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From "Paddies" to "Spics": The Comparison between the Contemporary Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric in American Media and the Anti-Irish one in the 19th Century

Abstract: The animated debate surrounding an apparent migrant problem of the Western world, manifesting itself in either the immigration crisis in Europe or the progressing tendencies to isolationism both in Europe and in the United States of America, provides a good case to investigate the media representation of immigrants in the American context. The sometimes biased portrayal of immigrant communities in the contemporary American media, especially those with right-wing inclination, has been given a higher profile in the U.S. public discourse and bears a striking resemblance to the anti-Irish sentiment and press coverage that dominated in the U.S. in the 19th century. It is in the purview of the following paper to examine the media rhetoric and representation strategies that were used at that time and that are harnessed currently. The idea warrants discussion since the United States also prides itself for its multicultural and multiethnic heritage, which proves to highlight the polarized public opinion. In the author's estimation, the anti-immigrant attitudes are a recurring theme in the American culture and have always divided the public.

Keywords: immigration, rhetoric, media, manipulation, caricatures

The anti-immigrant rhetoric has gained impetus even in countries in which immigration is traditionally and historically a third-rate problem. If the immigration is so widely commented in the media of rather ethnically homogenous countries then I think we should delve into the mediascape of countries commonly perceived as immigrant nations, such as the U.S. The U.S. is an interesting area of investigation as the country is essentially multiethnic and much of its economic or political prominence was built upon the immigrant (human or financial) capital. In fact, one of America's emblematic founding myths alludes to its inclusive and egalitarian character. Still, the political

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climate of as much the U.S. as of the rest of the world has given rise to a stormy immigration debate in which media outlets (both print media and broadcast news) play a prominent role. Just as the global societies, so the media display dissimilar attitudes toward and interpretations of the immigration issue and, more importantly, of how it should be addressed. Traditionally right-wing and conservative news outlets have adopted hard-line and critical stance toward immigration, whereas the liberal media stand up for the immigrants and their condition[1].

The immigration debate seems to have always returned in politically and economically trying times. We may lament such a trend, still the question of immigration has aroused public to passion and action more than once. In general, opinion polls do not enjoy reputation of infallible sources of information on social moods, still it is emblematic that, for example, according to the 2014 Gallup research 77% of Americans consider immigration as one of the burning concerns of their country (Newport 2015). Certainly, such a result might have been caused by a simple fact that for instance Donald Trump used the ageless immigration controversy as a tool to mobilize and consolidate popular support in his political rise. On the other hand, it might also point to the fact that conservative media might have greater impact on the public opinion than it is usually attributed to them. In fact, it has already been demonstrated that partisan media advance substantially attitudinal polarization of its audiences, thus proving its "outsized political role" (Levendusky 2013, 612). Therefore, in this article I shall focus primarily on the representation of immigration offered to the public by the conservative media outlets that display alarming tendency to present immigration in negative and biased manner. The study of how immigration is portrayed in America is important not only due to nation's "immigrant origins" but also because of its deserved repute of a peculiar trendsetter that exerts influence on other countries in various respects. Understandably, the rhetoric pervading in the American public sphere might bode some broader global trends that cannot be left unexamined.

Even a cursory glimpse at the current worldwide media representation of immigrants suffices to make us realize that the antagonistic rhetoric of 'the Other' has taken hold in both European and American cultures. The structural anthropology points to the dual nature of culture and human cognitive processes, claiming that we understand and interpret the world around us through binary oppositions, such as life and death, good and evil, white and black, *us* and *them*. Especially, the last dichotomy has permeated the Western culture's socio-political processes, as it has been frequently purloined by politicians as a rallying cry (Stomma 2014, 202).

[1] Even though such statement does not depart from truth, it is still an oversimplification. In fact, the framing of immigration by as much conservative as liberal media outlets is a far more complex issue that is difficult to be evaluated unambiguously. As an illustration let us serve the words of J. Benjamin Taylor (2017, 161): "In recent years, both liberal and conservative outlets frame immigration concentrating on the negative aspect of immigration policy. Conservative media concentrate their attention on law enforcement, and liberal media concentrate on the potential economic threat posed by news immigrants."

Umberto Eco (2012, 11–14) discerns that the theme of *ennemi commun* has found its multiple applications throughout history. Heathens, Jews, Blacks, the lepers, women (or witches to be precise) – those are just the most obvious examples of groups branded by different societies at different historical periods. Interestingly, foreigners have also belonged to such marginalized and ostracized groups of misfits for centuries. As Eco notices, the very term "barbarian" makes reference to speaking a foreign language, as in Greek *barbaros* designates someone who mumbles, stammers and, thus, is incomprehensible. Hence, it is hard to escape the obvious conclusion that even the ancient civilizations shared the fear and dislike of the others, similar to ours. The aversion towards foreigners or immigrants has only been cemented by the development of trade as well as political or cultural international contacts. Within different communities, they started to be perceived as a particular "fifth column" that jeopardizes the existing order and common good. Undoubtedly, such hostility towards non-natives allows to strengthen the collective identity and to uphold the nation in the belief of its own excellence.

Nevertheless, rhetoric that "creates" enemies or forces societies to jump into premature conclusions and to search for scapegoats is nothing else but a cunning PR strategy employed in times of grave social crises (Eco 2012, 27). It allows the public to channel its frustrations and anger onto the external agent, instead of searching for the real causes of the problem. Such rhetoric has found an extremely fertile ground in the contemporary political arena, as it was used by the Bush administration in the aftermath of 9/11 with reference to terrorists or Islamic radicals, and as it is employed now with reference to illegal immigrants or refugees in the U.S. or in Europe.

The media frenzy and lively discussion of an apparent migrant problem of the Western world reflect a need to investigate the media representation of immigrants in the American context. The eruption of an anti-immigrant sentiment in the contemporary American public discourse invites comparison to similar negative attitudes held by the 19th-century American mainstream against Irish immigrants. At this point it is essential to stress that the 19th-century backlash concerned the legal immigration, whereas nowadays the illegal newcomers are targeted. Still, it is my intention to demonstrate that the general anti-immigrant moods present in some media are a recurring theme in world's history and in the American culture. One might doubt if such a comparison is reliable, as the media landscape of the 19th century was governed by different set of rules than the modern mass media. Not only were the forms of communication less diversified in the 19th century, but also their opinion-making capability and accessibility to wider public were smaller. Still, the very phenomenon of using media to create an acrimonious atmosphere and sway public opinion is, by all means, a trusted and proven tactic.

In the media-saturated Information Age, the media possess unprecedented prominence in molding and swaying public opinion. As Ryszard Kapuściński (2004, 118–119) posited, our knowledge of the world is largely predetermined by the media, which is to say that we know of the world affairs as much as the media want or allow us to

know. Moreover, people are highly susceptible to suggestion and the media power of suggestion is enormous. By means of media coverage, an average person forms an opinion about major world affairs; hence, the media play an unprecedented role in shaping the public beliefs and social awareness. The main objective of the media is to inform the public, a function that is corroborated by the very etymology of the word information, which derives from Latin verb *informare* and means to train, instruct or educate. The information has the ability of shaping people's perceptions and worldviews and, thus, it can condition people's interpretations of world events and change the attitudes towards them. The media have the potential to affect as much individuals as policymakers. With the right amount of pressure, the media might suggest, if not even force, the course of action of both domestic and foreign policies.

As Voltaire said, with great power comes great responsibility, and that is precisely the case of the media. The media possess great influence over masses, which makes them run the danger of abusing that influence. It is widely acknowledged that media can be ideologically compliant with the ruling classes and advance their particular agenda. Additionally, the market for information has become so competitive that the news offered by the media have transformed into products to be sold. As a result, the criterion of truth in journalism has been replaced with the one of attractiveness, which opens gates for significant distortions of reality (Kapuściński 2004, 116–117). As Douglas Walton (2007, 98) notices, the attention span of the modern audiences has become increasingly shorter, which implies the progressing tendency of the media to "leap from one attention grabbing story to another" in order to preserve the publicity. For this reason, the media frequently resort to selectivity of news coverage. Nevertheless, "[m]edia bias usually does not occur in random fashion (…)" and is the result of as much financial as ideological calculations (Parenti 1997, 5). The media can either provide us with partial and sanitized coverage of truly important matters or can exaggerate and blow the reported material out of proportion, thus playing with our emotions. Agenda-setting, priming or framing are methods of message-construction that dangerously verge on manipulation. The way the news is packaged, the amount of our exposure to it or the fashion in which it is expressed may affect societal values and dictate our real-life choices. Once we explore the connection between media and social interaction, we realize that the discursive tactics of media are frequently imperceptible, as they "create a desired impression without resorting to explicit advocacy" (Parenti 1997, 7).

Suffice it to mention that the rhetorical success of the media is primarily attributable to their pronounced tendency to exploit people's emotions. In the scholarly opinion of such distinguished language and media investigators as George Lakoff (2004) or Manuel Castells (2013), the persuasive argumentation of the media and the political elites is grounded in emotions, and strong emotions seem to be the most effective factor of prompting the audience to action. As it seems, our emotions are directly connected with our values and moral precepts that become a basic prism through which societies interpret world affairs. Hence, our emotion-driven judgment frequently renders us open to manipulation. Media language, of outlets on both sides of ideological scale,

frequently tends to be repeatedly filtered of arguments or details, and leans immoderately on rhetorical strategies that appeal to our emotions. I will venture to say that this is precisely the case of the modern media representation of the immigration, especially the one offered by right-wing news outlets, as it relies heavily on rhetorical stratagems rather than circumspect deliberation. For this reason, it is imperative that we attend to the substance of the contemporary media rhetoric concerning immigration.

The notion of immigration has received considerable negative press in the recent decades in the U.S. and targets chiefly the Hispanic community, although the 9/11 terrorist attacks also fanned xenophobic attitudes towards Muslims. Not to mention, that America also faces the refugee challenge that has become largely the Euro-American problem. It is true that the scale and societal implications of illegal immigration have become a major problem in the U.S., and the examples from the Old Continent prove that the unrestricted openness can eventually backfire on its advocates, still we should ask ourselves a question whether those risks truly justify the emotional and prejudiced overtones that appear in the media coverage on immigration. The media frequently duplicate tendentious and biased view of immigrants, emphasizing mostly the negative side of the immigration. As an example let us serve several quotations extracted by Katherine Pool from major American news outlets: "The Rio Grande Valley has become ground zero for an unprecedented surge in families and unaccompanied children flooding across southwest border" – *Los Angeles Times*; "Experts agree, Central Americans who are deluging the southern border with tens of thousands of their children are breeding not only a humanitarian crisis, but also a serious national security crisis to the US" – CBS News, or "The flow of Central and South Americans through South Texas has become an unmanageable torrent within the past month" – *Houston Chronicle* (Poor 2016, 140–141). Those quotations prove that the accusations hurled at the newcomers convey as much explicit as implicit message, according to which immigration has reached a size that jeopardizes the social order, let alone the national security of the U.S. The use of such vocabulary as "flood," "deluge" or "torrent" represents immigration as unstoppable force of destruction and the immigrants as colonists that will attempt to force their own culture, religion or language on the native population. The aggressive and sensationalist language employed by the mass media induces fear and, consequently, favors the manipulation of our emotions. Especially, as invocations of "ground zero" bring back in American public painful memories of the World Trade Center terrorist attack, thus convincing Americans that immigrants pose similar danger as terrorists (Poor 2016, 147–148). The media coverage of immigration employs chiefly negative terminology and depicts it in terms of a problem, crisis, invasion or even plague, which in turn elevates the topic of immigration to crisis-level proportions. One can instance the indisputable fact that the word "illegal" appears in the American public discourse primarily in the context of the Mexican community in the U.S. (Timberlake et al. 2015, 273).

The images evoked by such a negative portrayal stimulate popular imagination and stoke up strong sentiments, such as anger, sense of insecurity or hostility. An important

rhetorical strategy employed while discussing immigration is the use of vivid imagery. Immigrants are often shown either as an amorphous and faceless mass (Figure 1) so that we cannot relate to them and we cannot develop any empathy towards their predicament, or as a wolf in sheep's clothing (Figure 2). Even the isolated and insignificant incidents of aggression, violence or criminal activities perpetrated by immigrants are hyped by the media and dramatized. In fact, the media tend to put an inordinate emphasis on felonious instances of immigrant community lives, such as drug trafficking, violence and human smuggling, which in turn suggests that the new arrivals have ill-intent and bring disorder to their host country (Branton and Dunaway 2008, 1010). In this connection one should also mention the controversy over the Fox News representation of Sweden's reimplementation of military draft for its citizens. As it seems, the channel let its viewers to believe that the draft was a response to the refugee threat, whereas the real motivations of the Swedish government were to counteract the aggressive foreign policy of the Russian Federation (Bishop 2017). It transpires that some news outlets are so determined to forward their agenda that they decide to resort not only to emotion-driven coverage but even to distortions of truth.

Certainly there are incidents of violence perpetrated by immigrants, still the media tend to attribute the principle of collective responsibility for individual crimes to the entire immigrant community. Thus, the immigrants become subjects of vilification, or even dehumanization. The unspoken message hidden behind such framing of immigration is that the newcomers do not deserve our sympathy, not to mention help. The media representation of immigrants thrives upon ethnic stereotyping and proves to be extremely biased, simplified and one-sided. As we know, focus narrows vision, which is why such ruses of representation applied by the media hinder us from developing a broader picture of the issue and from forming an independent and objective opinion about immigrants and their condition.

Correspondingly, the negative representation of immigrants in some media has led to the unprecedented radicalization of views on both sides of the conflict and has cemented the cultural racism deep within the American society. How effective such negative 'framing' can be, was especially demonstrated by the controversy following the Coca-Cola advertisement aired at Super Bowl 2014. The advertisement shows a multiethnic group of people singing the traditional 'America is Beautiful' anthem in their respective languages, also in English. Even though the intention of its creators was obviously benevolent as they wanted to emphasize the multicultural character of American society, the general public's response to the ad was quite negative. The major accusation leveled by ad's detractors pointed to the fact that the anthem was not performed solely in English language, which was clearly interpreted as unpatriotic and even profane. The comments went as far as: "My family thought that the diversity ad was totally anti-American offensive, and giving the finger to European-American culture" or "I'm sick of multiculturalism being shoved down our throat. If you want to immigrate to the US, fine, learn English and assimilate… and we'll welcome you. The commercial is trash and now I'm a Pepsi drinker" (Marlow 2015, 631–635). On the ba-

sis of the above example we can see that pernicious rhetorical practices of some opinion-making media outlets or politicians produce a negative social fallout and make it necessary for American nation to revisit the myth paramount to its identity – the one of a multicultural, multiethnic and inclusive nation, as well as to address the exacerbating social tensions.

Nevertheless, one should stress that the anti-immigrant sentiment is not a new phenomenon in American culture, for "(…) along with the ebbs and flows of immigration have been ebbs and flows in anti-immigrant political and social attitudes among native-born Americans" (Timberlake et al. 2015, 272). The demographic changes in the U.S. have always generated distress among the dominant population that feared losing its economic capital or political influence. The tumultuous political seasons, such as elections, only nursed the mainstream grievances held against immigrants, thus framing the immigration as a matter of highest public interest. Noteworthy here is the fact that the economic, political or historical forces have had an enormous impact on the public perception of immigration. An example that suggests itself is the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that was designed to hold back the Chinese immigration to the U.S. At this point, it is also essential to stress that the anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. is subjected to regional variables, as some American states are more affected by the influx of the newcomers than other, hence the anti-immigrant rhetoric intensifies in the states with significant immigrant population (Timberlake et al. 2015, 272). Indeed, the problem of anti-immigrant discourse in the American public sphere is of ancient pedigree. American historiography provides us with several examples of anti-immigrant backlash that at different periods of time affected, e.g. the Chinese, the Mexicans or the Irish – the last of which I intend to discuss.

There were several waves of the Irish immigration to the U.S., and not all of the Irish newcomers received negative welcome. In fact, majority of first Irish arrivals were Ulster Protestants, that adapted quickly to Anglo-American value system and melted with the mainstream Protestant society (Meagher 2005, 20–22). Still, the Irish migration reached its zenith between the 1820 and 1860, a period of the outbreak of the Potato Famine in Ireland. According to estimations, a million of the Irish starved to death or died from famine-related diseases, whereas another million left Éire for America (Ó Gráda 2009, 93). That part of Irish migration was mostly Catholic and impoverished, which had tremendous implication for their reception by native-born Protestant Americans. Commonly held generalization suggested that the Famine-era Irish settlers were poor and unskilled, thus, from the very beginning, they were sentenced to belong to the lowest strata of the American society (Kenny 2006, 354–356). The significant number of the Irish Catholic newcomers fueled sectarian conflict in the U.S. as it caused apprehension among the Protestant communities which feared that the Irish might serve the Pope's agenda and that they will eventually exert major influence on American policymakers (Whelan 2006, 273–274).

Without greater moral or even ethical restraints, the Anglo-American press commenced to vent the mainstream aversion toward the Irish and to reproduce the nativist

rhetoric that defamed the Irish population. It is my intention to focus on the most visible manifestation of such negative 19th-century press coverage, namely caricatures on the Irish that were disseminated in many periodicals of that time. As Kerry Soper notices, the 19th-century British and American press are characterized by its fondness of ethnic cartoons that were "one of the most popular genres of comedy in humor magazines in both England and America" (2005, 258) despite being traditionally seen "as a low, degraded form of artistic expression" (2005, 259). Still, their reliance on coarse and primitive humor did not limit the opinion-making capability of the caricatures, which proved to be an effective source of social conditioning.

Interestingly, the Famine-era Irish immigration was also portrayed as a flood and deluge, mainly due to the unprecedented volume of the immigration that was direct result of the outbreak of the potato blight in Ireland. The large numbers of famished, poor, Catholic and unskilled Irish immigrants were feared and unwelcome in America. One of less known facts about the status of the Irish in American society in the 19th century is that they were compared or even equated with black slaves (see Figure 3). Such comparisons were applied as much to their alleged character traits or behavioral patterns, as to their physical appearance. The British and American political and humor magazines such as *Punch, Harper's Weekly* or *Puck* perpetuated negative stereotypes about the Irish that took root in the American consciousness for decades. The image of the Irish projected by the press pointed to their alleged drunkenness, incivility, laziness, ignorance or proclivity towards violence (Appel 1971, 369). A recurring theme of such caricatures were the simian features of the Irish, such as ape-like posture, extended jaws or fleshy lips. Such representation of the Irish alluded to their alleged "Africanoid" roots, which served as a cunning strategy of reinforcing the conviction about the Irish inferiority in the Anglo-American society (Soper 2005, 263*)*. As Noel Ignatiev (1995, 41) writes: "In the early years Irish were frequently referred to as 'niggers turned outside out'; the Negroes, for their part, were sometimes called 'smoked Irish,' an appellation they must have found no more flattering that it was intended to be." Resentment towards the Irish reached nationwide proportions, which even led employers to use the "No Irish Need Apply" signs that evidenced the progressing racial and cultural discrimination of the Irish in the U.S. (see Figure4).

Poverty forced the Irishmen to search for employment as common laborers, whereas the majority of Irish women worked as domestic servants or maids; in consequence of which the Irish started to carry a label of a servant race. The stereotypical Irishman was nicknamed as "Paddy," whereas females were called "Bridget" or "Biddy" (Lynch-Brennan 2006, 332–333). Although Paddies were ridiculed and represented as clownish and whiskey-drinking peasants they were also attributed with the potential to disturb the social order and public welfare in the U.S. (see Figure 5 and 6). By means of such representation, the American public opinion was led to believe that the Irish bring anarchy and chaos to wherever they appear. On the other hand, Bridgets were equally dangerous for the American domestic life. Andrew Urban (2009, 264) observes that the Irish maids were portrayed as possessing "crude qualities, savage

disposition and masculine physique." They were usually juxtaposed with polite and well-bred Anglo-Saxon females, and, as we might expect, such comparisons did not work in their favor (see Figure 7).

The press coverage of the "Irish problem" was saturated with vitriolic and confrontational rhetoric that validated the Irish "literal and figurative exploitation" in America for years to come (Soper 2005, 265). By and large, caricatures are considered as innocent and trivial forms of humor; still, there is always more than meets the eye. Caricatures, as much as any graphic forms of expression, have the potential to invade our perception without even appearing to be a medium of manipulation. The messages encoded by ethnic caricatures and cartoons taunted people's emotions and pandered to their prejudices. As a result, they created state of agitation that shook the bedrock of American civic life as they propelled anti-immigrant ambience and led to numerous riots between Catholic and Protestant populations of the U.S. (McMahon 2014, 38). No wonder, the devastating use of cartoons in the 19th century by American domestic press demonstrated the pathologies of American media and public debate that seem to resort to anti-immigrant rhetoric whenever it fits their ideological or political objectives.

That said, we should remember that the economic wealth of the U.S. was greatly acquired thanks to the immigrant labor and creativity. As much the technological development as successful business ventures in the U.S. have frequently occurred as a result of foreign-born Americans' initiative, who came to their new homeland to fulfill their own "American dream." The Irish are particularly cited as an example of an immigrant community that successfully assimilated to the American melting pot. Chicago, Boston and Philadelphia are commonly perceived as "Irish cities," St. Patrick's Day is celebrated nationwide, Irish folk culture (especially music) is genuinely popular, and the Irish community has had its representatives in American cultural, social or political life – just to name President John Fitzgerald Kennedy or actress Grace Kelly.

The humble beginnings of the Catholic Irish in the U.S. prove that the anti-immigrant sentiment is an "oft-traversed path in the historiography of American immigration" (McMahon 2014, 33). The analogy between the 19th century antipathy towards Irish immigrants and the current climate of mistrust and hostility towards new immigrant communities (legal or not) showcases that the anti-immigrant rhetoric and narratives that invite strong emotions are frequently employed by the media or politicians, thus fueling the popular misperceptions about the immigration. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the devil is not so black as he is painted and that the immigration problem is largely socially constructed. Beyond question, the media play a fundamental role in promoting the nativist ideology and fomenting the anti-immigrant sentiment. The media seem to be somewhat dysfunctional, as their selectivity, bias or the fact that they are short on argument and long on emotive appeal, create a permissive climate for abuse. Therefore, the past experiences of the Irish in the U.S. should serve us as a cautionary tale that would allow us to cool down our temper and to realize that we need to develop the rhetorical awareness of the media content in order to be able to think independently. Only this way we will become more immune to present-day manipulation in the public sphere.

Figure 1. The alien tsunami that scares even the Lady Liberty (CNS News.com, 2010)

Source: E. Pluribus Unum. "Cartoons." 2017. Accessed June 10. https://epluribusunumjcom2010.wordpress.com/cartoons/.

Figure 2. Representation of refugees as a lurking danger (ALG, 2015)

Source:The Federalist Papers Project. "Politically incorrect cartoon DESTROYS Obama Over Immigration and Refugees." 2017. Accessed June 10. http://thefederalistpapers.org/us/politically-incorrect-cartoon-destroys-obama-over-immigration-and-refugees.

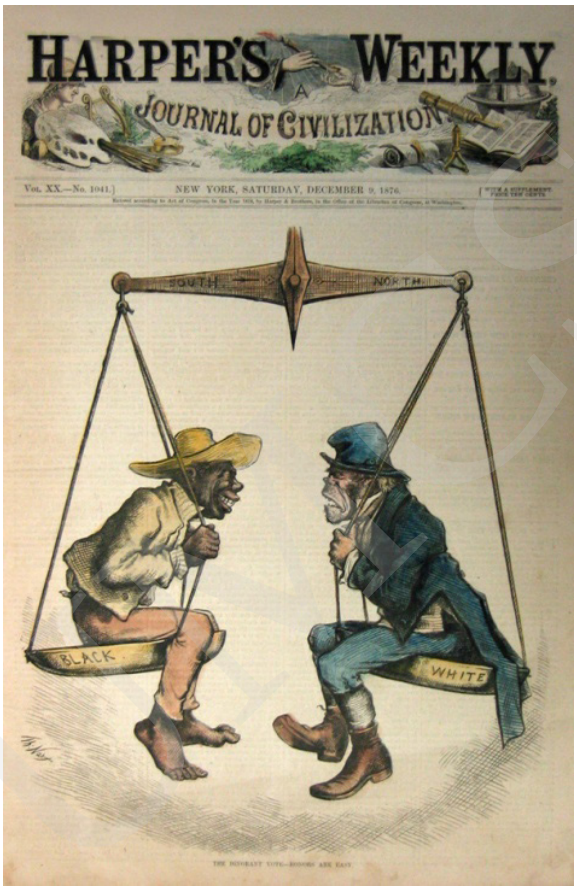

Figure 3. The equation of the Irish with black slaves (*Harpers Weekly*, 1876)

Source: Dooley, Michael. "Editorial Cartoonist Thomas Nast: Anti-Irish, Anti-Catholic Bigot?". 2017. Accessed June 14. http://www.victoriana.com/history/irish-political-cartoons.html.

Figure 4. The so-called NINA sign

Source:"No Irish Need Apply – Wait, What?. " 2016. Accessed October 11. https://dessertating.wordpress.com/2014/03/17/no-irish-need-apply-wait-what/.

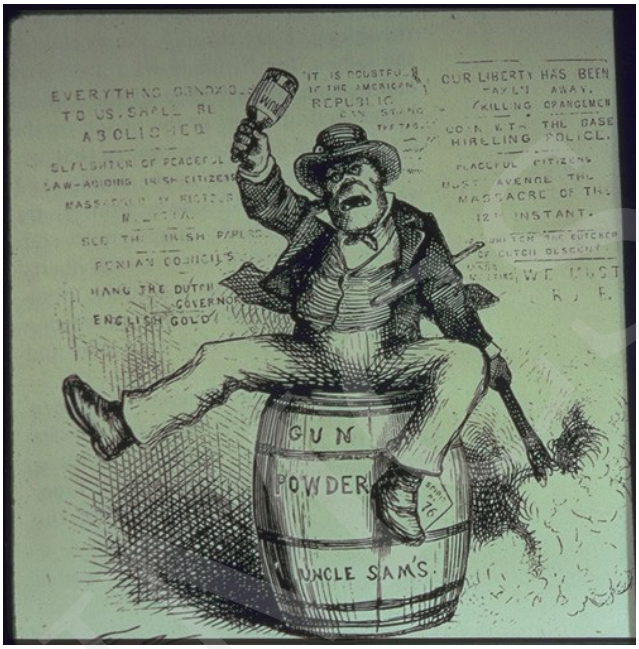

Figure 5. Irishmen turning the U.S. into a powder keg (*Harpers Weekly*, 1871)

Source:"The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things." 2017. Accessed June 14. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TheUsualIrishWayofDoingThings.jpg.

Figure 6. St. Patrick's celebration that turned into riot (*Harpers Weekly*, 1867)

Source:"Irish Stereotypes – Stereotyping of the Irish Immigrant in 19th century Periodicals." 2017. Accessed June 14. http://www.victoriana.com/history/irish-political-cartoons.html.

Figure 7. An overbearing Irish maid (*Puck*, 1883)

Source:"(Bad)Luck of the Irish in Political Cartoons." 2017. Accessed June17. https://hsp.org/blogs/fondly-pennsylvania/bad-luck-of-the-irish-in-political-cartoons.

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