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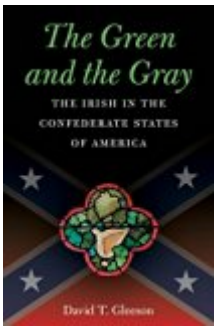

David T. Gleeson. *The Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America.* Civil War America Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. 336 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-0756-6.

Reviewed by Jerome Devitt

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

In what can only be described as a superb and long overdue addition to the literature on the role played by the Irish in the United States Civil War, David Gleeson tackles the subject of the Irish in the Confederacy with both detail and rigor. The book has been widely reviewed both on this platform and elsewhere, and so this review will focus its attention on the book's interesting methodological approaches, rather than lingering too long on the narrative it presents.[1] Its primary contribution is to contest the monolithic presentation of Irish Confederates as the glorious "fighting Irish" of myth and fable, and replace it with a far more nuanced and balanced picture of the Irish as "ambiguous Confederates" capable of shifting their allegiance along with the shifting political and military realities they faced.

The book begins with an examination of the Irish involvement in the antebellum secession movement. The problems associated with the discussion of an "ethnic sensibility" (p. 6) are tempered by a series of detailed case studies of individuals and deft illustrations of how each personality is representative of a different aspect within the spectrum of identities considered. The "reluctant secessionists" of chapter 1 are examined through both a detailed analysis of shifting voting patterns of Irish Southerners and through the attitudes of the Irish towards slavery and slave ownership. This balance between tangible metrics and ephemeral issues of identity is both insightful and intriguing.

Chapter 2 examines the enlistment of the Irish into the Confederate army. Here, Gleeson takes the often-quoted figure of 40,000 (first suggested by prominent Irish Confederate John Mitchel to knowingly inflate Irish participation) and reexamines it through a detailed analysis of muster roles, surname analysis, and extrapolation from more complete data sets to draw general trends--resulting in an estimate in the region of 20,000 as a more accurate total. The transparency of this analysis is critical, with the author acknowledging that "problematic though it is when working with a definition of 'Irish' as one of birth or active Irish ethnicity, one is left with surname

analysis as the only practical way to assess total Irish numbers" (p. 59). This uncertainty is offset, however, by considering both the broader historiography of Irish involvement in foreign armies and the process of naming Irish units in the Confederate army as being representative of those traditions. In terms of the motivations of these enlisting soldiers, Gleeson argues persuasively that "while they did not object to slavery or fighting for its preservation, it could not have been a primary motive for the vast majority of them," which helps to further de-mythologize the Irish involvement in the war (p. 69).

The third chapter focuses on the more traditional "drum and trumpet" tradition of battle history, but does so only in so far as the analysis of Irish Confederate battle performance can be illustrative of the broader issues of Irish identity at stake. Acts of valor and bravery are presented side by side with desertion and the taking of the "Oath of Allegiance" to the Federal government after capture, resulting in a far more nuanced approach than one might expect. The process of debunking long-held myths continues with Gleeson's detailed examination of the infamous Battle of Fredericksburg, and Thomas Francis Meagher's Irish Brigade's charge up Marye's Heights toward Irish Confederates, so famously portrayed in Ronald Maxwell's *Gods and Generals* (2003). Often seen as epitomizing the Irish tragedy of the US Civil War, Gleeson's detailed analysis of Colonel Robert Emmet McMillan's regiment illustrates that its Irish identity was "imposed incorrectly" on to it due to its Irish leader (p. 105). This not only de-romanticizes the battle, but offers an interesting methodological process to do so.

The balance provided by chapter 4, which discusses the problems faced by the Irish on the home front, continues the even-handed approach. Gleeson notes that these civilians "could not perform the ultimate overt act of patriotism, fighting and dying for the Confederacy. Their loyalty would have to be expressed in other ways" (p. 113). Critically, the role of the Irish on the home front is illustrative of not just the immigrant Irish experience, but also of that of the host society, thus broadening the appeal and utility of the book. The discussion of the home front is balanced between the experience of men and women, and across all social classes, rather than just focusing on prominent nationalists like John Mitchel. Newspaper articles, song lyrics, poetry, and accounts of day-to-day existence under the pinch of the Federal blockade all make this a well-balanced chapter.

The discussion of religion (predominantly Irish Catholicism) that dominates chapter 5 is important because it transnationalizes the Irish experience in the South. Gleeson argues that laity and clergy had "connections to their co-religionist countrymen in the North and across the Atlantic Ocean [that] gave them significance beyond their rallying of Irish southerners to the cause" (p. 150). Churches' role as reputable financial trustees of "substitution contracts" and the role of Irish-born nuns ("Confederate paragons") as military nurses highlight the practical, as well as the spiritual roles fulfilled by the clergy. Father John Bannon, an Irish-born Confederate chaplain, who operated in Ireland to try and limit Federal recruitment from among the large northbound emigrant population is particularly interesting, because within Irish historiography the reciprocal impact of the Confederacy on Ireland is rarely considered.

The final chapter presents a detailed treatment of the evolution of the memorialization and commemoration of the "Lost Cause," a trope well understood and exploited by the former Irish Confederates. This analysis is particularly telling, acting as a counterpoint to Samito's ***Becoming American Under Fire***, with Gleeson arguing that "They [the Irish-Confederates] did not become southern 'under fire', but rather in the commemoration of the Confederacy" (p. 221). While the truth seems more likely to lie somewhere between these two poles, it is perhaps more impor-

tant in its parallels with the way in which Ireland's own traditions of commemoration are undertaken. As Ireland plods through its own "decade of commemorations" the role of the Irish in the sesquicentennial commemorations of the American Civil War, of both Federal and Confederate soldiers, is the most notable absence. The USCW is, after all, the war with the second-highest number of Irish participants, behind only the First World War, yet it appears nowhere in the Irish secondary school (high school) curriculum, and in precious few university courses either. Recent calls by Gleeson and others for a balanced and contextualized process of commemoration can only be helped by the book's timely publication.[2]

Minor quibbles do emerge upon reading the book. A more detailed examination of Fenianism in the immediate postwar environment would be of considerable interest and value, as would a more detailed treatment of the Vatican and Ultramontanism. It is understandable, however, that in trying to maintain a focused and readable text those elements might be sacrificed. Gleeson's assertion that the Irish do not have a "particularly strong maritime tradition" could certainly be contested (p. 54). Similarly, the cooperation between the British and US governments in "cracking down on Fenianism" began well before the quoted date of March 1869 (p. 197).[3] Any such quibbles are more than offset by the level of detail and depth of insight offered by this book, which should find its way into any university course that purports to discuss the Irish diaspora and identity. It is, above all, good history.

Notes

[1.] See, for example, the reviews by Cian McMahon, H-Albion, H-Net Reviews, December, 2013: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=40638; Damian Shiels, Irish in the American Civil War website, November 17, 2013: http://irishamericancivilwar.com/2013/11/17/book-review-the-green-and-the-gray-the-irish-in-the-confederate-states-of-america/; Kristopher A. Teters, *West Virginia History: A Journal of Regional Studies* 8, no. 1 (2014): 101-103; and Bryan Giemza, *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 4 (2014): 606-608.

[2.] *Irish Times*, Feb. 16, 2015.

[3.] Peter Vronsky, *Ridgeway: The American Fenian Invasion and the 1866 Battle That Made Canada* (Toronto: Penguin Global, 2012), 25–28.

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