

Racism

Irish Famine  
Unit II

II.

# Racism



UNIT II - Racism

ADDITIONAL UNIT GOALS:

**PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES**

1. The student will be able to define and give examples of anti-Irish racism, and relate them to the Irish Famine experience.

**TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES**

A. Students will learn that anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic discrimination have been an inherent part of British colonial rule in Ireland. Students will also examine this racism in the context of racism against other peoples.

Activity 1. Students will view anti-Irish cartoons, finding, listing and discussing racist stereotypes.

Activity 2. Students will read "Out of Africa, Out of Ireland" and "British Racism: Before, During and After the Famine". They will then answer questions following the readings and discuss the issues raised.

**INSTRUCTIONAL, MATERIAL/RESOURCES**

"Out of Africa, Out of Ireland" and "British Racism: Before, During, and After the Famine". (see footnotes for sources)



Bog Trotters

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"Bog Trotters" is a long-standing English term for Irish people, especially Irish peasants. They are shown here as near imbeciles, frolicking over the countryside.



2.

"The Irish Ogre" about to devour the peasants is none other than Daniel O'Connell, "the Liberator". He earned that name by leading a peaceful struggle for Catholic emancipation. Why he is depicted with copious bags of rent money is unclear.



3.

"The workingman 's burden" shows a gleeful Irish peasant carrying his Famine relief money while riding on the back of an exhausted English laborer. The cartoon could just as easily have depicted Irish peasants carrying absentee English landlords on their backs.



4.

"The Pig and the Peer". This cartoon shows a life-size pig with an Irish accent pleading with the English Prime Minister. During the Famine thousands of Irish peasants were evicted to make way for animals that could "pay rent".



"Two Forces" shows "classical" Britain using the sword of law to protect Ireland (Hibernia) from Irish "anarchists" and their demand for land reform.



"The Irish Frankenstein" capitalized on Mary Shelley 's popular novel to depict the Irish as savage, inhuman monsters.

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This untitled cartoon shows the Irish as obese, wasteful, violent, drug abusing monkeys. John Bull (Britain) shows Uncle Sam that he will take care of the troublemaker.



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"Equal Burdens". Here the stereotype of the belligerent Irishman meets the stereotype of the happy slave. Irish were called "white Negroes".



UNCLE SAM'S LODGING HOUSE

10.

"Uncle Sam's Lodging House" shows the Irish as the only new emigrant raising hell and disrupting good order.

P U C K.



11.

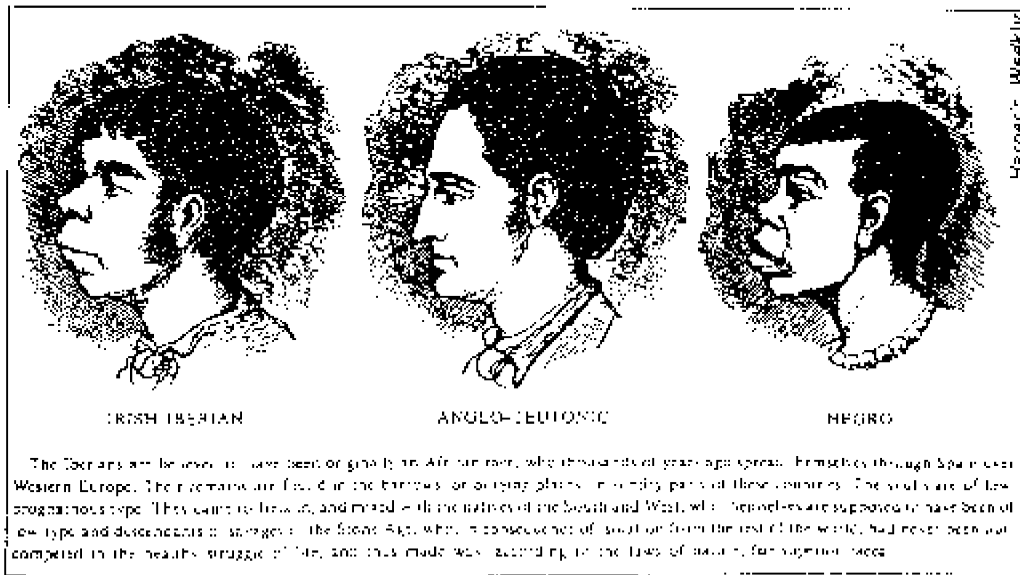
"American Gold" contrasts the industrious Irish in America with the slothful Irish in Ireland. "No Irish Need Apply" signs were common.



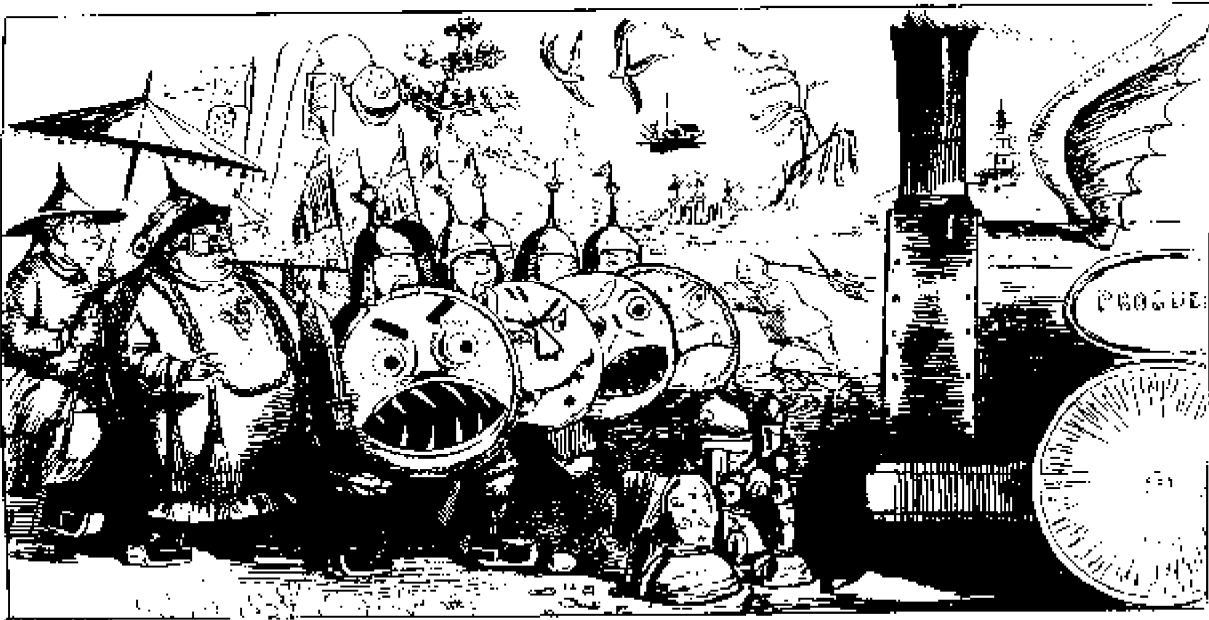
The Irish stereotyped as a lower form of life in Harper's Weekly cartoon by Thomas Nast, 1867

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"The Day We Celebrate" by American cartoonist Thomas Nast shows the Irish on St. Patrick's Day as violent, drunken apes.



"Scientific Racism" from an American magazine, Harper's Weekly, shows that the Irish are similar to Negroes, and should be extinct!



This British cartoon shows backward Chinese blocking "Progress" only ten years after the "Opium War" when the British government used troops and gunboats to force the Chinese to accept illegal opium trafficking.

**Irish Famine**  
**Unit II**  
**Activity 2**

**OUT OF AFRICA, OUT OF IRELAND**

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W.E.B. Du Bois, founder of the NAACP, and the preeminent historian on slavery in the Americas, wrote: "Any attempt to consider the attitude of the English colonies toward the African slave-trade must be prefaced by a word as to the attitude of England herself and the development of the trade in her hands."

Du Bois gives us a logical starting place for discussing racism and the legacy of slavery in America: it begins with the "Mother Country's" dominant role in the Atlantic slave trade. Before all white Europeans are lumped together with the British as colonists and slave keepers, let us consider Britain's treatment of the Irish and the Africans, and the many parallels of subjugation and enslavement to be drawn.

Britain first entered the slave trade with the capture of 300 Negroes in 1562, and pursued it with religious zeal for three centuries. She introduced the first African slaves to Virginia on board a Dutch ship in 1619. In 1651 she fought two wars to wrest the slave trade from the Dutch.

In her book, Black Chronology from 4,000 B.C. to Abolition of the Slave Trade, Ellen Irene Diggs wrote: "The final terms of peace surrendered New Netherlands (Delaware, New Jersey and New York) to England and opened the way for England to become the world's greatest slave trader."

In 1662 the "Company of Royal Adventurers" was chartered by Charles II of England. The Royal Family, including the Queen Dowager and the Duke of York, contracted to supply the West Indies with 3,000 slaves annually. This company was later sold for 34,000 Pounds and replaced by the "Royal African Company" also chartered by King Charles II.

Diggs says that in 1655, "Oliver Cromwell, in his zeal for God and the slave trade", sent an expedition to seize Jamaica from Spain. It soon became Britain's West Indian base for the slave trade.

Six years earlier Oliver Cromwell and his 20,000 man army invaded Ireland. They killed the entire garrison of Drogheda and slaughtered all the townspeople. Afterwards, Cromwell said "I do not think thirty of the whole number escaped with their lives. Those that did are in safe custody for the Barbados."

Under Cromwell's policy known as "To Hell or Connaught" Irish landowners were driven off millions of acres of fertile land. Those found east of the river Shannon after May 1, 1654, faced the death penalty or slavery in the West Indies. Cromwell rewarded his soldiers and loyal Scottish Presbyterians by "planting" them on large estates. The British set up similar "plantations" in Barbados, St. Kitts and Trinidad. The demand for labor on these distant plantations prompted mass kidnappings in Ireland. A pamphlet published in 1660 accused the British of sending soldiers to grab any Irish people they could in order to sell them to Barbados for profit:

"It was the usual practice with Colonel Strubber, Governor of Galway, and other commanders in the said country, to take

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people out of their beds at night and sell them for slaves to the Indies, and by computations sold out of the said country about a thousand souls."

In Black Folk Then and Now , Du Bois concurs: "Even young Irish peasants were hunted down as men hunt down game, and were forcibly put aboard ship, and sold to plantations in Barbados".

According to Peter Berresford Ellis in To Hell or Connaught , soldiers commanded by Henry Cromwell, Oliver's son, seized a thousand "Irish wenches" to sell to Barbados. Henry justified the action by saying, "Although we must use force in taking them up, it is so much for their own good and likely to be of so great an advantage to the public." He also suggested that 2,000 Irish boys of 12 to 14 years of age could be seized for the same purpose: "Who knows but it might be a means to make them Englishmen."

In 1667 Parliament passed the "Act to regulate Negroes on British Plantations." Punishments included a severe whipping for striking a Christian. For the second offense: branding on the face with a hot iron. There was no punishment for "inadvertently" whipping a slave to death.

Between 1680 and 1688 the English African Company sent 249 ships to Africa and shipped approximately 60,000 Black slaves. They "lost" 14,000 during the middle passage, and only delivered 46,000 to the New World.

Diggs points out that "Planters sometimes married white women servants to Blacks in order to transform these servants and their children into slaves." This was the case with "Irish Nell", a servant woman brought to Maryland and sold to a planter when her former owner returned to England. Whether her children by a Black slave husband were to be slave or free, occupied the courts of Maryland for a number of years. Petition was finally granted, and the children freed.

The "custom" of marrying white servants to Black slaves in order to produce slave offspring was legislated against in 1681. How many half Irish children became slaves through this custom? How many Black Americans have Irish ancestors because of it? If a servant is forced to mate with a slave in order to produce slave children for her slave master, is she not a slave?

In 1698 British Parliament acted under pressure and allowed private English merchants to participate in the slave trade. The statute declared the slave trade "highly Beneficial and Advantageous to this Kingdom, and to the Plantations and Colonies thereunto belonging," according to Du Bois.

English merchants immediately sought to exclude all other nations by securing a monopoly on the lucrative Spanish colonial slave trade. This was accomplished by the Assiento treaty of 1713. Spain granted England a monopoly on the Spanish slave trade for thirty years.

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England engaged to supply the Spanish colonies with "at least 144,000 slaves at the rate of 4,800 a year," and they greatly exceeded their quota, according to Du Bois. The kings of Spain and England were to receive one-fourth of the profits, and the Royal African Company was authorized to import as many slaves as they wished.

In Slavery: A World History , Milton Meltzer says, "Slave trading was no vulgar or wicked occupation that shut a man out from office or honors. Engaged in the British slave trade were dukes, earls, lords, countesses, knights - and kings. The slaves of the Royal African Company were branded with initials D.Y. for the Duke of York"

The Church of England supported the slave trade as a means of converting "heathens," and the Bishop of Exeter held 655 slaves until he was compensated for them in 1833. Trader John Newton had prayers said twice a day on board his slave ship, saying he never knew "sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion." Francis Drake's slave ship was the "Grace of God."

In the late 18th century English historian Arthur Young travelled widely in Ireland. He wrote, "A landlord in Ireland can scarcely invent an order which a laborer, servant, or cottier dares to refuse. He may punish with his cane or horsewhip with most perfect security. A poor man would have his bones broken if he offered to lift a hand in his own defense."

When the Irish rebelled in 1798, Britain shipped thousands of chained "traitors" to her penal colonies in Australia. Many Irish prisoners were convinced that the masters of these convict ships were under orders to starve and murder them by neglect on the outward voyage. In The Fatal Shore , Robert Hughes says, "They had reason to think so," and points to the 1802 arrival of the Hercules, with a 37 percent death rate among the political exiles. That same year, the Atlas II sailed from Cork, with 65 out of 181 "convicts" found dead on arrival. Irish sailors who mutinied to help their countrymen were flogged unmercifully, and "ironed" together with handcuffs, thumbscrews and slave leg bolts.

In Slavery and the Slave Trade, James Walvin writes: "In 1781 the British slave ship the Zong, unexpectedly delayed at sea and in danger of running short of supplies, simply dumped 132 slaves overboard in order to save the healthier slaves and on the understanding that such an action would be covered by the ship's insurance (not the case had the wretched slaves merely died)."

Africans who arrived in the West Indies were sometimes sold in advance to plantation owners, or an agent could be paid 15-20 percent for handling the sale. But most often the ship's captain was responsible for selling the slaves, and his method was the "scramble."

According to Meltzer, the slaves were marched through the town behind bagpipes and drawn up for inspection in the public square. "By agreement with the buyers, a fixed price was set for the four

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categories of slaves: man, woman, boy, girl. A day for the sale was advertised. When the hour came, a gun was fired, the door to the slave yard flung open, and a horde of purchasers rushed in, with all the ferocity of brutes....each buyer, bent on getting his pick of the pack, tried to encircle the largest number of slaves by means of a rope. The slaves, helpless, bewildered, terrified, were yanked about savagely, torn by one buyer from another." Already branded once by the trader, the slaves were branded a second time with their new owner's initials.

The last report of slave populations in the British West Indies was in 1834. K.W. Stetson in his "Quantitative Approach to Britain's American Slave Trade" documents them as follows: Barbados: 82,000, Jamaica: 324,000, Grenada: 23,600, St. Vincent: 22,300, Dominica: 14,200, Trinidad: 20,700, Tobago: 11,600, St. Lucia: 13,300, Virgin Islands: 5,100, Bahamas: 10,100, Bermuda: 4,000, British Honduras: 1,900.

One victim of the trade was a Ghana man, Ottobah Cugoano, who was kidnapped at 13 and taken to the British West Indies as a slave. Later he was brought to England and freed. He commented bitterly on the British:

"Is it not strange to think that they who ought to be considered as the most learned and civilized people in the world, that they should carry on a traffic of the most barbarous cruelty and injustice, and that many are become so dissolute as to think slavery, robbery and murder no crime?"

Britain also colonized many African countries, including: Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Cameroons, Egypt, Zanzibar, N. Rhodesia, S. Rhodesia, Swaziland, Somalia, Tanganyika, Basutoland, Seychelles, Mauritius, Togoland, and South Africa (Transvaal, Orange River, Natal, Cape Colony).

There were slave uprisings in Jamaica in 1669, '72, '73, twice in 1678, '82, '85, '90, 1733, '34, '62, '65, '66, 1807, 1815 and 1824. The last rebellion was led by Samuel Sharpe. The British executed him along with all the other leaders of the revolt, but his action did lead to Britain abolishing slavery. In the 1830's the British government paid the West Indian slave owners 22 million Pounds as compensation for the loss of their slave property. The slaves were not compensated.

Walvin says, "The picture described here has been too charitable toward the slavers and does not fully underline the inhumanities endemic in the slave trade...the slave trade was an exercise in cruelty and inhumanity to a degree scarcely imaginable to modern readers."

In The African Slave Trade, Basil Davidson says, The value of British income derived from the (slave) trade with the West Indies was said to be four times greater than the value of British incomes derived from trade with the rest of the world." Diggs says that the



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great profits from the trade "helped make possible the British Industrial Revolution". The tables from the Royal African Company indicate that between 1690 to 1807, they took 2,579,400 slaves out of Africa.

In 1845-52 over a million Irish people died of starvation and related diseases while enjoying the benefits of direct rule from London. The mortality rate was increased by the forced eviction of 500,000 souls.

A million and a half more left Ireland, many suffering and dying onboard "coffin ships".

There are many parallels between the treatment received by the Irish and the Africans at the hands of the British, and undeniably, racism played a major role in both tragedies.

### **BRITISH RACISM: BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE FAMINE**

Racism is an ancient scourge, and the two groups in conflict need not be of different colors or religions.

When one powerful group begins to see another people as apes, pigs, beasts, or as an inferior race of subhumans, a disaster is in the making. Any study of racist stereotyping should consider what the dominant group stands to gain. Racism usually begins with economics.

Massacres, the slave trade, and the theft of vast tracts of other people's land, have all been justified by claims of religious, cultural and racial superiority. Such myths often hide the harsh reality of exploitation and colonization.

Anti-Irish prejudice is a very old theme in English culture. The written record begins with Gerald of Wales, whose family was deeply involved in the Norman invasion of Ireland.

In his 12th-century History and Topography of Ireland Gerald wrote contemptuously of the people, portraying them as inferior to the Normans in every respect:

"They live on beasts only, and live like beasts. They have not progressed at all from the habits of pastoral living." He condemned their customs, dress, and "flowing hair and beards" as examples of their "barbarity". He also vilified the religious practices and marriage customs of the people:

"This is a filthy people, wallowing in vice. Of all peoples it is the least instructed in the rudiments of the faith. They do not yet pay tithes or first fruits or contract marriages. They do not avoid incest." (1.)

### **A SACRIFICE TO GOD"**

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Religion was often used to justify attacks on the Irish. In 1574, a colonial expedition to Ulster led by the Earl of Essex slaughtered the entire population of Rathlin Island, some 600 people. Edward Barkley, a member of the expedition, gave a graphic description of how Essex's men had driven the Irish from the plains into the woods, where they would freeze or die of hunger at the onset of winter. He concluded:

"How godly a deed it is to overthrow so wicked a race the world may judge: for my part I think there cannot be a greater sacrifice to God" (2.)

When the Irish resisted colonization, they were met with total war on soldiers and noncombatants alike. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, the military governor and half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh, stated:

"I slew all those from time to time that did belong to, feed, accompany or maintain any outlaws or traitors; and after my first summoning of a castle or fort, if they would not presently yield it, I would not take it afterwards of their gift, but won it perforce - how many lives soever it cost; putting man, woman and child to the sword." (3.)

Thomas Churchyard, a pamphleteer who accompanied Gilbert to Munster, justified the killing of non-combatants on the grounds that they provided food for the rebels: "so that killing of them by the sword was the way to kill the men of war by famine." Churchyard described Sir Gilbert's methods:

### EARLY TERRORISM

"That the heads of all those (of what sort soever they were) which were killed in the day, should be cut off from their bodies and brought to the place where he encamped at night, and should there be laid on the ground by each side of the way leading into his own tent so that none could come into his tent for any cause but commonly must pass through a lane of heads which were used ad terrorem, the dead feeling nothing the more pains thereby; and yet did it bring great terror to the people when they saw the heads of their dead fathers, brothers, children, kinsfolk and friends, lie on the ground before their faces, as they came to speak with the said colonel" (4.)

### "BEASTLY BEHAVIOR"

The various justifications for colonization were brought together and elaborated by Edmund Spenser, the poet and author of The Faerie Queene. In his book, A View of the State of Ireland, published in 1596, Spenser wrote:

"Marry those be the most barbaric and loathy conditions of any people (I think) under heaven...They do use all the beastly behaviour that may be, they oppress all men, they spoil as well the subject, as the enemy; they steal, they are cruel and bloody, full of revenge, and

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delighting in deadly execution, licentious, swearers and blasphemers, common ravishers of women, and murderers of children." (5.)

In 1610, A New Description of Ireland was published. Its author, Barnaby Rich wrote:

"The time hath been, when they lived like Barbarians, in woods, in bogs, and in desolate places, without politic law, or civil government, neither embracing religion, law or mutual love. That which is hateful to all the world besides is only beloved and embraced by the Irish, I mean civil wars and domestic dissensions .... the Cannibals, devourers of men's flesh, do learn to be fierce amongst themselves, but the Irish, without all respect, are even more cruel to their neighbors." (6.)

### "GLORY TO GOD ALONE"

On his arrival in Dublin in 1649, Cromwell said: "By God's divine providence" he and his troops would "carry on the great work against the barbarous and bloodthirsty Irish..." After his army laid siege to the town of Drogheda, and killed the entire garrison, he wrote:

"It hath pleased God to bless our endeavors in Drogheda...The enemy were about 3,000 strong in the town...I do not think 30 of the whole number escaped with their lives. Those that did are in safe custody for the Barbados...I wish that all honest hearts may give the glory of this to God alone, to whom indeed the praise of this mercy belongs." Cromwell proceeded to Wexford where he slaughtered 2,000 more. (7.)

The English poet John Milton wrote at this time: "God is decreeing some new and great period. What does He then but reveal himself...as his manner is, first to his Englishmen?" (8.)

### NO PEOPLE MORE PREJUDICED

British contempt for the Irish was part of an increasing disdain for foreigners in general. The Swiss traveller de Saussure observed them in 1727:

"I do not think there is a people more prejudiced in its own favor than the British people, and they allow this to appear in their talk and manners. They look on foreigners in general with contempt, and think nothing is as well done elsewhere as in their own country." (9.)

### A TRUE-BORN ENGLISHMAN

English writer Daniel Defoe, the author of Robinson Crusoe, lampooned the notion of English superiority in a poem, "A True-born Englishman". The preface began: "The intent of the satire is pointed at the vanity of those who talk of their antiquity, and value themselves upon their pedigree, their ancient families, and being True-Born; whereas it is impossible we should be True-Born: and if we

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could, should have lost in the bargain."

Defoe then listed the diverse peoples who had settled in England: Romans, Gauls, Greeks, Lombards, Scots, Picts, Danes and "slaves of every nation", and concluded: "From this amphibious ill-born mob began that vain ill-natured thing, an Englishman." (10.)

### **RACISM AGAINST AFRICANS, INDIANS AND EGYPTIANS**

The British denigrated the Africans in terms similar to those they used about the Irish, but even more defamatory. While the Irish were despised for their "inferior" brand of Christianity, the Africans were dismissed for not even being Christians, but "heathens." And African customs were represented as even more "barbaric" than the Irish.

In India, British rule was justified because the Indians were "heathans" and unfit to rule themselves. In 1813 Lord Hastings wrote: "The Hindoo appears a being nearly limited to mere animal functions and even in them indifferent. Their proficiency and skill in the several lines of occupation to which they are restricted, are little more than the dexterity which any animal with similar conformation but with no higher intellect than a dog, an elephant or a monkey, might be supposed to be capable of attaining." (11.)

Lord Cromer, the British Governor of Egypt, wrote that, "Free institutions in the full sense of the term must for generations to come be wholly unsuitable to countries such as India and Egypt...it will probably never be possible to make a Western silk purse out of an Eastern sow's ear." (12.)

The 18th century British philosopher David Hume, who wrote contemptuously of the Irish, also maligned the Africans. In his essay, "Of National Characters" he wrote: "I am apt to suspect that Negroes, and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white..." (13.)

In the British view of the world, the Irish occupied a position way below themselves, but just above the Africans. The two were often compared, as in these verses from the British magazine Punch in 1848:

"Six-foot Paddy, are you no bigger -  
You whom cozening friars dish -  
Mentally, than the poorest nigger  
Groveling before fetish?  
You to Sambo I compare  
Under superstition's rule  
Prostrate like an abject fool." (14.)

In 1849, British historian Thomas Carlyle published "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question." Mr. Eric Williams, former Prime

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Minister of Trinidad, and a historian, called it "The most offensive document in the entire world literature on slavery and the West Indies." Carlyle argued that the recently emancipated slaves should be forced to work for the whites: "Decidedly you will have to be servants to those who are born wiser than you, that are born lords of you; servants to the Whites, if they are (as what mortal can doubt they are?) born wiser than you." (15.)

Carlyle visited Ireland soon after the famine and filled his journal with tirades against what he called "this brawling unreasonable people". Ireland, he wrote, was a "human swinery", "an abomination of desolation" and "a black howling Babel of superstitious savages". (16.)

### IRISH CHIMPANZEES

In the 1860s, the debate among scientists about the relationship of humans to animals prompted British racists to make frequent comparisons between Irish people, Black people and apes. The Cambridge historian Charles Kingsley wrote to his wife from Ireland in 1860: "I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country...to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black one would not see it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours." (17.)

### "THE MISSING LINK"

In 1860 the first live adult gorilla arrived at the London Zoo just after Charles Darwin's Origin of the Species had been published. Victorians flocked to see it and debate the relationship of humans to animals. In 1862 the British magazine Punch published "The Missing Link" a satire attacking Irish immigrants: "A gulf certainly, does appear to yawn between the Gorilla and the Negro. The woods and wilds of Africa do not exhibit an example of any intermediate animal. But in this, as in many other cases, philosophers go vainly searching abroad for that which they could readily find if they sought for it at home. A creature manifestly between the Gorilla and the Negro is to be met with in some of the lowest districts of London and Liverpool by adventurous explorers. It comes from Ireland, whence it has contrived to migrate; it belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages: the lowest species of Irish Yahoo. When conversing with its kind it talks a sort of gibberish. It is, moreover, a climbing animal, and may sometimes be seen ascending a ladder ladden with a hod of bricks." (18.)

The British historian Edward Freeman visited the United States in 1881. His obituary states that "he gloried in the Germanic origin of the English nation." On his return from America, he wrote: "This would be a grand land if only every Irishman would kill a Negro, and be hanged for it. I find this sentiment generally approved - sometimes with the qualification that they want Irish and Negroes for servants, not being able to get any other." (19.)

### "SCIENTIFIC" RACISM

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Although their empire was acquired by military force and a divide and conquer strategy, the British attributed their success to Anglo-Saxon superiority. This old idea was brought up to date through pseudo-scientific theories of race.

Nineteenth century theorists divided humanity into "races" on the basis of external physical features. These "races" were said to have inherited differences not only of physique, but also of character. These "differences" allowed the races to be placed in a hierarchy. Needless to say, the Teutons, who included the Anglo-Saxons, were placed at the top. Black people, especially "Hottentots" were at the bottom, with Celts (Irish) and Jews somewhere in between.

Anthropologists went around measuring people's skulls, and assigning them to different "races" on the basis of such factors as how far their jaws protruded. Celts and others were said to have more "primitive" features than Anglo-Saxons.

The physician John Beddoe invented the "index of nigrescence" a formula to identify the racial components of a given people. The Anglo-Saxon's "refined" features also came with a "superior" character. They were said to be industrious, thoughtful, clean, law-abiding and emotionally restrained, while the characters of the various colonized peoples were said to be the very opposite.

In 1850 the anatomist Robert Knox described the Celtic character as "Furious fanaticism; a love of war and disorder; a hatred for order and patient industry; no accumulative habits; restless; treacherous and uncertain: look to Ireland..." He drew the following conclusion:

"As a Saxon, I abhor all dynasties, monarchies and bayonet governments, but this latter seems to be the only one suitable for the Celtic man." (20.)

### **SUBJECTION AS A CONDITION FOR ADVANCEMENT**

In 1862, the British historian Lord Acton wrote:

"The Celts are not among the progressive, initiative races, but among those which supply the materials rather than the impulse of history...The Persians, the Greeks, the Romans and the Teutons are the only makers of history, the only authors of advancement." He concluded: "Subjection to a people of a higher capacity for government is of itself no misfortune; and it is to most countries the condition of their political advancement." (21.)

In 1886 Lord Salisbury opposed Home Rule for Ireland with these words: "You would not confide free representative institutions to the Hottentots, for instance." Self government was only for people of the "Teutonic race." (22.)

### **"THE WILD IRISH"**

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Another proponent of the theory of Anglo-Saxon racial supremacy was James Anthony Froude, a professor of history at Oxford. He described the Irish country folk as "more like squalid apes than human beings." He depicted the Irish as "unstable as water", while the English stood for order and self-control. Only "efficient military despotism" could succeed in Ireland, he wrote, because the "wild Irish" understood only force.

### "THOSE WHO ARE WISER"

Froude considered Negroes, like the Irish, to be an inferior race. He wrote: "Nature has made us unequal, and Acts of Parliament cannot make us equal. Some must lead and some must follow, and the question is only of degree and kind...Slavery is gone...but it will be an ill day for mankind if no one is compelled any more to obey those who are wiser than himself..." (23.)

Toward the end of her 1984 book, Nothing But the Same Old Story': The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism, Liz Curtis wrote:

"A gigantic exercise in self-delusion has helped to preserve English pride and self-regard down the centuries. Actions taken for reasons of political and economic expediency have been presented as if altruism were the sole motive. Atrocities of all kinds - from Cromwell's massacre at Drogheda, to the slave trade, to the appropriation of vast tracts of other people's countries - have been justified by claims of religious, cultural and racial superiority. These myths have served the British ruling class well over the centuries, clouding the harsh reality of exploitation and colonization."

That reality is best described by Jonathan Swift in Gulliver's Travels:

"A crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither, at length a boy discovers land from the topmast, they go on shore to rob and plunder; they see an harmless people, are entertained with kindness, they give the country a new name, they take formal possession of it for the King, they set up a rotten plank or a stone for a memorial, they murder two or three dozen of the natives, bring away a couple of more by force for a sample, return home and get their pardon. Here commences a new dominion acquired with a title by divine right. Ships are sent with the first opportunity, the natives driven out or destroyed, their princes tortured to discover their gold; a free license given to all acts of inhumanity and lust, the earth reeking with the blood of its inhabitants: and this execrable crew of butchers employed in so pious an expedition, is a modern colony sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people."

## QUESTIONS

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- How were racism and religion used by the British to justify the economic exploitation of Ireland?
- Why is it necessary to examine racism against the Irish in the context of British racism against a variety of peoples?
- Given that radio and television did not exist during the Irish Famine, a few British Ministers and powerful newspapers could have used racism, religion and propaganda to control British public opinion about Ireland. How could such a tragedy happen today, in the age of mass communication?
- How is Britain's role in the slave trade relevant to a study of anti-Irish racism?

### FOOTNOTES

1. Gerald of Wales, The History and Topography of Ireland, Penguin Classics 1982
2. Canny, Nicholas P., "The ideology of English colonisation from Ireland to America", William and Mary Quarterly, vol. 30, 1973, p.581.
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