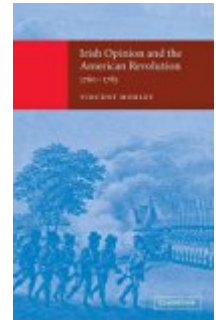


**Vincent Morley.** *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760-1783.* New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. x + 366 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-81386-0.



**Reviewed by** Jeremy Black

**Published on** H-Albion (March, 2003)

Drawing on a wide range of sources, especially newspapers, pamphlets, vernacular song, and published sermons, Dr. Morley charts the evolution of attitudes in Ireland at each stage of the revolution, whether those produced directly through the operation of American example on Irish opinion or indirectly as a result of altered circumstances arising from the war. This obliges him to take a chronological approach, with the stages chosen being imperial unrest (1760-75), colonial rebellion (1775-78), international war (1778-81), and Britain defeated (1781-83).

In his introduction, Morley opens a careful account of the trends in opinion at the outset of the period, although there is not a comparable discussion of the difficulties of assessing opinion. He argues that "old political orthodoxies were beginning to break down among Irish Anglicans by 1760" (p. 27). Irish Presbyterians "gave no indication that they were any less supportive of the constitutional status quo than their coreligionists in Scotland" (p. 39), but the stress they placed on the right to resist unconstitutional exactions was to make them more willing to accept the themes of

American patriots. In the 1760s and early 1770s, colonial unrest was seen as part of a wider malaise in the empire, but as late as 1775 "it would be a mistake to think that American affairs loomed particularly large in the consciousness of the Irish political nation" (pp. 95-96), and direct contact between American and Irish patriots was fitful.

Interest shot up with the outbreak of hostilities. Opposition to the war was strongest among the Presbyterians. Hostility to the American cause rose with American independence, while the move towards war with France rallied Protestants around the Crown, at the same time that it had a very different impact on "lower-class Catholics" (p. 169). For the latter, as Morley points out, their attitude towards the conflict, certainly, at least as it was reflected in the vernacular literature of the period, owed nothing to arcane constitutional arguments about the powers of Parliament. Instead, the conflict was interpreted in the light of a long-standing world-view that assumed the persecution of Catholics by the established church, the op-

pression of Ireland by England, and the illegitimacy of the Revolution Settlement.

The prevalence of such an outlook did not imply that they would necessarily sympathize with the American rebels but it did preclude the possibility of widespread support for Britain. The Catholic elite had a very different view: they sought, by loyalty, to win an improvement in their legal position, but, by 1781, Morley suggests, there was a measure of convergence between the Anglo-Irish patriot opposition and the "lower-class Catholics." Political tension persisted beyond the end of the war, as the "glacier of Irish politics which had remained almost immobile since 1691" continued to thaw (p. 331). Morley does not trace this to the impact of American ideas, and, instead, emphasizes the consequences of the international conjuncture, specifically the limited ability of the government to oppose Irish demands.

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**Citation:** Jeremy Black. Review of Morley, Vincent. *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760-1783*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. March, 2003.

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