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The study of Anglo-American relations is critical to understanding U.S. foreign relations in the nineteenth century. To suggest that Anglo-American relations were tense in the nineteenth century would be an understatement. American Anglophobia reached new levels in the wake of the War of 1812. By the time of the U.S. Civil War, the possibility of Anglo-American conflict was a frequent source of speculation on both sides of the Atlantic.¹ In subsequent decades, even seemingly mundane Canadian-American rivalries over fisheries rights sparked Anglophobic demands for war. The mass influx into America of anti-British Irish nationalists only exacerbated transatlantic tensions throughout the Victorian Era.

Or did it? The ‘Irish Question’ – the conflict between Irish nationalism and English colonialism – has long sat uncomfortably within this larger transatlantic narrative. So it was that British statesman William Gladstone (1809-1898) spent “his declining years trying to guess the answer to the Irish question; unfortunately, whenever he was getting warm, the Irish secretly changed the question.”² This tongue-in-cheek 85-year-old observation rather aptly summarizes the difficult task that still confronts historians who, like Gladstone, continue to seek answers to the amorphous Irish Question.

David Sim’s impressive book A Union Forever: The Irish Question and U.S. Foreign Relations in the Victorian Age, makes clear that the Irish Question in the nineteenth century was far from straightforward by challenging the all-too-common monolithic portrayal of Irish nationalism within the history of Anglo-American relations. In doing so, Sim utilizes an innovative transnational approach. Bridging the ante- and postbellum eras and exploring diverse issues – from famine and antislavery to Fenian filibustering and international law – Sim’s volume is a notable addition to the growing body of transatlantic studies delving into this rich subject.³ Sim explores the dynamic and shifting nature of Irish nationalism, illuminating how various Irish nationalist


attempts to derail Anglo-American relations in the near term ironically ended up aiding in the long-term development of Anglo-American rapprochement.

The roundtable reviewers find much to commend. Niall Whelehan describes Sim’s transnational approach as “both valuable and necessary to reconstruct how different American politicians viewed Ireland and Irish nationalists’ attempts to find favour in the U.S.” He notes that the book “reveals much of value regarding how the Irish question helped shape the increasingly important issues of citizenship, expatriation, neutrality, and security in the changing north Atlantic world of the Victorian era.” Andrew Priest describes A Union Forever as “a well-written and compelling account ... an excellent example of transnational history, demonstrating the crucial role of domestic forces and international groups – as well as their limitations – in the formation of U.S. foreign policy.” Ian Delahanty suggests that, because of Sim’s book, “any student of this topic must take into consideration how transatlantic Irish nationalists influenced the United States’ relations with the nineteenth-century world’s greatest power.” And David Brundage finds the book to be “thoroughly researched . . . a vigorously argued and persuasive work.”

Perhaps unsurprising considering the slim volume’s ambitious scale and scope, the reviewers were also at times left wanting more. For example, Priest would have liked a more explicit discussion as to how Sim’s story of Irish nationalism altered the turn-of-the-century development of the ‘Great Rapprochement’ between the United States and Britain. Delahanty suggests that the inclusion of “deeper structural forces” like the “rising tide of Anglo-Saxonism” would have helped explain “the essential outcome of the events in A Union Forever.” Brundage, in turn, would have liked a more “rounded treatment” of “the world of Irish American nationalism,” and wonders whether “parallels or contrasts” could fruitfully have been drawn with other immigrant groups during this period. Nevertheless, the reviewers all agree that Sim’s A Union Forever is an important transnational addition to the study of Irish nationalism, U.S. politics, transatlantic migration, and Anglo-American relations.

Participants:

David Sim is Lecturer in U.S. History at University College London, specialising in U.S. foreign relations in the long nineteenth century. He received his doctorate from the University of Oxford in 2011. A Union Forever: the Irish Question and U.S. Foreign Relations in the Victorian Age was published by Cornell University Press in late 2013. He is currently conducting research for a project looking at the statecraft of William H. Seward and his place in narratives of American imperialism.

Marc-William Palen is a Lecturer in Imperial History at the University of Exeter, and a Research Associate in U.S. Foreign Policy at the U.S. Studies Centre, University of Sydney. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. His articles on Anglo-American relations have appeared in Diplomatic History, the Journal of the Civil War Era, and the Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History, among others. His book, The “Conspiracy” of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalization, 1846-1896, is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.

Ian Delahanty is a postdoctoral fellow in the History department at Boston College. In 2013, he published an article in *Britain and the World* on famine-era Irish nationalists’ debates over accepting aid from proslavery Americans, and his article on the Irish origins of Irish-American anti-abolitionism will appear in *The Journal of the Civil War Era* in 2016. He is currently working on a book-length project that examines how Irish immigrants’ support for and eventual opposition to slavery was influenced by the political and social history of mid-nineteenth century Ireland.


Niall Whelehan is a Marie Curie Fellow in history at the University of Edinburgh. His work explores political and social movements, migration and political violence in transnational and comparative contexts. His first monograph is entitled *The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World, 1867-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and he has recently published the edited volume *Transnational Perspectives in Modern Irish History* (New York: Routledge, 2014). He has also recently published the article “Youth, Generations and Collective Action in Nineteenth-Century Ireland and Italy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 56/4, 2014, 934-967.
nineteenth-century Irish American nationalism was inescapably transnational,” observes David Sim in the Introduction to his impressive first book, and indeed a transnational approach has been a hallmark of recent work on the topic (6). Over the last few years, important monographs have appeared on the entanglement of the transatlantic movement to repeal the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland with that to abolish slavery, on the international aspects of Irish nationalist political violence, and on the transatlantic reach of the Irish Land League. Taken together with recent studies of important ocean-crossing figures like the Young Ireland activist-turned-Canadian politician D’Arcy McGee and the Fenian leader James Stephens, these works have gone a long way towards establishing the value of a transnational perspective on this history.\(^1\) *A Union Forever* should be seen in this context and the book fits very neatly in Cornell’s excellent series on “The United States in the World.” But though Sim is highly attuned to what he terms Irish and Irish American “nationalist agency,” he is mainly concerned with a somewhat different issue: how America’s political leaders, and particularly its foreign policy elite, responded to the “Irish question” and how their response shaped the larger pattern of U.S.-British relations in the period from about 1840 to 1890 (178). His central argument is that repeated Irish nationalist efforts to aggravate tensions between the two nations to their own advantage had “the paradoxical effect of breeding closer Anglo-American relations over the long term” (2). All in all, it is a persuasive argument.

Sim opens his book in the early 1840s, with an analysis of how the Irish parliamentarian Daniel O’Connell’s campaign to repeal the Act of Union, which bound Britain and Ireland together in a single political unit, played out on the stage of American politics. That the immigrant-oriented Democratic Party engaged in a kind of pro-Irish “tub-thumping” (38) is hardly surprising, but Sim demonstrates conclusively that rhetorical support for repeal crossed partisan political lines, involving a good number of Whig party leaders as well. Here he builds on Angela Murphy’s recent work and correctly follows her lead in dating the collapse of the American repeal network not with O’Connell’s famous anti-slavery appeal to Irish Americans in 1843 (or his abolitionism in general), but rather with his bellicose “affirmation of imperial loyalty” in Britain’s dispute with the United States over Oregon territory and the U.S. annexation of the slaveholding Texas Republic in 1845 (36).\(^2\) To be sure, even before Murphy historians had been aware of the widespread American public sympathy for the Irish repeal campaign.\(^3\) Sim’s main contribution here is his nuanced analysis of how this

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sympathy could be mobilized by various American politicians and statesmen to retaliate against Britain for what they believed was that nation’s cynical use of abolitionism to further its imperial aims vis-à-vis an expansionist United States. Whether or not there was actually anything to their belief—and Sim thinks there wasn’t much—it does help make sense of some of the American support for repeal.

If Sim’s discussion of repeal adds complexity to earlier accounts, his analysis of the Irish Famine (1845-49) and American diplomacy in Chapter Two is more wholly original. Though the Famine has generated a rich historiography, admirably synthesized by the scholarly essays in the recent *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, it has not usually been seen as having significant implications for the history of international relations. Yet Sim shows that the Famine was not only an immense human tragedy and a spur to the emergence of a new and more militant form of Irish nationalism in the shape of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (known as the Fenian Brotherhood in America), which appeared a decade later. It also presented U.S. politicians and policy makers with an unexpected opportunity to project commercial and moral power “in the heart of the British imperial system” (38). Free-trade Democrats were particularly adept at using the Famine to indict British economic protectionism, but even Whigs saw the promotion of charity for Ireland as an opportunity to bolster the standing of the United States on the world stage. However, while the politics of famine relief may have provided an arena for some diplomatic and ideological quarrels between the United States and Britain, it did not in the end provide much in the way of opportunities to Irish or Irish American nationalists. Many American politicians and statesmen did indeed interpret the Famine as a failure of British imperial governance, but this did not lead them to support Irish nationalism. After the decline of the repeal movement following O’Connell’s death in 1847 and the humiliating defeat of the Irish rebellion of 1848, Americans across the political spectrum came to see both constitutional and revolutionary Irish nationalism as “sorry if romantic failures” (68). Sim’s title for this chapter captures their point of view perfectly: “Ireland Is No Longer a Nation” (38).

Chapters Three and Four, which analyze the effects of Irish American revolutionary efforts from the late 1840s to the early 1870s on the evolution of U.S. and international law regarding neutrality, naturalization, and expatriation, should be seen as the heart of Sim’s book. His discussion of the little-known Cincinnati filibusters, who were arrested in early 1856 (two years before the formation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood) for encouraging the migration of Americans in order to foment revolution in Ireland, is fascinating. Though charged with violation of the U.S. Neutrality Act of 1818, the “capaciousness” of that law—particularly its ambiguity on the question of filibustering during peacetime—led to the Cincinnatians’ acquittal (79). That outcome, combined with the well-known tensions between the Britain and the United States that arose from the American Civil War, gave hope to the Fenians that they could launch ‘invasions’ into British-controlled Canada without legal consequences, ideally further exacerbating U.S.-British tensions in the process. Some even believed that U.S. officials would support such actions. When the Fenians’ actually conducted their Canadian raids in 1866 and 1870, however, they faced condemnation from the Johnson and Grant administrations and arrest by federal forces. More importantly for Sim’s overall argument, the Anglo-American Treaty of Washington (1871), which came on the heels of the Fenian raids, created stronger obligations around neutrality and “marginalized (though it did not eliminate) the disruptive potential of Irish nationalism in American politics” (96).

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As Sim explains in Chapter Four, an even more complicated situation arose when British authorities arrested and tried American citizens of Irish birth. Throughout the 1860s, Britain held to the doctrine that citizenship was inalienable, and regarded Irish immigrants who had become U.S. citizens under American naturalization law as continuing to have an obligation of ‘perpetual allegiance’ to Britain. While in ordinary times this could seem like a somewhat arcane issue, in the context of Fenian raids on Canada and an Irish rebellion in 1867, it meant that Irish-born American citizens arrested in Ireland, Britain, or Canada could face very long terms in British prisons. The American Fenians and their supporters (a group that included some key members of Congress) took up the cases of a number of such individuals. But though some of these Irish American nationalists were eventually released, the Fenians’ larger goal of intensifying tensions between the United States and Britain was undercut in 1870, when Parliament passed a law permitting a British-born subject to “divest himself of his birth-allegiance, and adopt another citizenship” (99). With this legislation, American and British governments finally settled their dispute on a friendly basis. Though international law on the right of expatriation had been advanced, so too had Anglo-American relations, much to the disappointment of the Fenians.

In untangling this complicated story, Sim makes a signal contribution to a fascinating recent turn in migration studies: from a traditional focus on the politics of entry (border control, naturalization, etc.) to what Nancy Green has called the “politics of exit.” Along with Mitchell Snay and Lucy Salyer, who is completing a book on “the forgotten rights of expatriation,” Sim finds in transnational Fenian activity a useful prism on this important issue. It also plays a central role in the arc of his overall argument, for once this divisive matter had been hashed out, even potentially destabilizing moments like the Irish land war of 1879-82 (which Sim analyzes in Chapter Five) and an Irish American-directed bombing campaign in British cities in the mid-1880s (the focus of Chapter Six) could be handled by the United States and Britain in a spirit of “transatlantic congeniality” (146). Irish nationalist agency was vital, but the Anglo-American “comity” that was its main result was not only unanticipated, it was “perverse” (172).

Thoroughly researched—Sim draws on diplomatic correspondence, presidential papers, congressional records, newspapers, and political pamphlets, among other sources—A Union Forever is a vigorously argued and persuasive work. It is also a relatively short one and there are several points where more in the way of context and detail could have been provided. One question that Sim might have addressed is that of Irish American distinctiveness. Could parallels or contrasts have been drawn with the long-distance nationalism of other immigrants and émigrés in nineteenth-century America (Poles who arrived after failed insurrections in 1830, 1848, and 1863, for example, or Hungarian followers of political leader Lajos Kossuth, arriving after their unsuccessful revolution against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1849)? Irish American nationalists were not the only non-state actors making efforts to shape U.S. foreign policy in this period and these or other examples might have been profitably compared to the Irish case.

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So, too, the world of Irish American nationalism might have been given a more complex and rounded treatment. Though Sim forcefully demonstrates their shared transnational agency, the many points of difference among constitutional reformers like O’Connell, republicans like the Fenians, and working-class radicals like the American supporters of the Irish Land League, are never really fleshed out. As a consequence, Sim misses an opportunity to explore points of connection between Irish nationalists and their American political supporters, who were not always cynically motivated by a desire for Irish American votes, as he sometimes seems to imply. The powerful republican ideas that shaped both Fenians and Radical Republicans during Reconstruction, for example, must have been part of the reason that the former could hold such high hopes for their project of driving a wedge between Britain and the United States.\textsuperscript{7} While the absence of such detail in no way undermines the argument that Sim advances, paying more attention to this intellectual and political complexity would have made this effective work even more satisfying.

\textsuperscript{7} For a still persuasive analysis of these intellectual connections, see David Montgomery, \textit{Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872} (New York: Knopf, 1967), 127-34.
In *A Union Forever*, David Sim joins an already impressive body of scholarship that approaches Irish-American history from international and transnational perspectives in order to illuminate seminal topics in nineteenth-century United States history. Past works in this vein have enriched our understanding of urban politics in the Early Republic, citizenship, and labor protest.1 The Anglo-American relationship certainly fits the bill as an essential element of nineteenth-century American history. Thanks to *A Union Forever*, any student of this topic must take into consideration how transatlantic Irish nationalists influenced the United States’ relations with the nineteenth-century world’s greatest power.

Sim’s central argument is that Irish-American nationalists’ efforts to gain American support for Irish independence were counterproductive. In their attempts to win the sympathies of the American public and the federal government, Irish-American nationalists inadvertently fostered a closer bond between the governments of Great Britain and the United States. Throughout the mid-1800s, Irish-American nationalists pressured Americans to lend rhetorical and financial support to their endeavors. More revealing in Sim’s account are cases in which Irish-American nationalists demanded that the federal government treat them as citizens with the right of due process after they were arrested in Ireland by British authorities. By the same token, Irish immigrants who were arrested for plotting an insurrection in Ireland from a Cincinnati civic hall claimed protection under the nation’s ambiguous neutrality laws. Sim uses court records and diplomatic correspondence in these and other cases to show that his protagonists believed that U.S. laws not only protected them from prosecution but also might provoke a conflict between the United States and Great Britain. Irish-American nationalists were not the “dupes of scheming politicians,” Sim argues (9). *A Union Forever* thus adds to a growing body of scholarship that treats mid-nineteenth century Irish-American nationalists as individuals of their time instead of the foolhardy romantics they appear in earlier accounts.2

Yet by the end of the nineteenth century, American and British statesmen had resolved the contentious debates over neutrality, citizenship, and extradition that Irish-American nationalists brought to the fore of Anglo-American relations. As secretaries of state and foreign ministers (as well as their respective representatives in London and Washington, D.C.) discussed the Irish question, they grew confident in their ability to mediate disputes. The result was what Sim terms “a new Anglo-American order” that precluded interference in one another’s domestic affairs (2). This was a stunning result for Irish nationalists who, since the 1840s, had pinned their hopes of winning concessions from Great Britain to some form of American assistance. Sim builds a convincing case for interpreting the late-nineteenth century Anglo-American rapprochement as a direct outcome of Irish nationalists’ endeavors to drive a wedge between John Bull and

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Uncle Sam. In doing so, he makes a valuable addition to recent scholarship that places the Anglo-American connection at the center of nineteenth-century American history.3

Sim develops the book’s thesis over six chronologically-arranged chapters, beginning in the 1840s and drawing to a close around 1890. This roughly half-century span witnessed the rise and fall of several iterations of Irish nationalism, including the Repeal movement, Young Ireland, Fenianism, the Home Rule movement, and the dynamiting campaign. The distinctive strategies and goals of these various types of Irish nationalism are important to Sim’s analysis, for each posed a different set of challenges to Anglo-American relations. While the Fenians who invaded British North America in 1866 forced the administration of President Andrew Johnson to defend its interpretation of the Neutrality Act of 1818, an Irish-American-led campaign to dynamite British cities in the 1880s reinforced an emerging liberal consensus among policymakers in London and Washington, D.C. Sim deftly maneuvers through the rocky waters of mid-nineteenth century Irish nationalism, identifying the unique diplomatic problems bred by different nationalist activities and situating each episode within a narrative of increased cooperation between British and American statesmen. An epilogue neatly ties up the book by juxtaposing President Woodrow Wilson’s refusal to endorse Irish nationhood after World War I against Irish President William Cosgrave’s 1927 paean to the “intense, devoted and constant support of the American people” for Irish independence. As Sim observes, there was “[l]ittle in the tangled history of Irish American nationalism” to substantiate Cosgrave’s version of events (185).

Or was there? Sim makes a strong case for the simultaneous decline of American support for Irish nationalism and growth of Anglo-American diplomatic cooperation, especially on the Irish question. But another strength of his book is its attention to the significance of Irish-American nationalism in American politics. Perhaps American politicians in the Civil-War era and Gilded Age were not the sincere, tireless supporters of the Irish national cause that Cosgrave made them out to be in 1927. What Sim makes clear, though, is that Irish-American nationalists were able to curry favor not only with Democrats, as we might suspect, but also with Whigs and Republicans. During his bid for the presidency in 1884, for instance, Republican James G. Blaine aligned himself with Irish-American nationalist leaders and appealed to Irish immigrant voters by pitching the GOP’s protective tariff as a weapon in the fight against British commercial dominance. To be sure, this incident supports Sim’s claim that American statesmen came to treat Irish nationalism as a potent domestic force even as they weakened Irish-American nationalists’ influence on foreign policy. But there is ample evidence in A Union Forever to show that American politicians on both sides of the aisle found themselves in step at times with would-be nationalist revolutionaries. Sim mines diplomatic correspondence, speeches, and the private writings of influential American statesmen to uncover not only what they said on the Irish question but also how both domestic and international considerations tailored their perspectives. The results are fascinating insights into the political worlds of President John Tyler and his son, Robert, Secretary of State William Henry Seward, U.S. Minister to Great Britain James Russell Lowell, and Wilson, among others.

Ultimately, however, Sim emphasizes the influence of non-state actors on the trajectory of Anglo-American relations over the nineteenth century. The Tylers, Seward, and Lowell, along with their British counterparts like consul Charles Rowcraft, Foreign Secretary Lord Clarendon, and Prime Minister William Gladstone, were all responding to the arguments and actions of Irish-American nationalists. Some of the most compelling and shrewd analysis in *A Union Forever* comes when Sim delves deep into the cases of individual nationalists who forced American and British authorities to confront seemingly irreconcilable differences between their respective laws, geopolitical interests, and ideologies. Take, for instance, the case of John Warren, who was arrested by British authorities in 1867 after sailing to Ireland on board a ship laden with guns and Irish-American nationalists bent on fomenting revolution. Claiming protection as a naturalized American citizen, Warren wrote to Irish newspapers and members of Congress to demand that his government support his right to be tried as an American. Because British law did not recognize the right of expatriation, Warren was tried as a British subject. His trial and conviction, Sim notes, “catalyzed a debate about the nature of citizenship and the protection of naturalized Americans abroad” (118). As Chris Samito has shown, Irish-American nationalists like Warren were successful in terms of bringing about changes in American naturalization and expatriation law. But Sim has a different story to tell. Time and time again, men like Warren attempted to turn cleavages between American and British law into chasms of conflict between the two nations. Paradoxically, they ended up creating an environment in which statesmen on both sides of the Atlantic proved willing and able to “negotiate a resolution to their disputes over citizenship, subjecthood, expatriation, and naturalization” (127). In Sim’s interpretation, Irish-American nationalists were agents of their own demise.

Like any bold argument, Sim’s interpretation is not without its potential flaws. Scholars of American foreign relations might ask whether there were not deeper structural forces at work in the Anglo-American rapprochement that, in the final analysis, is the essential outcome of the events in *A Union Forever*. Matthew Frye Jacobson has shown that late-nineteenth and early-twentieth Americans came to identify a host of ethnic groups as incapable of self-government, and one could question if the Anglo-American comity that augured against American support for Irish nationalism owed a bit more to the rising tide of Anglo-Saxonism than Sim allows for in the book’s epilogue. Importantly, though, Sim highlights how the Great Irish Potato Famine led prominent American and British statesmen to anticipate if not fully embrace an Anglo-Saxon racialization of the Irish. He also gives due attention to how anti-Catholicism and Ireland’s chronic poverty consistently caused Americans to look skeptically on the ability of the Irish to govern themselves. So while Sim shines the spotlight on how Irish-American nationalists shaped the dynamics of Anglo-American relations, he is also attuned to the more impersonal forces that shaped these events.

*A Union Forever* provides fodder for discussion not only among historians of U.S. foreign relations but also scholars of American immigration history, Irish nationalism, and American political history. This is a credit to Sim’s far-ranging research and his ability to explain the interplay between local, national, and transnational histories.

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David Sim’s *A Union Forever* aims to understand the role Irish nationalism and American sympathy for it played in United States politics and foreign affairs between the 1840s and the end of that century. Sim argues that Irish and Irish-American non-state actors influenced U.S. foreign policy at specific moments, but that their power generally faded as the century progressed. Indeed, despite the efforts of various Irish-American nationals to agitate against British rule in Ireland, Anglo-American relations actually grew stronger over time. In part, the author contends, these Americans exhibited what he calls “a fundamental ambivalence” about exporting American republicanism, linking this to the fact that their attitudes “were heavily qualified by religion and ethnicity” (2). So while Irish nationalism animated many different debates within the United States, this work illustrates the limited agency of many of its advocates, certainly in terms of desired political outcomes. The emergence of an Irish Free State in the 1920s did not ultimately result from such agitation, Sim concludes, but rather emerged in the aftermath of the First World War.

The book’s focus is squarely on Anglo-American relations during the period, viewed through the lens of the Irish question. Sim is persuasive in arguing that Irish nationalism was an important factor in the diplomacy between London and Washington, yet he also shows how it generally only had purchase at times of Anglo-American distress and its impact faded as relations improved. Sim demonstrates that the salience of Irish issues waxed and waned as the British and American governments moved toward what Bradford Perkins described as the “Great Rapprochement” between 1895 and 1914.¹ These findings are important, while they also raise further questions about the role of non-state actors in Anglo-American relations, as well as domestic influences such as immigration and religion.

The book is broadly chronological, but Sim organizes each chapter thematically. The first chapter explores the campaign for repeal of the Anglo-Irish Act of Union. Chapter two focuses on the Irish famine and its effects in the United States, especially on philanthropic relief efforts. Chapter three discusses the Civil War era and issues of neutrality, while chapter four investigates questions of naturalization and citizenship in the years immediately after the war. Chapters five and six respectively examine the move toward home rule and the decline of the Irish question in American national life. The work is bookended by studies of two Irish political figures: Daniel O’Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell. O’Connell was an Irish parliamentarian who agitated for repeal of the Act of Union during the 1840s, and who oversaw the formation of the Loyal National Repeal Association, which was based in Dublin but became increasingly internationalized over the course of the decade. Parnell campaigned for home rule in the 1880s and was head of the Irish National Land League.

Throughout this work, Sim shows that sympathy for the Irish and their plight in the United States was often limited, contingent, and served domestic, party political, or diplomatic interests more than humanitarian ones. Robert Tyler, son of American president John Tyler, for example, was president of the National Repeal Association in the U.S., yet he claimed in private that he did not care for the Irish, but rather aimed to use the repeal issue to strike a blow at British power (18-19). Even the Irish famine in the late 1840s, while stirring much philanthropic fervor in the United States, was as important for generating what Sim calls an “assertion of U.S. political and commercial ascendency” as it was about the moral imperative of helping the Irish (39). Furthermore, the famine actually served to undermine the case for Irish independence because of its

devastating effects and Ireland’s need for assistance from abroad, while reinforcing ties between Britain and America in the 1850s (40) because Britain was now importing so many foodstuffs from the U.S. Broader views of Irish dependence were further compounded by the “abject failure” of an uprising in Ireland in 1848 (64).

As is well known, Anglo-American tensions reached something of a peak during the American Civil War. The British declaration of neutrality early in the conflict enraged Americans and set the two governments on a collision course. Matters only worsened during the infamous Trent crisis of 1861-1862, when the Union’s seizure of Confederate diplomats from a British steamer led some in England to call for war, and the so-called Alabama controversy over the construction of ships for the Confederacy in Britain, which was not settled until after the war. Sim complicates this story with attention to the dynamics of Irish politics and agitation. As he suggests, the Civil War was a “mixed blessing” for Irish nationalists (87). On the one hand, it meant that Irish-Americans were woven more tightly into the fabric of American society through military experience (mostly in support of the Union). And yet the prospect of independence for the Confederacy offered a seductive potential parallel with Ireland. More controversially, the Irish population’s subordination to England raised uneasy comparisons with African-American slavery (73). The war itself encouraged radical nationalist Fenians to plot uprisings to destabilize British rule first in Ireland itself in 1865 and then in British North America from 1866. Sim contends that the power of the Fenians “lay in their sublimation of Irish goals in U.S. interests” (94). Yet in launching raids to demonstrate their effectiveness, they paradoxically undermined their own cause because the administration of Andrew Johnson (which had originally appeared to be sympathetic) was forced to take action against them. Successful postwar arbitration between Washington and London further undermined the nationalists’ position, as did the tightening of neutrality laws, which had given the Fenians such latitude in the first place.

In the postbellum period, Fenian agitation and imprisonment led the British and American governments to tighten legislation further to remove the “transatlantic category of citizen” (125) born in Ireland but naturalized in the United States. Once again, nationalist ferment had an impact on American public opinion and government action, but, also as before, nationalists were sidlined because of growing Anglo-American accord. Thus, from the end of the war the contingency of the Irish question was increasingly evident as successive administrations were able to insulate outstanding Anglo-American disputes – over such matters as fishing rights and extradition – from Irish concerns (165-166). Sim notes that even during the late 1860s and 1870s, when what he calls “residual Anglophobia” (134) in the U.S. meshed with support for Ireland, Republican dominance of the executive branch marginalized the importance of the Irish vote and nationalist influence dwindled further.

Separation of Irish matters from broader foreign policy goals in the 1870s helped to further consolidate Anglo-American ties, even when tensions were rising over such issues as the Clayton-Bulwer treaty (145-146). British Prime Minister William Gladstone, whose famous essay “Kin Beyond the Sea” was published in the North American Review in 1878 (169), exemplified this growing sense of Anglo-American bonhomie.2 When the home rule bill was promulgated in the mid-1880s, it led to greater “domestication” (170) of the Irish question in each country. It also reinforced ideas about the progress of liberal internationalist governance on

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both sides of the Atlantic that Robert Kelley, Frank Ninkovich, and others have explored so successfully (133).  

There are a few areas that Sim might have explored in a little more detail. For a work that is about Anglo-American realignment over the course of some sixty years, Sim has relatively little to say about whether our understanding of Anglo-American relations, and particularly the “Great Rapprochement”, is altered by placing these issues in the context of Irish nationalism. Much of his analysis covers periods during which, despite some significant tensions, London and Washington reached mutual agreements. To be sure, Irish nationalism was an issue that American politicians could use to court nationalist and anti-British voters. Yet even the supposedly Anglophobe Secretary of State James G. Blaine proved to be a conciliatory figure in Anglo-American relations during the early 1880s (although he amplified his English-baiting while courting the Irish vote in his subsequent bid for the 1884 presidential election [162-164]). In other words, Irish nationalist questions could often be manipulated or effectively removed by British and American politicians seeking an accommodation.

I wondered what implications this more generally has for understanding the role of non-state actors on American foreign policy. While Sim suggests that there was “openness” (2) in U.S. foreign policy to these actors, as he concedes, the effects of nationalist actions often produced something close to the opposite result of the one they wanted. If we accept that they failed to achieve what they intended, does this, in fact, suggest that American politics and foreign policy was more impervious to nationalist struggles than he suggests? And how should we conceptualize influence in what might be seen as negative terms?

Sim also might have said more about exactly how the process of mass Irish immigration and assimilation affected American thought about the possibilities of Irish self-rule. Matthew Frye Jacobson, for example, has shown how in the late nineteenth century, confronting new national immigrant groups, and considering where they had come from, required the American people to re-conceptualize the international. While Jacobson is writing about the end of this period when the Irish rates of immigration were decreasing, I wonder whether attention to the idea of Ireland’s “fitness for self-government” based on conceptions of the Irish in America might be useful here.

Finally, and related to this, while religion features in Sim’s study, it does so rather at the margins. While he discusses religion in the introduction, it tends to disappear from view as the book progresses. During the late 1840s and 1850s Sim shows how nativist suspicion about giving money to “Catholic” causes afforded the Quakers a more prominent role in famine relief (48), while the famine itself reinforced what many Americans saw as the “enervating effect of Catholicism” as well as the significant shortcomings of British landholding policies (58). How did American views of Catholicism change over the course of the nineteenth century and


how did this affect the tenor of debates over Irish independence? And how great a role did churches – Catholic and Protestant – play in such debates?

Overall, this is a well-written and compelling account that successfully combines histories of three nations to make important points about the changing nature of Anglo-American relations over time. It is an excellent example of transnational history, demonstrating the crucial role of domestic forces and international groups – as well as their limitations – in the formation of U.S. foreign policy.
In 1921, the final year of the Irish War of Independence, Winston Churchill referred to Irish Americans as a “parent nation” and Woodrow Wilson maintained that “there can never be real comradeship between America and England until this [Irish] issue is definitely settled and out of the way” (178). Similar observations and comments by statesmen have often generated the impression that Irish American nationalists held powerful leverage on Capitol Hill that sometimes translated into diplomatic pressure on Britain to modify its policies in Ireland. Instead, *A Union Forever* asserts that “in truth Irish nationalists had very limited political influence in the United States” (176). From Repealers to Home Rulers, David Sim argues, Irish nationalists never succeeded in decisively influencing U.S. policy toward Britain during the Victorian era. Yet their activities did contribute to shaping important aspects of the U.S. relationship with Britain, most often with “the paradoxical effect of breeding closer Anglo-American relations over the long term” (2).

Expanding on the work of Brian A. Jenkins, Mike Sewell and Alan O’Day, *A Union Forever* covers a wider period and contextualizes the Irish question within broader developments in U.S. domestic and foreign policy during the Victorian era. In doing so, the book offers a detailed perspective on the place of Irish nationalism in the American political world of the nineteenth century, while also providing insights into how “Americans thought about the global meaning of their revolution and its applicability to other peoples” (6). Based on research in American archives, the book employs a transnational approach that is both valuable and necessary to reconstruct how different American politicians viewed Ireland and Irish nationalists’ attempts to find favour in the U.S. While the “bottom-up approach” (3) to diplomatic history is perhaps more challenging, the study nonetheless seeks to incorporate actors traditionally seen as “beyond the purview of high diplomacy” (125).

In the 1840s, Irish leader Daniel O’Connell held a considerable international standing, but divisions in Irish America about slavery and some Americans’ perception of O’Connell “as an agent of British abolitionist imperialism” (12) limited the success of the Repeal movement in the U.S. During the Great Famine, extensive American charity did not translate into support among the political classes for an independent Irish nation, but Sim illustrates how the distress in Ireland was often pointed to as evidence of the increasing inferiority of Britain’s institutions and its economic policy in comparison to the United States.

Anglo-American tensions in the aftermath of Civil War created the most favourable opportunities for Irish American nationalists to exploit. The 1866 raids by Fenians into Canada were driven on by an assumption of tacit support from Johnson’s government, the belief that Irish American votes could be decisive in the elections of that year, and widespread speculation about Canadian annexation to the U.S. The raids failed, however, and when President Andrew Johnson eventually moved against them, Fenian leader and Civil War veteran John O’Neill proclaimed it “treachery” (91). At the time, in 1866, neither the Fenians nor the politicians who courted them were in positions to deliver their promises: on the one hand, there was no

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monolithic Irish vote to bargain with and, on the other, a divided government could not guarantee exertions for British concessions or support for Fenian ‘filibustering’ in Ireland.

Further diplomatic problems arose when Irish nationalists, many of whom were Civil War veterans who had become naturalised in the U.S., returned to Ireland to assist plans for rebellion in the late-1860s. Many were incarcerated and the British government refused to recognise them as U.S. citizens, creating an issue with powerful propaganda value for the Fenians. By the end of the decade, however, Anglo-American rapprochement just about neutralized the matter. Similar situations during the Land War, the author maintains, produced less confrontation and there was an acceptance among U.S. officials that arrests of Irish Americans in Ireland were the “prerogative of the British government” (151).

In chapters five and six, attention turns toward the Home Rule party and militants’ activities in the 1880s. The assessment that the bombing campaign of 1881-1885 originated in “some unknowable compound of political principle and instability of mind” (155) is dismissive, and overlooks the complex factors and motivations behind a campaign which, despite its contemporary headline grabbing, cannot be credited with “legitimizing a narrative of guerrilla activity that stretched through the twentieth century” (154). In these chapters the reader might expect some reference to Joseph P. O’Grady’s study and more engagement with arguments recently forwarded by Jonathan Gantt in a book that has its limitations, but covers some similar ground using similar sources.2

The theme of failure and declining influence runs throughout this book. Sim makes the point that looking back on Irish American history through the lens of the Irish Revolution leads to a misplaced emphasis on radical nationalists like John Devoy. We cannot assume that Devoy was representative of the majority of Irish Americans and, by the early 1900s, it was the moderate Home Rulers that commanded influence. The argument is well made that, from the 1840s, the actions of Irish American nationalists were regularly counterproductive, failing to provoke U.S. intervention in Irish affairs and instead forging a closer Anglo-American relationship. The book concludes that, given these failures, the establishment of the Irish Free State “was a pretty surprising outcome” (185). Yet this argument runs the risk of obscuring the Irish American diaspora’s crucial contributions, both financial and ideological, to the development of Irish nationalism in the 1800s and later during the Irish Revolution. Irish nationalists’ failure to materially influence U.S. government policy should not overshadow their successful organization of massive grassroots activity among Irish Americans. Overall, A Union Forever reveals much of value regarding how the Irish question helped shape the increasingly important issues of citizenship, expatriation, neutrality, and security in the changing north Atlantic world of the Victorian era.

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I would like to thank Tom Maddux for organising this roundtable and Andrew Priest, David Brundage, Ian Delahanty, and Niall Whelehan for their thoughtful responses to my work. Each offers a fair and nuanced assessment of the book’s arguments, including its central thesis, which is that in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century the actions of Irish American nationalists had the unintended effect of strengthening Anglo-American relations. Taken together, the reviewers suggest that the decision to explore the connections between Irish-American nationalism and American foreign policy in this period is one that I should not regret. I was especially pleased to see connections made with recent work on varied topics including emigration, anti-slavery politics, and transnational accounts of nationalist agitation. The commentators also highlight multiple directions in which the book’s focus on Irish-American nationalism might be extended and developed. Indeed, that the project has thrown up such interesting and varied areas that might be explored is very satisfying: I counted the outlines of at least four viable doctoral projects in the contributors’ writings.

Much as I would like to dwell on the kind words offered by these scholars, I’ll focus this response on some of the criticism offered. The contributors note a handful of authors with whose arguments I might have engaged and thereby strengthened the book. Whelehan asserts that Joseph P. O’Grady and Jonathan Gantt’s books might usefully have made an appearance; Priest suggests that I might have done more to interrogate Bradford Perkins’s ‘Great Rapprochement’ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^1\) I think each is a fair suggestion (though I would note that I made good use of Gantt’s punchy 2006 article on Irish-American terrorism and Anglo-American relations, which seemed to me a more appropriate source given my framing of the topic.)\(^2\) A Union Forever would also have benefited from being placed in conversation with two further monographs – by Ely Janis, on the Land League, and by Niall Whelehan himself, on the militant dynamite campaigns of the 1880s – that have since been published.\(^3\)

As to whether we should reconsider the idea of a ‘great rapprochement’, I hope that the book goes some way to addressing exactly this issue. All four reviewers note the importance to Anglo-American relations of settling issues relating to naturalization, emigration, and neutrality, a process which I suggest complements the later, more familiar cultural and racial narratives that we tell about rapprochement. I would add that the story I tell offers a more dynamic reading of the process of rapprochement, complicating an older analysis that emphasised the slowly changing strategic and ideological imperatives of two imperial blocs. Why does this matter? It matters because it expands the cast of historical agents shaping this process – an expansion that Brundage and Whelehan rightly suggest might be pushed further with greater analysis of grassroots

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mobilisation and greater attention to the variety of flavours of Irish nationalism on offer in the United States during this period. It also matters because the account of rapprochement offered in *A Union Forever* argues that the improved relationship between the American and British states rested on the successful containment of alternative or competing nationalisms, which had the potential to destabilise those relations.

This containment entailed, in the case of Ireland, a denigration of the idea of Irish self-governance. Here, as both Priest and Delahanty note, my work might be brought into productive dialogue with the ideas put forward by Matthew Frye Jacobson in his *Barbarian Virtues*. It seems to me that the Irish of *Barbarian Virtues* occupy an ambiguous place. They are subject to the speculations of eugenicists and the critiques of urban reformers, yet better insulated from the sharp Anglo-Saxonism of the turn of the century than the majority of immigrant communities that Jacobson analyses. Anglophone, often sharing an anglophobic outlook with their hosts, and with experience (though not necessarily happy experience) of representative government, Irish migrants could represent both the evils of denying self-government to the Irish in Ireland and the best argument against it. I, like Jacobson, would also have trouble pinning down change over time here. For instance, Americans at the end of the nineteenth century were frequently critical of Irish influence on city politics – but they had been since the 1840s. They were also prone to presenting “the Irish” in dehumanised terms – but, again, this was hardly novel in the 1880s.

Of course, we might debate the extent to which such conceptualisations informed or were informed by ongoing foreign policy debates. On this, Priest rightly highlights some ambiguity surrounding the ‘openness’ of U.S. foreign policy, and I thank him for noting this; I ought to have been more explicit in historicising the concept. I’m specifically interested in how, in the case of Irish American nationalist agitation, this apparent receptivity to the influence of actors outside the State Department diminished over time. The big picture questions here are, I think, very important ones for historians of U.S. foreign relations. How should we conceptualise American foreign policy in the nineteenth century? To whom should we ascribe agency, and how might this change over time? And how should we think about a field that sometimes places a premium on rhetoric and intentionality over context and irony?

*A Union Forever* was an enjoyable book to write, and benefited from the close and critical reading of fellow graduate students, colleagues, external readers, and editors. Its focus – and its lacunae – are a function of its production. It is not a sweeping, expansive study but, I hope, a lean, direct and argumentative book that connects different historiographies and poses a basic question: how does the history of Irish nationalism fit with historians’ renewed emphasis on the relationship between the United States and ‘the British world’? I very much appreciate the time that the reviewers have taken in reading the book and engaging with the arguments that it makes.

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