

ANOINTING THE “UNCROWNED KING OF IRELAND”: CHARLES STEWART PARNELL’S 1880 AMERICAN TOUR AND THE CREATION OF A TRANSATLANTIC LAND LEAGUE MOVEMENT

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Standing on the deck of the steamship *Baltic* during its slow retreat from New York Harbor, Charles Stewart Parnell, the Irish Member of Parliament (MP) and president of the Irish National Land League, an Irish nationalist organization seeking land reform in Ireland, took a last look to the shore. Braving a cold and blustery March afternoon, hundreds of supporters, including members of the famous Civil War Irish Sixty-Ninth Regiment, representatives of several Irish-American societies, and local dignitaries, stood at the wharf bidding him farewell. It was an impressive scene. Arriving in America only three months earlier, Parnell had undertaken a whirlwind cross-country tour, traveling over 16,000 miles, speaking in sixty-two cities, addressing a joint session of Congress, and raising over \$300,000 for famine relief and the Land League.¹ Parnell pushed the situation in Ireland to the front pages of American opinion, in the process assuming the undisputed leadership of the Irish at home and abroad. His secretary Tim Healy, in light of the tour’s success, christened Parnell the “Uncrowned King of Ireland.”²

Alternatively presenting himself as a moderate reformer and a committed revolutionary, Parnell crafted an image of himself that appealed to both revolutionary Irish-American nationalists and more conservative, affluent Irish Americans during his time in the United States. His ability to reach out to various types of Irish Americans helped to cultivate Irish-American sympathy, which became a reservoir Irish leaders would draw upon for the next fifty years. Parnell’s tour also succeeded in uniting the Irish in America to a degree previously unknown and launched the most energetic transatlantic Irish organization of the nineteenth century.

An “Appeal to the Irish Race”

Long-standing historical interpretations of the United States, which claimed American exceptionalism and insulation from international influence, have been increasingly revised as historians examine the American past through a transnational lens.³ While acknowledging the importance of the nation-state, we must recognize that, as Daniel Rodgers argues,

“even the most isolated of nation-states is a semipermeable container, washed over by forces originating beyond its shores.”⁴ But most of the research completed in the last two decades by historians reexamining American history in a transnational framework has focused primarily on the period before 1800, leaving the nineteenth century strangely absent. The last decades of the nineteenth century, however, were a crucial moment of transatlantic and global history: the laying of the Atlantic cable, the mass movement of immigrants across national borders, and the growth of global capitalism had important and far-reaching effects in the United States and elsewhere. Efforts like Rodgers’s *Atlantic Crossings* have begun to redress this absence, but much more work remains necessary.⁵ This essay explores the transatlantic social milieu that was a reality for many Irish and Irish-American men and women during the Land League movement of the late nineteenth century.

Transatlantic connections between Irish immigrants in the United States and their countrymen in Ireland in the 1880s were particularly strong. Numerous individuals participated in Irish and American social and political movements simultaneously. Irish and Irish-American activists in the Land League, well before the creation of a formal Irish nation-state in the early twentieth century, attempted to create an Irish national identity that spanned the Atlantic. Nationalism served as the primary tool in this transnational project. Dominant interpretations of Irish-American nationalism have emphasized its role as a means of assimilation into American society.⁶ Irish nationalism, however, was crucial in forming not just an American ethnic identity, but also, as Kevin Kenny writes, “a diasporic sense of Irishness that transcended any simple desire for acceptance in the host land.”⁷ Charles Stewart Parnell’s tour of the United States in 1880 on behalf of the Land League provides a clear example of this dual process.

The Land League agitation originated in the “New Departure,” an informal alliance between John Devoy, the Irish-American leader of Clan na Gael (a secret Irish-American revolutionary society), Michael Davitt, the former Fenian and land agitator, and Parnell. This alliance aimed to link the land and national questions, thus providing for a front uniting physical-force and constitutional nationalists.⁸ A combination of bad weather, poor harvests, and low prices in the summer of 1879 sparked rural discontent in County Mayo, Ireland, and Michael Davitt and local organizers moved quickly to marshal this feeling into a mass movement for Irish land reform.⁹ A Land League of Mayo was formed on August 16, 1879, and plans were made to establish a centralized, national organization.

The Irish National Land League was formed in Dublin on October 21, 1879, with Charles Stewart Parnell as president. Additional Land League branches were quickly established across Ireland. The aim of the Land League was to exploit rural unrest in Ireland to gain what became known

as the “three Fs”: fair rents, fixity of tenure, and free sale. In order to achieve success, Parnell and Davitt attempted to mobilize the Irish peasantry behind the Land League cause. To do so, however, would necessitate huge investments of time and money.

Facing a protracted struggle at home, the Irish National Land League recognized the potential benefit of appealing to the United States for support. Though he was a landlord himself, Parnell acknowledged the political utility of the growing anti-landlord sentiment in Ireland and crafted a newspaper appeal to the Irish abroad within this agrarian context.¹⁰ Parnell argued that Irish Americans, because they had been driven by famine from Ireland and into exile in America, understood the situation facing Irish tenants better than anyone else and should, therefore, be willing to help their family and friends in the homeland.

The Land League was not content simply to issue newspaper appeals for Irish-American support, however. At its inaugural meeting in 1879, delegates decided to send Parnell to America to raise awareness for their cause.¹¹ Thus, from its beginning, the Land League attempted to create a viable, transatlantic movement to agitate for land reform in Ireland. In deciding to send Parnell to America, the officers of the Land League had a dual purpose: to solicit money from the Irish in America and to mobilize American public opinion against British rule in Ireland. Davitt sought the aid of Devoy in organizing this tour, and Devoy helped lay the groundwork for Parnell’s arrival by calling on members of Clan na Gael to help make the Irish agitators’ upcoming tour a success.¹²

Money was vital to keeping the Land League agitation in Ireland going. The costs of promoting and protecting an agrarian uprising were substantial, with funds needed to help support evicted tenants. In an interview with an American reporter in Ireland, Parnell indicated the amount of funding sought from Irish Americans and suggested that, given their numbers, it would not require a great sacrifice from them. “There are computed to be ten millions of Irish in the States and Canada,” Parnell reasoned. “If they could send us \$100,000 a year for five years, it would not be a half dollar a family in all, and it would go a long way in enabling us to win.”¹³ It made sense for Parnell to appeal to America for money. Irish America had long been a steady source of remittances for Irish relatives and had contributed to various nationalist and cultural movements since the years of the Great Famine.¹⁴ What the Land League desired of the Irish in America, as Michael Davitt not so subtly confided to his American friend James J. O’Kelly, was “money, money, money. Without it this movement must fail—with it success is almost certain.”¹⁵ Earlier Irish movements had been unable to unite all sections of Irish-American opinion into a single organization as wealthy Irish Americans tended to avoid giving money to the Fenians and other nationalist causes.¹⁶ Davitt believed that

with the Land League, “the wealthy Irish-American class who hold aloof from *other* National work could I think be got to move in *this* one to free the land of Ireland from landlord grasp.”¹⁷ Building on the consensus formed during the New Departure between constitutionalist and physical-force nationalists, Davitt and others believed that the land issue could unite the Irish people at home and abroad, regardless of class distinctions, behind the Land League movement.

Parnell was an excellent choice to deliver the Land League’s entreaty to the people of the United States. A key element of Parnell’s worthiness as a candidate to head the Land League’s American tour was, quite literally, his birthright; his grandfather, Charles Stewart, had been an American naval hero. Stewart’s daughter, Delia Stewart (Charles Stewart Parnell’s mother), married the Anglo-Irish landowner John Howard Parnell in May 1835 and moved to Ireland with her husband. Charles Stewart Parnell frequently invoked his American heritage during his 1880 tour of the United States. His public identification with his famous grandfather highlighted his connections with America and underlined his credentials as a representative of the Irish at home and abroad. Parnell’s ancestry and gentlemanly manner gave him an aura of respectability that appealed to Irish Americans of all classes.

Parnell had also been to the United States twice before—in 1872 and again in 1876—and had some familiarity with American politics and the challenges that he would face on his mission. His first visit in 1872 was in pursuit of an American woman who ultimately turned down his proposal of marriage.¹⁸ He made his second visit when the Irish Home Rule Party sent him as one of the delegates to deliver a congratulatory address to President Ulysses S. Grant during the United States’s centennial celebration. Unwilling to alienate the British government, President Grant refused to accept the Irish address. Despite his failure to gain an audience with the president, Parnell’s prior experiences in America made him cognizant of the political realities there and would serve him well during his 1880 tour.

On December 21, 1879, Parnell and his first secretary John Dillon, the son of John Blake Dillon, the convicted leader of the Young Ireland rebellion of 1848, left Queenstown aboard the steamship *Scythia* bound for America. As they left Ireland to the cries of a cheering crowd, Parnell promised the assemblage that his visit to the United States would “show that the hearts of Americans would beat warmly towards Ireland.”¹⁹

Parnell’s Arrival in America

Parnell and Dillon arrived in New York Harbor late in the evening on January 1, 1880. Parnell had decided to visit New York first not only because of its status as the preferred port of arrival for Irish immigrants, but

also because New York was “the overseas capital of Irish nationalist agitation and mobilization.”²⁰ It was the home of such nationally influential Irish-American editors as John Devoy, Patrick Ford, and others. New York was also home to Irish political refugees, like Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa, exiled from Ireland by the British Government.²¹ In the late nineteenth century, much of the coverage of Ireland found in American newspapers emanated from New York. This confluence of Irish opinion-makers made New York a logical first stop for Parnell in America.

Upon his arrival in New York, Parnell discussed his goals for the tour in an interview with a reporter from the *New York Herald*. Declaring himself to be in America as the official representative of the Land League, Parnell explained the need for continued agitation in Ireland: “Ireland never won any great reform except by agitation, and this agitation, like obstruction, has been necessary in order to gain the attention of the Government. When a Government or a country totally disregard you, you must use strong and even disagreeable measures to get their attention.”²² While in America, he planned to focus his lectures on the land system in Ireland and the history and goals of the Land League movement. He and Dillon also hoped that cities they visited would form committees of representative supporters and take up collections and subscriptions to aid the movement at home.²³

Parnell was at pains to present himself as a respectable and moderate reformer, but he was also careful not to alienate supporters who favored more violent and immediate means of reform. In the same interview, in reaction to a direct question from the *Herald* reporter on Fenian sympathy with the Land League, he responded, “A true revolutionary movement in Ireland should, in my opinion, partake of both a constitutional and an illegal character. It should be both an open and a secret organization, using the constitution for its own purposes, but also taking advantage of its secret combination.”²⁴ Parnell, however, quickly qualified this statement, claiming that the “leaders of the Fenian movement do not believe in constitutional action” and assuring the *Herald’s* readers that he “would not belong to any illegal body.”²⁵ Several times during his tour, Parnell veered towards violent rhetoric, though he always retreated to more respectable ground when challenged.

Such ambiguity became a hallmark of Parnell’s public persona, and he cultivated it throughout his political career.²⁶ On the surface, his adherence to the terms of the New Departure remained strong. His goal in America, however, was to craft a message that would inspire and mobilize not only committed Irish-American nationalists but all segments of the Irish-American population. As one contemporary British journalist observed, “It was Mr. Parnell’s business to unite all platforms, and to link an errand of charity with the sterner business of Irish politics; to be received

by the most respectable and thriving Irishmen in every large city, and yet to become also the very incarnation of the impossible aspirations of the various Irish Nationalist societies."²⁷ In pursuit of his objectives, Parnell deliberately crafted an image of himself that would alienate neither Clan na Gael nor more moderate Irish Americans.

Parnell gave his first major speech on January 4, 1880, at Madison Square Garden in New York City before an estimated audience of seven to eight thousand. Here he announced a significant departure from his initial intention to only canvass the United States for funds for the Land League's political agitation. Due to worsening economic conditions in Ireland and "fear of wide-spread famine," he proposed to "open two funds, one for the relief of distress, and the other for the purpose of forwarding our political organization. These things will be kept entirely distinct, so that the donors will be afforded the opportunity of doing as they please in the matter,"²⁸ and he kept this promise. For those that feared their money would be put toward violent ends, he vowed, "Not one cent of the money contributed and handed to us will go toward organizing an armed rebellion in Ireland."²⁹ This was meant to attract wealthy and middle-class Irish Americans, who were traditionally apprehensive of contributing to such causes. Upon the completion of his Madison Square Garden speech, a collection was taken up for the starving peasants, and Parnell and Dillon were escorted outside the hall through the throng of cheering spectators.

Buoyed by their reception in New York, Parnell and Dillon decided to accept invitations from across the United States. They left New York in mid-January, traveling rapidly to sixty-two towns and localities. Parnell had hoped to travel across the entire United States but only made it to the East, Midwest, and Upper South, missing the West Coast entirely. The main reason for this failure was Dillon's unsuitableness as a secretary. From its beginning, the tour's itinerary was disjointed. Tim Healy was brought over from Ireland to act as secretary, but he arrived when only two weeks remained on the tour.

Two modern developments enabled Parnell to overcome the tour's poor organization: the extensive railroad network in the United States and the rapid speed of modern communications like the telegraph. During his tour of America, Parnell traveled almost exclusively by railroad, which allowed him to travel over 16,000 miles.³⁰ This pace could be grueling, and to cover more distance, Parnell and Dillon often split up for a few engagements at a time. Parnell also gave several short "whistle-stop" speeches, addressing crowds at train depots from the train's rear platform. In one day in Minnesota, on his way from Winona to Minneapolis, he delivered three such speeches before giving two major addresses in the evening.³¹

The relatively new transatlantic communication network, involving the laying of transatlantic telegraph cable in the 1860s, greatly increased

the dissemination of news between Ireland and the United States, further aiding Parnell. News of the Land League agitation in Ireland often reached the United States by the next day or, at the latest, within the span of a week. The rise of a strong Irish-American press—almost every major Eastern and Midwestern city supported a local Irish-American newspaper³²—facilitated the spread of this information. Alan O'Day has called Parnell “Ireland’s first modern media politician,” arguing that Parnell “advanced himself and the national project principally through indirect means, that is at a physical distance, through the press and often by what would now be called ‘sound bites.’”³³ His speeches in Ireland and America were quickly communicated back and forth across the Atlantic, helping to create a greater Ireland that spanned the geographic divide between the two nations.

Key Themes in Parnell’s American Speeches

Parnell’s speeches during his tour were part of a carefully tailored and calculated campaign to lead listeners to a desired conclusion: support for the Land League. The *New York Herald* accused Parnell of making the same speech in all his stops in America, which was true in many respects.³⁴ He emphasized several key themes in almost all his speeches, deliberately crafting his message to appeal to Irish Americans of all social classes.

The most important theme Parnell presented was the looming humanitarian crisis in Ireland. By focusing primarily on famine relief rather than the Land League’s political agitation, he achieved a much wider airing and acceptance for his message in America, both within and outside the Irish-American community. But he did not completely ignore the political dimension. Rather, Parnell made explicit that relief for the famine was only a temporary remedy and that sustained political agitation in the British Parliament was needed to effect permanent change.

Also key was Parnell’s assertion that rallying public opinion against British policy in Ireland was a necessity. In Boston, he stated, “We must continue our agitation; we must continue to tell the truth about the relations between England and Ireland until we force England to do its duty and get some measure for the relief of the distress that has come upon us.”³⁵ In effect, Parnell wanted not only to mobilize the American public in service of the Land League but to shame the British government into acknowledging and responding to the situation in Ireland. To newspaper critics who claimed he was attempting to draw the United States into conflict with Great Britain, he responded, “We do not desire to embroil your Government with that of England ... but we think that a people like the American people is entitled to express its opinion upon this question.”³⁶ Parnell’s harnessing of public opinion in favor of Ireland made the struggle in

Ireland a popular topic of discussion in the United States. New York Mayor William Grace, the city's first Irish-American mayor, later said of Parnell's visit that it "succeeded in creating a public sympathy with the course of Irish leaders, which I deem hardly less valuable than the money, without which the parent organization in Ireland must have signally failed."³⁷ Michael McCarthy, a contemporary of Parnell, believed that the effect of Parnell's speeches was even more widespread: "His visit to America was the beginning of an impeachment of British government in Ireland, and the court asked to hear evidence and pronounce sentence was no longer the British House of Commons, but the United States of America."³⁸

In his speeches, Parnell also attempted to relate the dire situation Irish peasants were facing at that time to the Great Irish Famine of the mid-nineteenth century in order to link Irish-American memory of the famine to the issue of land reform in Ireland. The "Famine generation brought a common memory ... a memory to which all Irish-Catholic immigrants could relate."³⁹ In Canada, which Parnell and Healy briefly visited at the end of their tour, Parnell claimed, "Our Irish famines are caused by man, not by God ... We charge that these continually recurring Irish famines, and that the constant of chronic poverty, which always obtains in Ireland, are due to the conditions of land tenure in that country."⁴⁰ In Cleveland, Parnell was more explicit: "It must be our duty in this country if England attempts to starve and exterminate our people to see that she does not do so secretly, silently, and by stealth, as she did in the great famine of '45, '46, '47, and '48."⁴¹ These words echoed those of the Irish nationalist John Mitchel, who famously declared during the famine that "the Almighty sent the potato blight but the English created the famine."⁴² Parnell also reminded his audiences that not money alone but the abolition of the land system was needed to prevent future famines. To his audience in Louisville, he asserted, "You may put it off for awhile; you may postpone the famine for a month or two; but it will be utterly impossible for any charity to deal with the distress existing there."⁴³ The Irish in America needed to support the Land League and remember the lessons of the Great Famine. If they did so, Parnell argued, the Irish problem would be solved. For the famine immigrants and their children, such reasoning had a powerful emotive effect.

For the Irish nationalists among his listeners, Parnell argued that the successful resolution of the land issue in Ireland would be the first step towards achieving Irish nationhood. "If you help us to keep our people alive during this winter," he reasoned in Chicago, "we will kill the Irish land system. And when we have killed the Irish land system we shall have plucked out and ground to powder the corner-stone of British misrule in Ireland."⁴⁴ The British government back home saw such assertions of Irish independence in America as treasonous. In Cincinnati, Parnell allegedly

declared, "When we have undermined English misgovernment, we [will] have paved the way for Ireland to take her place among the nations of the earth ... None of us ... will be satisfied until we have destroyed the last link which keeps Ireland bound to England."⁴⁵ Parnell later claimed that he was misquoted and never used the words "last link"; an examination of Cincinnati newspapers provides strong evidence to support his assertion.⁴⁶ Regardless of the accuracy of the reporting, this incident demonstrates the fine line between respectability and revolution Parnell navigated in his speeches.

During his tour, Parnell denounced the British government in often violent language, drawing the support of many members of Clan na Gael in America and the Fenian Brotherhood at home. At his speech in Boston, Parnell warned, "although I am not in favor of revolutionary methods ... I cannot help saying that if things are allowed to continue as they are in Ireland much longer, our people will scarcely be able to contain themselves ... which must drive them towards violent and revolutionary measures."⁴⁷ He was even more explicit in Cleveland, describing his feelings about the armed Irish-American regiments that often escorted him in processions: "I thought that each one of them must have wished with Sarsfield of old when dying on a foreign battlefield, 'Oh that I could carry these arms for Ireland!' Well it may come to that some day or other." If the landlords and the government did not negotiate in good faith with the Land League, the time would come when they would "get very much sharper and worse terms from somebody else."⁴⁸

Parnell himself did not believe in a violent overthrow of the British government. Instead, he engaged in a rhetorical effort to keep physical-force nationalists on his side. His purpose in coming to America had been to unify Irish America behind the Land League, and, in order to do so, it was important to placate those Irishmen committed to violent revolution. Later, when he was called to account for the violent rhetoric that he used in America after his return to Ireland, Parnell denied that his speeches in America were very radical in nature. He believed that it was "far more necessary to speak strongly to Irish people in Ireland than it is to speak strongly to them in America. In Ireland they require to be encouraged and lifted up because they are oppressed and beaten down; in America they require to have cold water thrown upon them."⁴⁹ If the occasional allusion to violence was necessary to keep physical-force supporters happy, Parnell was willing to engage in such rhetorical fireworks.

The apex of Parnell's visit came on February 2, when he addressed the House of Representatives in Washington, DC. Parnell's speech in the nation's capital had been arranged through the efforts of Clan na Gael and select Democratic representatives. In a secret meeting, Clan na Gael decided to send the House of Representatives an invitation to name a time

and place for Parnell to speak before them; a group of Democratic congressmen arranged for this offer to be accepted by the House. One of them, Congressman Samuel Cox of New York, put forward a resolution that Parnell be invited to speak in Congress. After a lively discussion, the resolution passed.⁵⁰ The invitation was quite an honor, as it had previously been given only to two other foreigners: the Marquis de Lafayette of Revolutionary fame in 1825, and Louis Kossuth, the Hungarian patriot, in 1851.

In his address before Congress, Parnell emphasized many of the same ideas he had elsewhere. He went to great lengths to present himself as a reasonable and moderate reformer and focused on the inequity of the land system. Moreover, he assured Congress that he did not mean to embroil the United States in a conflict with Great Britain yet claimed that in case of clear injustices like events occurring in Ireland, public opinion in a free country like America should be heard.⁵¹ Boasting of his American blood, he also asked America to help Ireland and maintained that a solution to the land question, if achieved, would prevent him and other Irish leaders from having “to appear as beggars and mendicants before the world” any longer; it would be “the last Irish famine.”⁵² After his speech, Parnell was given a short audience with President Rutherford B. Hayes. Though the U.S. government refused to officially denounce British policy, Parnell’s trip to Washington, DC, was a marked personal triumph, especially compared to the chilly reception he had gotten from the Grant administration only four years earlier.

Through his carefully calculated speeches and appeals to Irish America, Parnell attempted to link the Irish at home and in America into a unified whole. The idea of a greater Ireland spanning the Atlantic was not merely a rhetorical creation but a reality, according to many contemporaries. For example, in the Irish-American newspaper, the *Irish World*, the editor Patrick Ford declared,

England has now to deal with two Irelands. A blow dealt at Ireland is felt and resented by the Ireland across the Atlantic. The struggle is no longer to be between the English Government and five millions of disinherited Irishmen. Behind these ... are other millions ... throughout the United States and Canada, who stand ready to help their brothers in their battle for their natural rights.⁵³

This newspaper circulated widely in Ireland, transmitting ideas and declarations of sympathy across the Atlantic, and Irish newspapers did the same. The official Land League paper, *United Ireland*, published a regular column entitled “Transatlantic Ireland” carrying weekly reports of Land League activities in the United States. The transatlantic nature of the Land League agitation made it difficult for the British government to

know how to deal with the movement. The British Home Secretary Sir William Harcourt voiced this frustration: "Now there is an Irish nation in the United States, equally hostile, with plenty of money, absolutely beyond our reach and yet within ten days [*sic*] sail of our shores."⁵⁴ Irish America was coming of age in the 1880s; Parnell's visit both coincided with and consolidated its growing assertiveness. When the Land League issued the call for help to its brethren in America in this decade, they were ready to listen.

American Reaction to Parnell's Tour

Parnell's mission did much more than just promote close cooperation and coordination between Irish nationalist elites in Ireland and America. It also sparked a mass movement that incorporated large numbers of Irish Americans of all classes and ideologies into a sustained and powerful transatlantic Land League movement. The turnout and interest Parnell's visits to American cities generated were quite dramatic. Saloons and the meeting halls of Irish-American fraternal and benevolent societies posted fliers advertising Parnell's speeches.⁵⁵ Evidence of Parnell's popularity is found in the large numbers attending these events. In New York, seven thousand people turned out to hear him, while in Chicago, the largest meeting of the tour, an estimated ten to fifteen thousand people listened to his address.

Despite such enthusiasm, several commentators noted Parnell's subdued style in public meetings and believed him unable to stir Irish Americans to action. Though not the rhetorical equal of Daniel O'Connell⁵⁶ or other Irish leaders, Parnell proved increasingly effective in rallying Irish-American support for the Land League as the tour progressed. The *Catholic Union* claimed Parnell's soft-spokenness was actually a benefit, as he seemed "to weave a strange charm round the listener, so that he bends eagerly forward, fearing to lose the slightest word."⁵⁷ Parnell improved as an orator during his tour; the rhetorical skills he developed in America were crucial not only to making the Land League a transatlantic success but also to his emergence as the dominant Irish leader of his generation.

Parnell's tour raised impressive sums of money for the Land League, although it is impossible to tabulate the exact amount sent from America because of it. Moreover, famine relief for Ireland became a popular cause among large numbers of Americans, not only those of Irish descent. One journalist claimed that the total donated for this cause exceeded \$5,000,000, a figure probably overestimated but not by much.⁵⁸ Several different groups in Ireland and the United States besides the Land League set up relief funds for the suffering Irish farmers, the most prominent one being that of the *New York Herald*. Parnell refused to cooperate with these other funds, denouncing their motivations for seeking Irish relief. He explained

to a reporter that he was reluctant to associate with the *Herald* fund because it "had been started in order to check our success."⁵⁹ Despite these disagreements, Parnell and the other organizations generated publicity that helped to greatly increase U.S. aid to Ireland. By the end of the tour, Parnell had raised \$300,000 for the Land League Fund, including nearly \$50,000 pledged for the political purposes of the Land League agitation.⁶⁰

During his time in America, Parnell was also able to win the blessings of the American Catholic hierarchy. This was no small feat as members of the hierarchy had traditionally looked down upon Irish nationalist movements like the Fenians. With the blessing of their religious leaders, the laity of the archdiocese of New York raised \$55,000, the diocese of Hartford \$23,000, and the archdiocese of Boston \$37,000. Individual bishops also praised Parnell's mission and endorsed the Land League cause. Bishop John Spalding of Peoria, Illinois, said that Parnell was "striking at the root of the evil for there will be no permanent relief for Ireland until the system of land tenure is changed."⁶¹ Bishop John Ireland of St. Paul declared, "No fault can be found with the agitation. The means are legal, the demands are reasonable."⁶² The Catholic Church's embrace of Parnell and the Land League cause gave the agitation a respectability lacking in previous Irish movements,⁶³ so that middle- and upper-class Irish Americans flocked to it, making the Church's support a vital ingredient in Parnell's success.

Not everyone welcomed Parnell's activities in America. His tour especially rankled several important American newspaper editors, but Parnell's Protestantism, half-American and half-Irish descent, and class background as gentlemanly landowner insulated him from many of the common stereotypes unfriendly American commentators placed upon the Irish character. As the *Catholic Universe*, which supported Parnell, noted, "He is Protestant, and the cry of 'Papist' can not be invoked to injure his cause ... It is almost as if the child of the oppressor were fighting the battle of the oppressed."⁶⁴ It went so far as to deny that Parnell was subject to the fierce passions of the Irish race. "Pertinacity, self-restraint, no extra sensibilities to play upon—a cool-blooded self-asserting, English way of trying conclusions with the 'Saxon,' these are Mr. Parnell's public peculiarities novel in a Celtic leader."⁶⁵ *Harper's Weekly*, a staunchly anti-Irish paper, concurred with the *Universe's* description of Parnell: "Mr. Parnell is so unlike the typical Irish agitator that the papers which oppose his agitation find it hard to treat him in the usual way. He is certainly not an adventurer, nor a blatherskite, nor a wild rhetorician. He is a self possessed and dignified gentleman."⁶⁶ The negative qualities of laziness and fecklessness used to describe Irish-American women domestic servants and male laborers did not translate easily to Parnell, the gentlemanly landlord and upper-class elite.

Encouraged by his fund-raising and overall success, Parnell hoped to stay in America a few months longer to continue his work. Events in

Ireland, however, upset these plans. In early March, Parnell received news that the British Parliament had been dissolved. He and Healy canceled the rest of their engagements and traveled back to New York to depart for Ireland and campaign for the Irish Parliamentary Party. But first, Parnell attempted to ensure that the reservoir of Irish-American support he had built during his tour would not run dry.

Before returning to Ireland, Parnell was the key player in organizing the Irish National Land League of America in New York. On March 4, 1880, Parnell and Dillon sent out a circular to a list of prominent Irish Americans asking them to join them in New York for the formation of a Central Land League in New York. A meeting to arrange an American Land League was held just before Parnell left the United States. At the meeting, Parnell deputized a committee to organize the national movement after his return to Ireland and suggested the following resolution: "*Resolved*, That a committee be appointed with power to add to its number gentlemen from all parts of the Union, to carry out the resolution adopted at the full meeting; this committee to have power to consult with leading gentlemen in various parts of the country, and to extend and promote the organization."⁶⁷ In May, this American Land League was organized, and its members actively supported the land agitation in Ireland.

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With the building blocks of an American Land League in place, Parnell and Healy left New York on the morning of March 11 to take up the political campaign in Ireland. Describing their departure, Healy said, "It was a fine sight to see the 69th salute as we sailed off, and Parnell wave his hand in response, looking like a king."⁶⁸ On his return to Ireland from America, Parnell truly was the leader of the Irish at home and abroad. His mission to America not only catapulted him into this position but crucially strengthened the links between the Irish at home and in the United States, helping to create a greater Ireland that straddled the Atlantic. While the New Departure had led to a new level of cooperation among Irish and Irish-American nationalist leaders, it was Parnell's tour that excited and inspired ordinary Irish Americans to take up the cause of the land struggle in Ireland. By crafting a message that various segments of the Irish in America could embrace, Parnell was able to overcome the dissension and disunity that had plagued earlier Irish-American nationalist movements. The overwhelming response to Parnell's visit, both by his supporters and critics, pushed the situation in Ireland to the front pages of America's newspapers and provided much-needed succor to the Land League movement at home.

The strong connections that existed between Ireland and the United States during the Land League era demonstrate the usefulness and importance of examining American history from a transnational perspective.

Such an approach allows us to see not just the similarities and the interconnectedness of societies but also can highlight important differences. The Land League was not confined to the United States and Ireland but also had branches among the Irish populations of England, Australia, and Canada. The responses of Irish immigrants in these countries to the movement differed markedly from that of their Irish-American brethren. In Australia, for example, the economy was so tightly enmeshed in the British Empire that any move to sever this connection would have imperiled Australia's prosperity. Irish Australians interested in improving their economic and social status needed to retain their imperial ties, unlike Irish Americans in the republican United States. Irish Australians were happy to give monetary support to relieve famine in Ireland but were not interested in funding Irish rebellion. For the Irish in the United States, on the other hand, safely removed from British imperial control, the shared feeling of exile that developed after the Great Famine stoked Anglophobia among them, giving their expressions of Irish nationalism a much more virulent character than that of other Irish emigrant communities. As we can see, the Irish abroad found common cause in their support of the Land League, but the reactions in different Irish emigrant communities were also shaped by their experiences in their host countries. Examining movements like Irish nationalism through a transnational framework provides an approach that puts American exceptionalism into perspective, revealing not only what makes American history unique but also what it shares with other nations.

Notes

¹Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 1966), 103. For more on Parnell's tour, see Michael Hazel, "First Link: Parnell's American Tour, 1880," *Eire-Ireland* 15, no. 1 (1980): 6–24. See also Alan O'Day, "Media and Power: Charles Stewart Parnell's 1880 Mission to North America," in *Information, Media, and Power through the Ages*, ed. Hiram Morgan (Dublin, 2001), 202–21; C. J. Smith, *Parnell; or Ireland and America* (New York, 1880), 1–104; Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, or the Story of the Land League Revolution* (Shannon, Ireland, 1970), 193–210; F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1977), 106–15. For regional studies of Parnell's tour, see John R. O'Connor, "Parnell Visits 'The Ireland of America,'" *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 69 (1971): 140–49; Kenneth E. Calton, "Parnell's Mission to Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 12 (1940): 312–27; Robert Post, "Charles Stewart Parnell before Congress," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 51 (1965): 419–25.

²R. Barry O'Brien, *The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell* (1898, New York, 1969), 1:206.

³For a discussion of the need to look beyond the bounds of nationalism and exceptionalism in American history, see Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1031–51. See also Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, 1998); Raymond Grew, "The Comparative Weakness of American History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (1985): 87–101; Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, 2002).

⁴Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 1.

⁵See, for example, Timothy Messer-Kruse, *Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition, 1848–1876* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford, eds., *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Reform* (Athens, GA, 1999); Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830–1860* (New York, 2000).

⁶Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*; Eric Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism in the Gilded Age: The Land League and Irish-America," reprinted in his essay collection, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980), 150–200. Victor Walsh emphasizes the interplay of regional, cultural, and economic differences among Irish Americans. Victor Walsh, "A Fanatic Heart: The Cause of Irish-American Nationalism in Pittsburgh During the Gilded Age," *Journal of Social History* 15 (1981): 187–204.

⁷Kevin Kenny, "Diaspora as Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (2003): 134–62, 159. In this article, Kenny argues for the need for migration history that encompasses diasporic/transnational and comparative/cross-national analysis.

⁸The Fenians were a transatlantic Irish and Irish-American revolutionary organization active primarily in the 1860s. For more on the New Departure, see T. W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846–82* (Oxford, 1982), 221–51. Parnell always publicly claimed that he never agreed to any preconditions with Devoy or Clan na Gael, but his actions during the Land War seem to indicate that even if he did not formally agree to terms, his actions followed Devoy's suggested policies. On Clan na Gael, see Michael F. Funchion, ed., *Irish-American Voluntary Organizations* (Westport, CT, 1983), 74–93.

⁹See Donald E. Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland: County Mayo from the Plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge, 1994), 209–29.

¹⁰*Irish-American*, November 1, 1879, 1.

¹¹*Pilot* (Boston), November 15, 1879, 5.

¹²Terry Golway, *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America's Fight for Ireland's Freedom* (New York, 1998), 125.

¹³*New York Herald*, November 10, 1879, 5.

¹⁴For more on Irish-American remittances to Ireland, see Robert A. Doan, "Green Gold to Emerald Shores: Irish Immigration to the United States and Transatlantic Monetary Aid, 1854–1923" (PhD diss., Temple University, 1999).

¹⁵John Devoy, *Devoy's Post Bag 1871–1928*, ed. William O'Brien and Desmond Ryan (Dublin, 1948), 1:457.

¹⁶Adrian N. Mulligan, "A Forgotten 'Greater Ireland': The Transatlantic Development of Irish Nationalism," *Scottish Geographical Journal* 118 (2002): 219–34, 226.

¹⁷Devoy, *Devoy's Post Bag*, 416.

¹⁸John D. Gair and Cordelia C. Humphrey, "The Alabama Dimension to the Political Thought of Charles Stewart Parnell," *Alabama Review* 52 (1999): 21–50, 31.

¹⁹*Irish-American*, January 3, 1880, 1.

²⁰Dennis Clark, *Hibernia America: The Irish and Regional Cultures* (New York, 1986), 58.

²¹*Ibid.*, 59.

²²*Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), January 13, 1880, 4.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, 105.

- ²⁷ Philip Bagenal, *The American Irish and their Influence on Irish Politics* (London, 1882), 202.
- ²⁸ *Irish-American*, January 17, 1880, 1.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.* Money given to the Land League was usually spent per the wishes of donors.
- ³⁰ Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*, 103.
- ³¹ Robert M. Post, "A Rhetorical Criticism of the Speeches Delivered by Charles Stewart Parnell during his 1880 American Tour" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1961), 169.
- ³² Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York, 1985), 495.
- ³³ O'Day, "Media and Power," 203.
- ³⁴ *New York Herald*, January 21, 1880, 6.
- ³⁵ *Boston Globe*, January 13, 1880, 1.
- ³⁶ Quoted in the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, February 21, 1880.
- ³⁷ William R. Grace, *The Irish in America* (Chicago, 1886), 26.
- ³⁸ Michael J. F. McCarthy, *The Irish Revolution*, vol. 1: *The Murdering Time, from the Land League to the First Home Rule Bill* (Edinburgh and London, 1912), 94.
- ³⁹ J. J. Lee, "Millennial Reflections on Irish-American History," *Radharc* 1 (2000), 5–64, 36.
- ⁴⁰ *Pilot*, March 13, 1880, 4. Parnell and Healy were in Canada for a few days near the very end of Parnell's tour. Their reception in Canada was as positive as in America.
- ⁴¹ *Catholic Universe*, January 29, 1880, 1.
- ⁴² John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (1861; Dublin, 2005), 219. Mitchel, a leader of the Young Ireland movement, was arrested by the British government for treason felony and transported to Australia. He later escaped to the United States and remained a vocal critic of British rule in Ireland. For an excellent discussion of the construction of the memory of the famine, see James Donnelly, *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Gloucestershire, England, 2001), 209–45; Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 281–344.
- ⁴³ Quoted in Post, "A Rhetorical Criticism," 624.
- ⁴⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, February 24, 1880, 2.
- ⁴⁵ *Irish World*, March 6, 1880, 7. Two newspapers in Cincinnati used different language in their transcriptions of the speech.
- ⁴⁶ For an extensive discussion of Parnell's speech in Cincinnati, see Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, 111–13.
- ⁴⁷ *Pilot*, January 17, 1880, 5.
- ⁴⁸ *Cleveland Universe*, January 29, 1880, 1. Patrick Sarsfield (1660–1693) was an Irish Jacobite and esteemed Irish military leader who later exiled himself to France as part of the famous "Flight of the Wild Geese."
- ⁴⁹ *Missouri Republican*, March 5, 1880, 2.
- ⁵⁰ Florence Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish Toward State and National Affairs 1848–1892* (New York, 1951), 332–33; *Irish World*, March 6, 1880, 5.
- ⁵¹ *Irish-American*, February 14, 1880, 2.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 2. See also Post, "Charles Stewart Parnell before Congress," 419–25.
- ⁵³ *Irish World*, November 20, 1880, 4.
- ⁵⁴ Quoted in Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland* (New York, 1973), 45.
- ⁵⁵ Description based on a meeting in Chicago found in Post, "A Rhetorical Criticism," 427. See also James Hunter, *For the People's Cause: From the Writings of John Murdoch: Highland and*

Irish Land Reformer (Edinburgh, 1986), 183; Dennis Clark, *The Irish Relations: Trials of an Immigrant Tradition* (Rutherford, NJ, 1982), 69.

⁵⁶Daniel O'Connell, a popular Irish Catholic politician, pushed through Catholic Emancipation in the British Parliament in 1829 and led an unsuccessful movement to repeal the Act of Union in the 1840s.

⁵⁷*Catholic Union*, January 29, 1880, 4.

⁵⁸*Catholic Union*, September 2, 1880, 6; Doan, "Green Gold to Emerald Shores," 101; *Irish-American*, July 17, 1880, 4.

⁵⁹*New York Herald*, January 3, 1880, 4.

⁶⁰*Pilot*, June 12, 1880, 4.

⁶¹*Pilot*, March 20, 1880, 1.

⁶²*Pilot*, March 13, 1880, 4.

⁶³For an example of the conflict found between the Catholic Church and other Irish-American nationalist organizations, see Kevin Kenny, "The Molly Maguires and the Catholic Church," *Labor History* 36 (1995): 345–76.

⁶⁴*Catholic Universe*, January 29, 1880, 4.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Harper's Weekly*, February 7, 1880, 8. *Harper's Weekly*, and especially its star cartoonist Thomas Nast, saw the Irish in America as a drain on the republic and little more than pawns of the Democratic Party. See also Smith, *Parnell*, 8.

⁶⁷*Catholic Union and Times*, April 15, 1880, 3.

⁶⁸T. M. Healy, *Letters and Leaders of My Day* (New York, 1929), 1:85.