Building Irish Identity in America, 1870–1915

The Gaelic Revival

Úna Ní Bhroiméil

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Introduction

Modernization in nineteenth-century Ireland was equated with Anglicization. Even before the Famine, language and customs were being steadily anglicized in a broad sweep from east to west. The Famine decimated the Gaelic component of Irish society because it inflicted the most damage on the largely Irish-speaking peasantry in the west. In the years after 1851, people in even remote areas came to ape the English modes of the day as regards diet, dress and behaviour. The Irish economy was fully integrated into the free-trading, industrialized British economy; Irish institutions mirrored British ones; and over all lay the powerful and all pervasive mantle of language – the English language. Reinforced by the system of National education and increased literacy, the English language was taken for granted in Ireland as being the language of progress; it was the language of commerce and of government; and continuing emigration to English-speaking countries (in particular to America after 1851) led to English being the language of choice for the parents of a new generation of children. Irish was associated with backwardness and ignominy, a reminder of a poorer, less civilized way of life.

Politically opposed to the nation whose culture and customs it was absorbing, Irish nationalism after 1850 focused primarily on political nationalism and the attainment of some measure of political independence from Britain. The political quest for Home Rule subsumed the issue of what the distinguishing marks of this nation might be. Lacking agreed national political goals or a united political front in the aftermath of the death of Parnell in 1891, factionalism and issues of personality fragmented Irish politics. Re-defining the notion of Irish identity in non-political terms through cultural nationalism was both a reaction to the lack of purpose in political debate and an attempt to give coherence to a distinct sense of Irish nationality.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, cultural nationalism was manifested in Ireland by three main movements – the Gaelic Athletic Association, founded in 1884; the Gaelic League, founded in 1893; and the Anglo-Irish literary revival. All three sought the preservation and growth of a national identity rather than a colonial identity whether through the medium

of sports and athletics, language or literature.[1] All three asserted that Ireland was culturally different from any other nation, particularly from England whose culture was progressively eroding the native one.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Irish were seeking a sense of belonging on their own island and also in the New World of America. There had been an influx of 'new immigrants' into the United States in the 1880s and 90s bringing with them new languages and traditions. The Irish were already well established as an immigrant group in America but they were also part of this new immigration, as the numbers leaving Ireland demonstrate.[2] While the Irish language may have provided a basis for cultural nationalism at home, it can hardly be said to have been relevant in the United States. Emigration, in fact, was one of the reasons for the decline of the Irish language in the second half of the nineteenth century and, in general studies of language in America, Irish receives little mention. Irish is not considered to be an immigrant language nor can the Irish be said to belong to the foreign language minorities in the US.[3] While the Irish language may have had what Jeffrey Kallen terms a 'covert role' in the ethnic life of Irish communities in America, it was rarely used overtly in Irish American societies or institutions, particularly in the Catholic church.[4]

Generally, the Irish are regarded as having brought little of culture other than the 'culture' of Catholicism to the United States.[5] Although incidents of Irish speakers have been recorded by historians throughout America, the records are fragmented and patchy and do not give a clear picture of any kind of cultural revival movement towards the end of the nineteenth century.[6] Thomas N. Brown, an authority on Irish American nationalism, does recognize that there was an Irish language revival movement in the United States, but believes that it had declined by the end of the 1870s and that, even then, the main focus of the 'Philo-Celtic Clubs' was in making 'a contribution to the propaganda war between Celt and Saxon';[7] he regards the language issue as minor in the big picture of Irish American nationalism. Nor is the Irish language mentioned in studies of the Irish–American press or in any works

1 D.G. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 1982), p. 18.   2 W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish historical statistics: population, 1821–1971* (Dublin, 1978), pp 261–4.   3 H. Kloss, *The American bilingual tradition* (Rowley, Mass. 1977), p. 17.   4 J.L. Kallen, 'Irish as an American ethnic language' in Thomas W. Ihde (ed.), *The Irish language in America — a historical, sociolinguistic and applied linguistic study* (Westport, Conn., 1994).   5 N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan, *Beyond the melting pot* (Cambridge, Mass. 1970), p. 239.   6 L. McGowan, 'The Irish language in America' in Ihde (ed.), *The Irish language,* pp 3–9; P. MacAonghusa, 'An Ghaeilge i Meireeá', in S. Ó hAnnracháin (ed.), *Go Meireeá Siar* (Dublin, 1979); D.N. Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen and revolutionary America* (Dublin, 1981); D. Clark, 'Muted heritage: Gaelic in an American city' in *Éire-Ireland* 6:1 (1971); K.E. Nilsen, 'Thinking of Monday: the Irish speakers of Portland, Maine', in *Éire-Ireland* 25:1 (1990).   7 T.N. Brown, *Irish-American nationalism, 1870–1890* (Westport, Conn, 1966), pp 33–4.

dealing with the ethnic press in the United States,[8] an exception being J.P. Rodechko's study of Patrick Ford that places the cultural revival and Ford's support for the Gaelic societies firmly in the realm of the 'Irish struggle against the British Tories'.[9] Kerby Miller in his seminal work, *Emigrants and exiles*, tends to agree with him. Indeed, he argues that the structure of the Irish language contributed to the passivity, fatalism and dependence of Irish emigrants who were thus predisposed to look upon their emigration as exile.[10] Even in America, the Irish language was regarded as more of a burden than a blessing.

But there were Irish language societies in the United States. Irish was first published in America in the language columns of the *Irish-American* in 1857, and many of the leading Irish-American newspapers had 'Celtic departments', the first of which was started by the *Irish World* in 1869. The first popular bilingual newspaper, *An Gaodhal*, was published in New York from 1881 to 1898. Independent philo-Celtic societies flourished, and recognized branches of the Gaelic League were founded.

Studies that document the links between the language revival in Ireland and America focus almost exclusively on the 1905–6 mission to the United States of Douglas Hyde, the president of the Gaelic League in Ireland, and tend to concentrate on the charisma of Hyde and his search for funds rather than on the language movement in the United States.[11] There is little reference to the goals and aims of the language movement in the United States or to what, if anything, the Gaelic societies were doing in the period before and after the Hyde mission. Other studies of the Gaelic League refer in passing to later missions of the Gaelic League to America, but none reveal the state of the language movement in the United States or the myriad of reasons for sending missions there.[12] Yet contributions flowed to the Gaelic League from such diverse centres as Denver, Butte and San Francisco.

American dollars had long been sought by Irishmen under various guises, and for different causes. The Irish who sought this money whether for arms, churches, political parties or the funding of underground movements, described the trip to collect money as a 'mission'. While financial support was forthcoming from the American Irish for many causes, it was necessary to charm, cajole and convince the American Irish of the ultimate success of the

8 J.L. Kallen, 'Language and ethnic identity: the Irish language in the United States' in L. Mac Mathúna and D. Singleton (eds.), *Language across cultures* (Dublin, 1983), pp 101–12.   9 J.P. Rodechko, *Patrick Ford and his search for America: a case study of Irish-American journalism, 1870–1913* (New York, 1976), pp 204–6.   10 K.A. Miller, *Emigrants and exiles: Ireland and the Irish exodus to North America* (New York, 1985), p. 119.   11 J.E. Dunleavy and G.W. Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde, a maker of modern Ireland* (Berkeley, Ca. 1991), ch. 13; Douglas Hyde [An Craoibhín Aoibhinn], *Mo thuras go hAmerice* (Dublin, 1932).   12 Dunleavy and Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde*.

cause. Parnell had recognized this in 1879 when he undertook a speaking tour of the United States to collect money for the Irish Parliamentary Party; Michael Davitt had crossed the Atlantic to persuade the Irish Americans that the land question could be solved with their help; and W.B. Yeats charmed his American audiences during his fund-raising tour for the Anglo-Irish literary movement in 1903. When Douglas Hyde undertook his coast-to-coast tour in 1905–6 for a Gaelic League that was rapidly running out of money, he was following a well-worn path.

There were three Gaelic League missions to America – 1905–6, 1910–12, and 1914–15. Organizers expected both monetary and moral support for the Gaelic League from the American Irish. The missionaries' primary focus and concentration was on Ireland, on the movement 'at home', but there was also a flowering of cultural consciousness and debate among the Irish in the United States in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Already well versed in the organizing of Irish language societies, the American Irish regarded the missions as recognition by the Irish for their efforts. Expectations regarding the mission were not always the same on both sides of the Atlantic; indeed, the encounter between the language movements in Ireland and America was often complex and unpredictable.

A quest for identity

Breaking the English connexion with Ireland had long been a part of Irish political nationalism, especially since the Act of Union in 1801. That Act merged Ireland with Great Britain in one kingdom known as 'the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland', and Irish representatives sat in the Lords and Commons at Westminster, from whence Ireland was directly governed. The efforts to sever this union in the nineteenth century ranged from Daniel O'Connell's Repeal of the Union policy in the 1830s to the physical force risings by the Young Ireland movement in 1848 and by the Fenians in 1867. All were unsuccessful.[1]

Since the New Departure of 1879 which had linked three strands of agitation together – land agitation, physical force nationalism and constitutional reform – the people had been galvanized by Parnell, who had emerged as the leader of Irish nationalism.[2] The Secret Ballot Act of 1872, and the growing representation of tenants on Poor Law boards contributed to the political mobilization of the people, but the fact that Parnell and his Irish Parliamentary Party (pro-Home Rule) held the balance of power in Westminster in 1885 put politics at the heart of Irish nationalistic fervour.

When published, however, the Home Rule Bill of 1886 split Gladstone's own Liberal party and committed the Conservative Party to supporting the Union at all costs. The bill was defeated; the Conservatives retained power; and, inextricably linked to the Liberals, Parnell and his party were forced to await their return to power before any form of self-government for Ireland could be contemplated. By the time this second Home Rule Bill appeared on the scene in 1893, however, Parnell was dead.[3] A divorce suit citing him as co-respondent had threatened the Liberal alliance when the non-conformists in his party forced Gladstone to repudiate Parnell's leadership. Thus, faced with

1 O. McDonagh, *The Emancipist – Daniel O'Connell 1830–47* (London, 1989); R. Davis, *The Young Ireland movement* (Dublin, 1987); T.W. Moody, *The Fenian movement* (Dublin, 1968); R.V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context – Irish politics and society 1848–82* (Dublin, 1985); N. Mansergh, *The Irish question, 1840–1921* (London, 1965). 2 E.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London, 1971). 3 D. McCartney (ed.), *Parnell – the politics of power* (Dublin, 1991). This Home Rule Bill was passed by the Commons, but defeated in the Lords.

a choice of Home Rule or Parnell, the Irish Parliamentary Party deposed Parnell as leader. This led to an acrimonious split between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites which would not be resolved until the early years of the twentieth century. Campaigning in Ireland, Parnell caught pneumonia and died in 1891 at forty-five years of age. He left behind a party divided and a country riven by bitterness and recriminations. This, coupled with the Conservatives' post-1886 policy of constructive unionism or 'killing Home Rule with kindness', cleared the way for an alternative to political nationalism. A sense of disillusionment with politics and devitalization in the political arena brought the question of breaking the English connexion in other areas into focus at the turn of the century.[4]

Parnell's death in 1891 was a key factor in the rise of cultural nationalism in Ireland in the 1890s. It is, however, not the only one. People did not completely turn away from politics and search actively for a cultural alternative. Politics, as Roy Foster has shown, 'went on happening, vacuum theories notwithstanding'.[5] This is most clearly demonstrated by the success of the Local Government Act of 1898 and by the Wyndham Land Act of 1903. But politics was no longer the issue that magnetized the people and kept them in a constant state of expectation. The political issue of the day, Home Rule, was dead; the charismatic leader was dead; and the conflict that the split of the Parliamentary party engendered cannot be minimized. Parnellites and anti-Parnellites held their convictions very strongly indeed.

But even before the death of Parnell, politics had been a divisive factor between unionist and nationalist, Protestant and Catholic, North and South. Threatened by the prospect of Home Rule, Unionism achieved a cohesion in the period after the Home Rule Bill of 1886, but once that initial threat had passed, it fragmented once more. Even in Ulster, the opponents of Home Rule had been divided in 1885 and had allowed Parnell's party to pick up seventeen of the thirty-three Ulster seats.[6] With divisions *within* politics and divisions *about* politics, the political forum was not one that might serve to unite differing ideologies. Was there any basis for the common name of Irishman in the 1890s?

Yes, argued Douglas Hyde in 1892, in a lecture entitled 'The necessity for de-Anglicising Ireland', delivered to the Irish Literary Society. The son of an Anglican minister, a poet, folklorist and propagandist on behalf of the Irish language, a future president of the Gaelic League and ultimately, president of Ireland, Hyde urged the Irish people to turn away from things English, and to

4 E. Callanan, *The Parnell split, 1890-1* (Cork, 1992); P. Bew, *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland, 1890–1910 – Parnellites and radical agrarians* (Oxford, 1987); A. Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness – the experience of constructive unionism, 1890–1905* (Cork, 1987).   5 R.F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: connections in Irish and English history* (London, 1993), p. 268.   6 K.T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (London, 1989), pp 126–7.

recover from the past the language, manners and customs, music and games, place-names and personal names and the literature of Ireland. To become again what the Irish people once were, 'one of the most original, artistic, literary, and charming peoples of Europe', it was, he believed, necessary to de-Anglicize.[7] In Hyde's view, the essential continuity of Irish life had been broken:

> It has always been very curious to me how Irish sentiment sticks in this half-way house – how it continues to apparently hate the English, and at the same time continues to imitate them; how it continues to clamour for recognition as a distinct nationality, and at the same time throws away with both hands what would make it so.[8]

While seeming at first glance to complement the political separation of the two countries, Hyde's ideas were more complex. His theme was not a novel one. Irish Protestants, many of whom belonged to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, were alienated by a nationalism that seemed to identify nationality with Catholicism. In the words of Samuel Ferguson, they were:

> Deserted by the Tories, insulted by the Whigs, threatened by the Radicals, hated by the Papists, and envied by the Dissenters, plundered in our country seats, robbed in our town houses, driven abroad by violence, called back by humanity, and, after all, told that we are neither English nor Irish, fish nor flesh, but a peddling colony, a forlorn advanced guard that must conform to every mutinous movement of the pretorian rabble.[9]

Some of these Anglo-Irish Protestants saw in cultural nationalism a means of identifying themselves with, and attaching themselves to their native country on common ground with Irishmen of all political persuasions. Early Irish poetry and legend, early Irish manuscripts, and above all, the Irish language provided a civilization rooted in Celtic, rather than Catholic, antiquity. Protestants were prominent in societies such as the Royal Irish Academy founded in 1785, which promoted scholarly interest in Irish language and literature. Hyde presented de-Anglicization as a unifying strategy between Protestant and Catholic, unionist and nationalist.

In the 1840s, another Protestant, Thomas Davis, had exhorted the Irish people to re-kindle the 'spirit of the nation', and to cultivate a collective con-

7 D. Hyde, 'On the necessity for de-Anglicising Ireland' in B. Ó Conaire (ed.), *Language, lore and lyrics* (Dublin, 1986). 8 Ibid. 9 S. Ferguson, 'A dialogue between the head and the heart of an Irish Protestant', quoted in T. Flanagan, 'The literary tradition' in T.E. Hachey and L.J. Mc Caffrey (eds), *Perspectives on Irish nationalism* (Lexington, Ky., 1989).

sciousness. Articles on Irish art, poetry, music, antiquities and language were published weekly in *The Nation*, and rousing patriotic ballads exhorted the people to see Ireland as a nation rather than as a dull province.[10] Davis' nation was an inclusive one, 'multi-racial and multi-confessional',[11] and the mark of this renewed nationhood was, in his view, the revival of the national language:

> To impose another language on such a people is to send their history adrift among the accidents of translation – 'tis to tear their identity from all places ... 'tis to cut off the entail of feeling, and separate the people from their forefathers by a deep gulf ... A people without a language of its own is only half a nation ... To lose your native tongue, and learn that of an alien, is the worst badge of conquest – it is the chain on the soul ... to have lost entirely the national language is death.[12]

Gaelicization would assert the unique identity of all Irish people.

But Davis knew little Irish. Ireland was last totally Irish-speaking in the twelfth century[13] after which the struggle for cultural supremacy between Irish and English continued until the plantations and wars of the seventeenth century decimated the old Gaelic order. By the early nineteenth century, English had become the dominant language of Irish administrative, political and economic life, although Irish continued to be the language of the majority of the population of rural Ireland.[14] While it is estimated that there were some four million Irish speakers in Ireland before the Famine, Irish was clearly identified with poverty and illiteracy. Thus, although Thomas Davis urged the Irish people in 1843 to take pride in the national language, and to promote it as a mark of nationality, he himself concluded that to impose the language might:

> extinguish it altogether. But no one contemplates this save as a dream of what may happen a hundred years hence. It is quite another thing to say, as we do, that the Irish language should be cherished, taught, and esteemed, and that it can be preserved and gradually extended.[15]

Reality was to overtake this dream. The Famine crisis of 1845–50 concentrated the people's minds on land, food and survival. The apprehension and deportation of the Young Irelanders who participated in the failed rising of

10 A Young Ireland newspaper, founded in 1842 by Thomas Davis, John Blake Dillon and Charles Gavan Duffy. Estimated by its editor, Gavan Duffy, to have been read by a quarter of a million Irishmen. 11 O. McDonagh, *States of mind – a study of Anglo-Irish conflict, 1780–1980* (London, 1983), p. 110. 12 Ibid. 13 B. Ó Cuív (ed.), *A view of the Irish language* (Dublin, 1969); J. Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848–1915* (Dublin, 1973); N. McGonagle, 'Writing in Gaelic since 1880' in T. Bartlett, R. O'Dwyer, G. Ó Tuathaigh (eds), *Irish studies – a general introduction* (Dublin, 1988). 14 M. Wall, 'The decline of the Irish language' in Ó Cuív (ed.), *A view of the Irish language*. 15 *The Nation*, September 1843.

1848 signalled an end to the issues of identity and nationality, a beginning to the politics of tenant right, and the displacement of a secular, cultural nationalism with religion.

The spoken Irish language continued to decline in the post-Famine years. The 1851 census recorded one and a half million native speakers, the 1891 census 700,000.[16] There was some scholarly interest in Irish language and literature which manifested itself through societies such as the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language (1876), the Gaelic Union (1879), and the publication of the *Gaelic Journal* (founded 1882). But the mass of the people, illiterate in their own despised language, were not to be convinced that it was a necessary prerequisite for nationality.[17]

The foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893 would change that perception. Hyde and his co-founders, Eoin Mac Néill, a Catholic intellectual and civil servant originally from Antrim, and Fr Eugene O'Growney, a professor at Maynooth, established a non-political and non-denominational body. The Gaelic League had two main aims, one of which was the preservation of Irish as the national language of Ireland and the extension of its use as a spoken tongue. The second concerned the study and publication of existing Gaelic literature and the cultivation of a modern literature in Irish.[18] This was no mere academic foundation or an exercise in spiritual regeneration. It was a practical programme to put the ideas of de-Anglicization into effect. By 'propaganda, permeation, pressure-groups and the manipulation of politicians and public bodies', Hyde developed, as Oliver McDonagh has asserted 'a modern product for a modern market'.[19]

The Gaelic League was, in its early years, primarily concentrated in towns, an urban, rather than a rural movement, with branches in Dublin, Cork city, Galway city, Derry city and New Ross in 1894. While progress was initially slow, there were twenty-five branches by 1896, five of which were in Great Britain. By 1898, there were eighty-three branches registered, fifteen of which were in the United States, eight in Great Britain, and a European branch in Paris.[20]

The League was run by an executive committee, the *Coiste Gnótha,* which consisted of forty-five members elected by the general members at the annual congress; once a month, this executive committee met in Dublin. Subordinate committees which dealt with education and finance met more frequently and presented reports to the executive committee. Most officials worked on an honorary basis. Although relatively autonomous, the local branches, *Craob-*

16 McGonagle, 'Writing in Gaelic', p. 108.   17 T. Ó hAilín, 'Irish revival movements', in Ó Cuív (ed.), *A view of the Irish language.*   18 P. MacAonghusa, *Ar son na Gaeilge: Conradh na Gaeilge, 1893–1993* (Dublin, 1993); P. Ó Fearaíl, *The story of Conradh na Gaeilge – a history of the Gaelic League* (Dublin, 1975).   19 McDonagh, *States of mind,* p. 112.   20 D. Ó Súilleabháin, 'Leathanradharc ar Chonradh na Gaeilge sna laethanta tosaigh' in L. Prút (ed.), *Dúchas* (Dublin, 1990).

hacha, were connected to the organization's headquarters in Dublin, and each was entitled to send one or more delegates to the Gaelic League's annual congress in Dublin, the *Ardfheis.* Each branch paid an annual affiliation fee to the executive committee of ten shillings and was expected to make an annual collection for League Funds. Any other money which the branch collected through membership fees, donations or proceeds from activities was the branches' own to spend on teachers' salaries, rent or as the branch saw fit. The minimum number of members in an individual branch was twelve, and each branch had to conduct at least one class for the teaching of Irish. Irish plays, Irish dances and lectures on subjects of Irish interest also formed the basis for branch meetings. Local cultural festivals, *feiseanna,* which consisted of singing, dancing and recitation competitions were organized by the branches. Winners from these *feiseanna* qualified for the annual national festival, the *Oireachtas,* which was held in Dublin during the annual congress.

Textbooks, plays, poetry, collections of short stories, prose, novels, folktales both new and old, in the original Irish or as translations from English and other languages were published by the League. In 1899, a weekly newspaper, *An Claidheamh Soluis,* was established. Edited by Patrick Pearse from 1903 to 1909, it was bilingual, published articles, poems and stories in Irish, and encouraged new writers in Irish. Propagandist pamphlets were also published, such as *Ireland's battle for her language* (1900), by Edward Martyn and *The future of Irish in the National schools* (1901), by Fr O'Hickey.[21] The status of the language in the field of education improved after the League's bilingual policy for primary schools in Irish-speaking areas was adopted in 1904 and Irish became an essential subject for matriculation in the National University.[22]

As full-time organizers, *timirí,* moved throughout the country setting up branches, teaching language classes, Irish dances, music, history and folklore, as well as organizing dances, *céilithe,* and festivals, an alternative social life was established. The brief of the *timirí* was to establish Irish classes and branches of the Gaelic League and to teach people to read Irish who would, in turn, be able to teach and influence others. To this end, they distributed Irish literature, and they were also supposed 'to interview the principal residents of the districts visited, and to inform and arouse local opinion on the Irish language question'.[23]

In setting up new branches, the organizers first visited all the influential people in a particular locality including teachers, doctors, businessmen and local clergy, and explained to them the importance of creating an environment conducive to the promotion of the language. The support of the priest ensured that the Gaelic League would find rooms for their work and have their

21 Ó hAilín, 'Irish revival movements', p. 98.   22 Ibid.   23 Quoted in Ó Súilleabháin, 'Leathanradharc ar Chonradh na Gaeilge'.

meetings announced from the pulpit. While some priests insisted on separate classes for young men and women lest the good morals of their flocks be compromised,[24] the general view was that activities held under the auspices of the Gaelic League were 'respectable'; thus a sense of social belonging was created alongside that of sociability. Although the Gaelic League may not have been quite as one contemporary observer remarked 'the only national University that Ireland possesses',[25] it was, without doubt, the 'most highly developed system of adult education that Ireland had yet received'.[26] To maintain the standards of Irish among its teachers and organizers, the Gaelic League founded Gaelic Colleges throughout the country. By 1912, eighteen colleges had been established – six in Munster and Connacht respectively, four in Ulster and two in Leinster.[27]

Between 1901 and 1906 the number of registered branches grew from 227 to 964. In 1906, Patrick Pearse, the editor of *An Claidheamh Soluis*, estimated the number of people working for the League in a full-time capacity:

> Counting timirí and múinteoirí taistil, the officers at Headquarters and paid officials employed by some of the more important local bodies (coistí ceantair), we find that what may be called the League's regular army as distinguished from volunteer forces number about 120.[28]

With the Irish language as the cornerstone of its being, the Gaelic League gave a sense of purpose to the question of national identity as well as a social life to the Irish of the late nineteenth century. Irish classes provided the focus for the coming together of people to forge or renew their eroded sense of identity. 'Learning Irish' was the hook on which cultural nationalism was hung. The classes, by bringing the language to the fore also brought literature, history, music and song to a people for whom these aspects of cultural life had been submerged under a veneer of Anglicization for much of the nineteenth century. Coupled with the success of the Gaelic Athletic Association in reviving the games of hurling and Gaelic football, the Gaelic League brought a respectability to things that were essentially Gaelic.

Although the Gaelic League had as its inspiration those Irish-speaking areas where Irish was the vernacular, the *Gaeltachtaí*, the leaders were urban based and predominantly middle-class. The branch leaders of the League were mainly teachers and minor civil servants, and the main constituency, as Hutchinson and Garvin have noted, were journalists, writers, clerks and shop assistants, members of the *petit bourgeois*.[29] There were few avenues for the

24 T. Ó Fiaich, 'The great controversy' in Ó Tuama (ed.), *The Gaelic League idea*, pp 63–75. 25 Quoted in R. Kee, *The green flag* (London, 1976), p. 431. 26 Ó Fiaich, 'The great controversy', p. 63. 27 G. Grote, *Torn between politics and culture – the Gaelic League, 1893–1993* (New York, 1994), p. 57. 28 *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 17 March 1906. 29 T. Garvin, *Nationalist revolutionaries*

landless and upwardly mobile to pursue unless they wanted to spend most of their lives on the Irish sea, travelling between the province and the centre of power and influence. Even then, politics, as we have seen, had little to offer in the Ireland of the 1890s, and outside of dabbling in the 'greasy till' or a life in the church, these 'over-educated and under-regarded' groups had no native standard to aspire to. Cultural nationalism provided them with an alternative, and the Irish language was the linchpin. The Gaelic League was their movement.

The clearest exponent of what the Gaelic League and Gaelicization was about at the beginning of the new century was D.P. Moran, a journalist and political propagandist. A proponent of an *Irish* Ireland, rather then an Anglicized Ireland, his notion of an Irish nation was:

> A self-governing land, living, moving and having its being in its own language, self-reliant, intellectually as well as politically independent, initiating its own reforms, developing its own manners and customs, creating its own literature out of its own distinctive consciousness, working to their fullest capacity the material resources of the country, inventing, criticising, attempting, doing.[30]

'Doing' was the watchword of the Gaelic League in this cultural revolution. And as the League grew, it turned to Irish people everywhere to support its work. While there had been registered branches in the United States as early as 1896, the turn of the century saw the Gaelic League actively turn towards America – the Land of the Dollar.

Vaughan and Fitzpatrick estimate that 27.1 per cent of total Irish emigrants in 1851–5, and 24.4 per cent of 1891–1900, were Irish-speaking. Between 1856 and 1910, 49.3 per cent of all Irish emigrants to the United States came from counties which had at least a 10 per cent Irish-speaking population in 1891.[31] There was, therefore, a substantial body of Irish-speakers in America.

But language shift in Ireland was interwoven with emigration, for English was reputedly the language of effective emigration. In the post-Famine decades, unilingualism gave way to bilingualism in almost all areas. If we take Connacht as an example, we see that the number of people who had Irish *only* decreased from 77,818 in 1861 to 33,355 in 1881. During the same period the number of people who had both Irish *and* English increased from 331,664 to 332,856.[32] Monoglot parents ensured that their children learned English through the use of the *bata scóir* or tally stick worn around children's necks.

in Ireland, 1858 -1928 (Oxford, 1987), p. 21; Hutchinson, *The dynamics af cultural nationalism*, pp 178–9.   30 Quoted in G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'Is Do Chuala Croí Cine Soiléir', in S. Ó Mórdha (ed.), *Scríobh 4* (Dublin, 1979).   31 Vaughan and Fitzpatrick, *Irish historical statistics*, pp 261–353.   32 Census of Ireland 1861, H.C. 1863; 1871, H.C. 1874; 1881, H.C. 1882.

When a child spoke Irish at home, parents carved a notch in the stick and the children were subsequently punished at school.

The testimony of priests in Galway in 1872 attests to the bilingualism of their congregations:

> Are many of your congregation Irish speaking people?
> They are almost all Irish as far as they can understand but they can understand English too.[33]
> He (the priest) generally speaks it in English first and then in Irish afterwards or in Irish first and English afterwards.[34]

Certainly it is impossible to assess the standard of English of these people, but the trend towards bilingualism is clear. We cannot therefore assume that these Irish-speaking immigrants were functional only in the Irish language. Bilingual to some extent, the people were, however, literate in only one language, English.[35] By 1910, 95 per cent of Irish immigrants claimed literacy in the English language.[36]

S. Ó hAnnracháin (1976), drawing on contemporary newspaper sources, estimates that there were large concentrations of Irish speakers in major urban centres – 40,000 in Philadelphia, 30,000 in Chicago, and 20,000 in Yonkers at the close of the nineteenth century.[37] David Doyle estimates that there were almost 70,000 Irish speakers in New York and 30,000 in Boston at that time, most of whom were classed as unskilled labourers. De Fréine and Nilsen documented the extensive use of spoken Irish in Portland, Maine, at the beginning of the twentieth century.[38]

Nonetheless, it is clear that the trend towards bilingualism in Ireland already recognized that English was the language of enhanced prospects and upward mobility. English was associated with modernization and Irish was a traditional spoken, conversational tongue. While Irish may have been spoken in America by sizeable numbers of emigrants, there is no reason to suppose

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33 Copy of Evidence, Galway Co. Election Petition 1872, question 18,517.   34 Ibid., question 464.   35 This is evident in the letters emigrants wrote to parents who had no English: 'My grandmother who did not know any English, when a letter arrived from her son or daughter and after it was read aloud to her by some member of the family used to remark in Gaelic – "I don't know what it says, dear, but I recognize the phrases 'Dear Mother' and 'pleasure'."' Quoted by a Kerry folklore collector in C. Ó Gráda, 'Irish emigration to the United States in the nineteenth century', in D.N. Doyle and O. Dudley Edwards (eds), *America and Ireland 1776–1976 – the American identity and the Irish question* (Dublin, 1979).   36 C. Curtin, R. O'Dwyer, G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'Emigration and exile' in T. Bartlett et al. (eds), *Irish Studies, a general introduction* (Dublin, 1988), p. 68.   37 *Irish World*, 4 March 1899, 29 October 1898, 13 May 1899 respectively. Quoted in 'An Réamhrá', in Ó hAnnracháin (ed.), *Go Meirceá Siar*, p. 10.   38 S. De Fréine, *The great silence* (Dublin, 1965), pp 126–7; K.E. Nilsen, 'Thinking of Monday: the Irish speakers of Portland, Maine' in *Éire-Ireland* 25:1, pp 6–19.

that they regarded language maintenance with any greater conviction in Man-
hattan than they had done in Moycullen.[39] It was, without doubt, expendable.

Did the Irish immigrants have anything in common with each other once
they reached America? Although David Doyle finds that Irish emigrants in
both the United States and in Australia had a common will to improve their
lot, in that they were 'generally "would be-s" in societies which "would be":
in open-ended societies without congealed customs',[40] Dale Light suggests
that there was very little common ground between them other than desire to
do well in America:

> People crossed the Atlantic at different times, by different routes, and
> for different reasons. Some prospered; others did not ... Some felt an
> intense nostalgia for the Ireland of their youth and considered them-
> selves 'exiles' in a strange land; many others did not. Some were quick-
> ly assimilated into local communities in America; others were
> consigned to lives on the outermost fringes of American society. In
> short, there was no common historical experience to bind together Irish
> immigrants in nineteenth century America and to instil in them a sense
> of ethnic identity.[41]

Certainly it is important to recognize that the immigrants were a varied
and diverse group with a host of different aspirations; they were a predomi-
nantly urban group;[42] 72 per cent of the American Irish were to be found in
the urban industrial areas of seven states in 1870 – Massachusetts, Connecti-
cut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois – and settled in
communities where population exceeded 2,500.[43] When the Irish moved west,
they tended to move again to urban centres – St Louis, St Paul, San Francis-
co – and to mining towns such as Butte, Montana. These urban groups were
not necessarily homogenous. David Emmons in his study of the Irish in Butte,
maintains that while it was an Irish town in the sense that Irish was the dom-
inant culture and the host society there, their world nonetheless consisted of
three parts:

> the settled of whatever class; the unsettled workers who moved along
> paths laid out by the ethnic communities and who hoped one day to

39 J.L. Kallen, 'Irish as an American ethnic language' in Ihde (ed.), *The Irish language in the Unit-
ed States.*   40 D.N. Doyle, 'The Irish in Australia and the United States: some comparisons,
1800–1939' in *Irish Economic and Social History* 16 (1989), pp 73–94.   41 D.B. Light, jr., 'The
role of Irish-American organizations in assimilation and community formation', in Drudy, *Irish
Studies 4*, pp 113–41.   42 D.H. Akenson argues (with evidence extrapolated from Canadian sta-
tistics) that the Irish were not predisposed to being an urban group, and that some did well on the
frontier. See D.H. Akenson, *The Irish diaspora: a primer* (Ontario, 1996), ch. 9–10.   43 L.J.
McCaffrey, *The Irish diaspora in America* (Bloomington, Ind., 1976), p. 63.

settle and enter one of them; and the transient workers who either could not or would not fix themselves.[44]

There were class differences among the Irish. David Doyle has divided the 4.3 million American Irish in 1900 into three groups – a middle, lower middle and farming class (35. 5 per cent); a working class where they dominated skilled trades such as plumbing and plastering (50 per cent); and a labouring and poverty class (15 per cent).[45] Generational differences also contributed to class differences. By 1880, second generation Irish Americans comprised half of the Irish community and were more likely to be skilled workers rather than labourers. In Philadelphia in 1880, the second generation numbered twice as many skilled workers such as ironworkers and bricklayers, as did the first generation.[46] Stephan Thernstrom in his study of the Boston Irish found that the American-born children of Irish immigrants did notably better than their fathers, increased the size of their middle class element and reduced the fraction of low manual workers.[47] These divisions were further augmented by differences in outlook, as Kerby Miller has shown. An air of gentility and respectability was cultivated by middle-class American Irish in order to distinguish themselves from the rowdiness and poverty of recently arrived immigrants or those Irish still living in slums:

> an increasingly large 'petite bourgeoisie' of 'lace curtain' Irish furnished parlors with pianos and strove to keep the still omnipresent 'tenement' and 'shanty' Irish at arms length.[48]

But the popular image of the Irish in America in the wake of the post-Famine emigration of the 1840s and 1850s was that of an impoverished, Catholic mass. Hostility towards the Irish was rooted in fear and prejudice and gave rise to nativism and Know-Nothingism. The Irish, humiliated, resentful and exiled, remained alienated from the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture of America as a single group.[49] Fishman stresses that it was only *after* emigration that many emigrants became aware of their common origin and of their com-

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44 D.M. Emmons, *The Butte Irish – class and ethnicity in an American mining town, 1875–1925* (Chicago and Urbana, 1989), p. 67.   45 D.N. Doyle, *Irish Americans, native rights and national empires* (New York, 1976), p. 64.   46 E. Foner, *Politics and ideology in the age of the Civil War* (Oxford and New York, 1980), p. 152.   47 S. Thernstrom, *The other Bostonians: poverty and progress in the American metropolis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973) p. 136.   48 K.A. Miller, 'Assimilation and alienation: Irish emigrants responses to industrial America, 1871–1921' in P.J. Drudy (ed.), *Irish studies 4: the Irish in America: emigration, assimilation and impact* (Cambridge, 1985), pp 88–9; W.V. Shannon, *The American Irish – a political and social portrait* (New York, 1963), pp 142–3; S. Birmingham, *Real lace* (London, 1974).   49 Miller, *Emigrants and exiles*; Shannon, *The American Irish*; O. Handlin, *Boston's immigrants, 1790–1880* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979, revised edition); *The uprooted* (Boston, 1973, second edition).

mon past, and that it was in America that many of them became aware of their 'groupness'. It was the very fact of their emigration that made group mainte-nance a conscious goal.[50] The nature of the Irish emigration exacerbated this sense of groupness as they arrived in America with a sense of being a perse-cuted group driven from their homeland.

Kerby Miller argues that the Irish were not easily absorbed and assimilat-ed into American life as their precarious status, under-representation in native power structures, and WASP non-recognition of Irish American accomplish-ments kept the wounds of prejudice open and fresh. But the Irish tried stren-uously to assimilate. The desire to 'do well' in America was often reflected in materialistic acquisitions, which were for the American Irish more symbols of status than signs of corruption. Most emigrants were quickly assimilated into what Kerby Miller suggests were superficial matters of dress, diet and speech – speaking English 'grandly', buying top quality tea, white bread and fash-ionable clothes and getting into the 'hang' of the country.[51] The Americanism of the prosperous American Irish surprised a Dublin friar who found a civi-lization which he did not recognize among the Irish in American cities.[52] This form of assimilation was strongly condemned by those who regarded it not as a search for status but as a rejection of ethnicity:

> It is an error to suppose that it is the poor class of Irish that reneague (sic) their country. Not at all; it is those who accumulate wealth ... and who know nothing of the learning of their ancestors, but, on the con-trary, believe them to be semi-savage, as their enemies represent them to be. This is the class of persons that deny their country and its char-acteristics.[53]

Proinnsias Mac Aonghusa also finds that it was exceptional for the middle class to be interested in or helpful to the setting up of night schools in Amer-ican cities where adults could improve and practise their Irish and where chil-dren of emigrants could learn the language, and that it was predominantly the marginal poor who funded and attended such schools.[54]

Dale Light, however, argues that the middle class were the most enthusi-astic exponents of ethnic solidarity.[55] Drawing on the Irish institutions and organizations of Philadelphia – a city in which one in five was of Irish descent in 1880 – he maintains that although Irish institutions were alternatives to the dominant Protestant culture, their actual effect was to acculturate immigrants, that is to work hard, to be thrifty, to submit to civil authority, to be patriotic and

50 J.A. Fishman, *Language loyalty in the United States* (The Hague, 1966), p. 27.   51 Miller, *Emi-grants and exiles*, p. 98.   52 Doyle, *Irish Americans*, p. 65.   53 M. Ó Lócháin in *An Gaodhal*, June 1892.   54 P. MacAonghusa, 'An Ghaeilge i Meireeá' in Ó hAnnracháin (ed.), *Go Meireeá Siar*, p. 27.   55 Light, 'The role of Irish American organizations'.

to take pride in their conformity. This, he argues, was a deliberate attempt by the middle class to make the working class respectable. As the middle class depended on the custom of the Irish working class, they could not afford to abandon them completely. Consequently, although there were elite associations for the affluent, most of the associations were broadly based.

> Based in parish churches and directed by middle-class Irish 'spokesmen' these networks of associations attempted to enlist immigrant workers and their children into an ethnic community that embodied the ideals of Catholic devotion, Irish nationalism and bourgeois respectability.[56]

Light maintains that the benefits which accrued to immigrants from these ethnic organizations – services, acceptance, and a sense of self-esteem – were available from non-ethnic sources, and stresses ethnicity as the motivating force in these associations. Concluding that the growth of a self-conscious Irish ethnic community was as a result of the structural assimilation rather than the exclusion of Irish immigrants, Light takes no account of the hostility of non-ethnic organizations towards the Irish, or of the fact that the Irish had little choice but to form their own organizations. No one else would have them.

Miller suggests that the emigrant Irish were so traumatized by 'having' to leave Ireland that they felt guiltily duty-bound to do 'something' for the country. 'Images of their mothers' tears, their fathers' graves, their parents' hypothetical sufferings from poverty, English oppression, or their children's alleged "ingratitude": all these were the nationalists' stock-in-trade.'[57] This 'emigration as exile' motif was a badge of community identification according to Miller, and, therefore, movements or organizations which supported or promoted Irish causes were certain of support whether financial or moral from the American Irish generally. David Emmons presents a similar view. He maintains that the American Irish contributed to the cause of an independent Ireland not because it raised their social ranking or expressed their social radicalism, but because they were historically conditioned to 'wish it'. This wish was, for them, a missing part of a puzzle: 'These were exiled Irishmen, men of "fanatical heart".'[58]

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that many of these emigrants actively wished to leave and that they looked down upon their native area as worthless. Staying there was out of the question:

> If you go into any of the national schools any day and ask a child to write an ordinary letter for you, the letter is invariably written to some

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56 Ibid., p. 132.   **57** Miller, *Emigrants and exiles*, p. 568.   **58** Ibid., p. 94.

friend either in the United States, or Canada or Australia, asking the person to send a ticket to take them out. That is the ordinary letter that would be written in 99 national schools out of 100 ... it is perfectly marvellous how universal (the desire to go) is.[59]

For many, it was a coming of age, the realization of an ambition encouraged and abetted by the letters and cheques from America as well as the posters of the shipping companies:

In the shops where he carried out his buying and negotiating were hung pictures of ships, maps of America, and advertisements of special deals to help the young make their way to the new world. The agent arranged for an emigrant's complete passage–from the Rock of Tears to a city in the United States.[60]

The preparation for emigration to America had been constant:

The power of America? – Yes, these people know that their children will be going to America.

For ten or fifteen years they do think of America, and speak English to their children because of that? –Yes.

Do you think that they do that of their own understanding? – Yes.

America is in the minds of all the fathers and mothers of the children? – Yes. From the day they are born they are thinking of America.

And they act accordingly? – Yes.[61]

Although the notion of exile cannot be lightly dismissed, it is significant that few of the Irish immigrants returned 'home' to Ireland in comparison with Italian immigrants, for example. America was home and had to be adapted to. And so there *was* an attempt at 'ethnic-fade' by the Irish Americans in their effort to assimilate to the host society. Had there been less block immigration, had the Irish been less Catholic, had they been initially more skilled, they might just have succeeded. They had some advantages. They were white and they spoke English. But Miller's contention that problems of social and cultural marginality were common among both the middle class and the working class has substance.[62] For all their diversity and despite all their aspirations and

59 Quoted in D.N. Doyle, 'Inimircigh nua agus Meirceá tionsclaíoch, 1870–1910' in Ó hAnnracháin (ed.), *Go Meirceá Siar*, p. 171.   60 H. Brody, *Iniskillane: change and decline in the west of Ireland* (London, 1973), p. 84.   61 From *Coimisiún na Gaeltachta, 1925*, quoted in M. Ó Conghaile, *Conamara agus Árainn, 1880–1980 – Gnéithe den Stair Shóisialta* (Indreabhán, 1988), p. 210.   62 Miller, 'Assimilation and alienation', p. 90.

efforts, they could not overcome the very real prejudice against them as a group. As an immigrant group, as William Shannon has said, they were closest to being 'in' and American while remaining 'out'.[63]

Irish Americans searched for a niche which would buttress them against nativism, distinguish them from the new immigrants, and give them the respectability and status that they felt they were entitled to. It was nationalism that seemed to unite the Irish most clearly in the New World. Internal divisions along generational, economic and class lines did militate against communal self-consciousness. But American Irish nationalism relied on a sense of ethnicity generated by English rule in Ireland, reinforced by bitter memories of the Great Famine and emigration, and nourished by anti-Irish prejudice in America. The distinctive attitudes attributed to Irish American nationalism – a pervasive sense of inferiority, intense longing for acceptance and respectability, and an acute sensitivity to criticism – were shaped, according to Thomas N. Brown, not by the nationalist causes espoused by Irish Americans but by their life in America. It was the degradation of the Irish that led to their embracing of nationalism in their quest for identity and respectability.[64]

The goal of this nationalism was a free and independent Ireland. But American Irish nationalism was also a product of the New World, with one eye focused on America and on Irish American status, and another on Ireland. Nearly two-thirds of the almost five million Irish Americans in 1900 had been born in America. By reshaping Ireland in an American mould, free and independent, the shackles of Irish inferiority and weakness would be thrown off not only in Ireland, but also in America. It is in this sense that William Shannon regards Irish American nationalism as being essentially assimilationist.[65] An independent Irish nation, free to take its place among the nations of the world as an equal, would likewise confer dignity and status on the American Irish as members of that free nation and finally remove the last obstacle to full assimilation. By participating in nationalist organizations the Irish Americans were part of the national movement 'at home' to help Ireland win self-government. Its deeper purpose was to allow the immigrant Irish to gain respectability in American life. In championing the cause of Ireland they were, as T.W. Moody argues, 'helping their own morale in the most effective way open to them'.[66]

Not only might support for Irish nationalism unite the Irish Americans in a common cause and enhance their collective chance of improvement in the United States, it would also help the Irish at home. This would fulfil the duty and obligation that many Irish Americans felt towards their families and

63 Shannon, *The American Irish*, p. 132.   **64** McCaffrey, *The Irish diaspora*, p. 107.   **65** T.N. Brown, *Irish American nationalism, 1870–1890* (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 23; Shannon, *The American Irish*, pp 134–5.   **66** T.W. Moody, 'Irish American nationalism', in *Irish Historical Studies*, 15: 60 (September, 1967).

friends in Ireland. These 'duties' to send money and tickets were, in Miller's view, onerous burdens for struggling or ambitious immigrants. Alexander Sullivan stated in 1883 that the $5 million sent annually to Ireland had become 'compulsory and of the nature of a tax'.[67] And the immigrants would constantly be reminded of their 'duty' to Ireland by various groups on diverse missions to the United States hoping to enlist both moral and financial support for their varied causes.

But Irish nationalism had many faces and there were many different types of Irish nationalists in America. Miller divides them into four broad groups – those who supported Home Rule for Ireland and whose articulate spokesperson was the editor of the Boston *Pilot*, John Boyle O'Reilly; those nationalists who stressed social and economic reforms on both sides of the Atlantic and whose proponent was Patrick Ford, editor of the *Irish World*; Clan na Gael, led by ex-Fenian John Devoy and the United Irishmen led by ex-Fenian Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. Both of these latter organizations were committed to Irish freedom and physical force nationalism but disagreed over tactics such as O'Donovan Rossa's 'Skirmishing fund' for dynamiting English cities.[68] The most powerful and well known of all the groups was Clan na Gael under Devoy. Founded in 1867, the Clan was a secret, conspiratorial organization which was bound to the Irish Republican Brotherhood through a joint revolutionary directory established in 1877. Throughout the 1870s its membership numbered about 10,000.[69]

It was the Land League, however, which was the first nationalist organization to unite the Irish–American community in 1879–80. Poor harvests and farm prices produced a rural crisis in Ireland while evictions and agrarian violence soared. Widely publicized by American journalists, the needs of the League were reinforced by the visit of Parnell to the United States in 1879 to raise funds for relief and for the Land League; before his departure, he set up the Irish National Land League of America to provide the home organization with financial and moral support; at its height in 1881, the INLLA had half a million members in 1,500 branches, and between 1879 and 1882 contributed over $5 million dollars to Ireland, primarily through Patrick Ford's *Irish World*. John Devoy, who with Michael Davitt had joined with Parnell in the New Departure, saw the membership of Clan na Gael rise to 40,000 in the 1880s.[70]

A centralized Irish–American institution was called for by Devoy in 1881: 'We want an Irish–American movement that can speak in the name of our whole race and its work and must not be confined to the interests of any one class of our people at home', and in April 1883, when around 1,200 Irishmen

67 Quoted in Miller, 'Assimilation and alienation', p. 99.   68 Brown, *Irish American nationalism*, pp 60–73.   69 Ibid. pp 64–73; Miller, *Emigrants and exiles*, pp 538–9.   70 Miller, *Emigrants and exiles*, pp 539–40; Foner, *Politics and ideology*, pp 38–42; Brown, *Irish American nationalism*, pp 101–15.

met in Philadelphia to found the Irish National League of the United States, this institution appeared to become a reality. The Land League was represented by 468 delegates, and others represented included the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), the Catholic Total Abstinence Union (CTAU) and the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union (ICBU). Almost all Irish American fraternal societies were represented. The main goals of the League were to support Parnell in achieving Home Rule; promote the development of Irish industry; boycott British goods; foster the Irish language and arts; and destroy 'those baneful animosities of province and creed [and] ... keep alive the holy flame of Irish nationality'. But the League failed to grow. Only 553 branches, six less than the Land League had had in 1883, were officially recorded at its second convention in Boston in 1884. It was a fund-raising body, raising $635,873 between April 1883 and January 1890, but it was in funds and membership weaker than some of its affiliated societies. Its significance, argues Brown, was in its testimony to the new Irishman of America: sober, hardworking, respectable, although the activities of Alexander Sullivan and the Chicago Triangle and the fighting between the Devoy and Sullivan factions of Clan na Gael which dominated the League led to dwindling Clan and League membership.[71]

The people who subscribed money to the Land League were, according to the *New York Times* in 1881, 'the day labourers and servant maids of America'. Eric Foner has argued that collective organization and class consciousness among Irish miners in the anthracite region of north-eastern Pennsylvania led to their support for Patrick Ford's radical doctrines and for the Land League which functioned as a surrogate Knights of Labor. The average contribution to the *Irish World* fund was less than a dollar. After 1884, however, wealthier Irish Americans supported Parnell. Major John Byrne, a Cincinnati businessman, proposed an independent fund to aid Parnell's parliamentary party and asked for support from rich Irishmen who had previously shunned the League. Although castigated by League leaders for jeopardising American Irish unity under the League by catering to the rich, Home Rule Clubs and Parliamentary Aid Associations were set up in American cities during 1885–6. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised and sent to the Irish League treasurer in Dublin. The Hoffman House Committee, led by multimillionaire president of the Emigrant Savings bank, Eugene Kelly, and including members of the Friendly Sons of St Patrick and New York City Democrats, raised $150,000 for Parnell in nine months.[72] But the assassination in Chicago of an opponent of Alexander Sullivan, Dr Patrick Henry Cronin, in May 1889 spelt the end for the National League. In May 1890, the Dublin leaders requested the American leaders to relinquish control over

71 Brown, *Irish American nationalism*, pp 101–15.   72 Ibid.; Foner, *Politics and ideology*.

League funds in the United States. Then Parnell's divorce scandal in 1890–1 split the Irish Parliamentary Party and exacerbated the already deep divisions among Irish American nationalists with the formation of the Irish National Federation in opposition to the National League.[73]

Although the last convention of the Irish National League of the United States was held in Chicago in October 1891 and Irish American nationalism appeared to fragment into oblivion, the 1890s and early 1900s were focused, as Timothy Meagher argues, on non-political activities.[74] Irish America had always expressed its need for community and identity in ethnic associations. Nationwide fraternal associations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians which claimed 200,000 members in 1908, the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union, the Catholic Total Abstinence Union and the Knights of Columbus linked the Irish together while providing benefits such as insurance and employment networks. The leaders of these organizations were predominantly middle class, and the majority of their membership either middle class or skilled workers. They were closely bound to the Catholic Church. But Irish nationalism was never far from the surface. In the 1890s, the AOH promoted the study of Irish history in parochial schools; endowed a chair of Irish at the Catholic University of America and supported the Gaelic League; and backed Redmond's Home Rule party and then Sinn Féin's physical force nationalism.[75]

In 1900, the Irish Parliamentary Party reunited under the leadership of John Redmond. On an American fund-raising tour in 1901 Redmond founded the United Irish League of America to once again provide financial and moral support for the Home Rule movement. Clan na Gael, reunited in 1900 under John Devoy and Daniel Cohalan, a New York supreme court judge and Tammany politician, opposed Home Rule. By 1902, the UILA had over 200 branches and was supported by conservative upper and middle class Irish Americans. By 1910, the UILA had sent over £50,000 to Ireland. It supplied most of the living allowance money allocated to half the Irish Parliamentary Party until salaries for Members of Parliament were introduced in 1911. It funded the 1906 general election and two general elections in 1910. Clan na Gael, which sent funds to the IRB and founded the Sinn Féin League of America in 1908 appeared to be waning.[76]

But as Protestant militancy escalated in Ireland in 1912, Clan na Gael dominated American fund raising for the Irish National Volunteers. When Redmond pledged loyalty to the British Empire at the outbreak of World War I, the UILA collapsed and Redmond was forced to subsidize it from Irish funds

73 Funchion, *Chicago's Irish nationalists*, pp 28–55; Brown, *Irish-American nationalism*, pp 68–9.
74 T.J. Meagher, (ed.) *From Paddy to Studs – Irish-American communities in the turn of the century era, 1880–1920* (Westport, Conn., 1986).   75 Brown, *Irish American nationalism*, pp 68–9; Miller, *Emigrants and exiles*, pp 533–35.   76 Miller, *Emigrants and exiles*, pp 541–3; A. Ward, *Ireland and Anglo-American relations, 1899–1921* (Toronto, 1969), pp 12–69.

in 1915. Clan na Gael and the AOH supported the Irish Volunteers after their split with Redmond's National Volunteers and sought alliances with German Americans to prevent American support for the British war effort. Clan na Gael also financed Roger Casement's trip to Germany to convince the German government to give military help to Ireland when the opportunity would arise.[77]

In March 1916, Clan na Gael held an Irish Race Convention in New York and the Friends of Irish Freedom was founded. The 1916 Rising in Ireland bolstered the FOIF and at its height it had 275,000 members. As the United States entered the war on Britain's side in 1917, the FOIF prepared to lobby President Wilson to apply the principle of self-determination to Ireland at the end of the war. Sinn Féin's victory in the 1918 general election rallied Irish America behind the FOIF, and in February 1919 an Irish Race Convention opposed any peace treaty which would ratify British rule over Ireland.[78]

Éamon de Valera arrived in America as president of the Irish Republic in 1919 seeking recognition for the Irish Republic and, of course, financial assistance. Public quarrels ensued between de Valera and the leaders of the FOIF, especially Daniel Cohalan, as to who controlled the Irish American movement. Cohalan stressed to de Valera that American interests were paramount and that the Irish in America could only exert influence on American politics in their capacity as American citizens. He wanted to retain control of Irish-American opinion. De Valera, on the other hand, believed that Irish allegiance should be to the newly established republic and to him, as its president. As de Valera departed the States in 1920, a rival organization to the FOIF was founded – the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic. The AARIR launched a bond-certificate drive which raised $5.5 million and $5 million was raised for prisoner relief. At its height, the AARIR had 800,000 members.[79]

It is clear, therefore, that throughout the period 1870–1920, an independent Irish nation was a *political* objective of many Irish Americans. But political independence was not the only aspect of nationalism that could confer dignity and status on the American Irish. Irish music, history and language were held up as proof that the Irish were entitled to respect and status. Journalists reminded the immigrants of the 'greatness' of the old country, and Irish American journalists reiterated the idea 'that the Irish constituted a distinct and superior race complete with admirable traits and worthy characteristics'.[80] In 1884, the *Irish World*, in an article about an Irish musical performed

77 Ward, *Ireland and Anglo-American relations*; John Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish rebel – a personal narrative* (New York, 1929). 78 Miller, *Emigrants and exiles*, pp 543–4; F.M. Carroll, *American opinion and the Irish question* (New York, 1978), pp 106–7; 126–8. 79 P. McCartan, *With de Valera in America* (New York, 1932); C. Callan Tansill, *America and the fight for Irish freedom* (New York, 1957), Appendix. 80 Rodechko, *Patrick Ford and his search for America*.

in New York, 'An Bard agus an Fó', linked language and music with the self-respect of the Irish and with their rights to nationhood:

> The more our language, history and music are understood the more claim can we lay on the educated mind to advance every struggle made for Ireland. Therefore, it behooves all to assist in the presentation of what promises to be but the inception of a series of Irish festivals that will unquestionably prove of immense value in gaining for Ireland the attention of the public mind, which, once interested, is sure to inquire further into all the essentials we possess to fit us to enjoy the rights of nationality.[81]

This attitude is again evident in the pages of *An Gaodhal*, a bilingual (Irish and English) monthly journal published by Michael J. Logan in New York which had as its purpose, 'the preservation and cultivation of the Irish language and the autonomy of the Irish nation'.[82] In Logan's view, language and nationality were interlinked. He urged his readers to support the Irish language so that they could be proud of their heritage and of their race. This pride, he believed, would contribute to an increase in their status and prestige as society recognized the Irish people in the United States as belonging to a nation with an ancient and glorious culture of its own.

But why would the American Irish support the Irish language or its revival? Certainly, if assimilation to the host culture was the primary objective of Irish immigrants, the maintenance of an ancient and essentially useless language would not be a priority. Why, after all the effort of emigration would the American Irish suddenly revert to that which they had cast aside even before leaving Queenstown? Although, as Fishman suggests, language was more likely to be a source of embarrassment and an obstacle to immigrants becoming true Americans, language loyalty and language maintenance became aspects of consciousness for many immigrants as they became aware of their 'groupness'. Allied to this was the fact that, dependent as they were on transmuted ethnicity rather than upon a daily ethnic way of life, language maintenance may have become ideologized and wedded to a philosophy which combined national distinctiveness and national mission.[83] Glazer and Moynihan suggest that while cultural differences such as religion and language may become increasingly symbolic, they may nonetheless serve as a basis for mobilization of the ethnic group and become an effective focus for such mobilization.[84] Thus, while it would have seemed unlikely that the Irish language would prove to be a unifying force among the American Irish given its progressive decline

81 *Irish World*, 29 November 1884.   82 É. Ní Fhlannagáin, *Mícheál Ó Lócháin agus An Gaodhal* (Dublin, 1990), p. 22.   83 Fishman, *Language loyalty*, p. 171.   84 N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan (eds), *Ethnicity: theory and experience* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975) p. 18.

in post-Famine Ireland, allied to other aspects of nationality within the American context, it acquired a significant import in Irish American organizations.

With the foundation of the Gaelic League in Ireland a practical programme of de-Anglicization was begun which placed the revival of the Irish language at the heart of the Irish collective consciousness. In the United States, Irish nationalism united the diverse Irish and gave them a common purpose. The belief that a free and independent Ireland would raise the morale and status of the American Irish was central to this nationalism. In the Anglophone culture of America, de-Anglicization in language terms was not the objective. The fact that Ireland had a separate civilization and a language that was unique and distinctive would advance the case for an independent nation. And in the Irish quest for assimilation to the host country, a badge of ethnicity that indicated an ancient and glorious past, rather than demeaned and debased, could prove to be an invaluable one.[85]

85 See K. Neils Conzen, D.A. Gerber, E. Morawska, G.E. Pozzetta and R.J. Vecoli, 'The invention of ethnicity: a perspective from the USA' in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Fall 1992, p. 10, with regard to the shifting of the weighting of ethnicity from negative to positive.