future research ought to delve deeper into investigating the turning point between Irish and German immigrants struggle and success. This thesis has striven to get

beneath that surface, and uncover the unknown. Overall, despite the exceptional challenges that these immigrants were faced with, their utilization of opportunities that America presented aided in redefining their status in America, which in turn enabled them to climb out of poverty and thereby prove their true worth.

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