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Ethnicity and “Women Religious”: How Irish-American and Other Ethnic Nuns Were
Presented in American Newspapers from 1865 to 1915

By

Lydia Hursh

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Department of History

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orders – a loose classification based on either a religious order’s origin in Ireland or the predominance of its Irish members. Decreasing in frequency over time, the Irish were still those most likely to be signaled as outsiders in the press with comments on women’s names prior to taking their vows or references to their birth in Ireland. This period saw rising numbers of immigrants from many countries in addition to Ireland, although Irish immigrants were viewed as more socially permissible than other groups because of the duration of immigration from Ireland and the visible service done by Irish nuns in the war. Over the course of fifty years, the Irish immigrants, and by extension Irish nuns, came to be viewed with special honor as “our” immigrants; if there was a group considered simultaneously ethnically separate and yet distinctly American, it was the Irish/Irish-Americans. Part of this privileged position also came about because of the Irish’s prior knowledge of English.

Women with ethnicities such as German, French, Polish, and Italian were also the subject of news articles, although to a lesser extent than the Irish. These articles were not as focused on the origins of specific women, and instead generalized about the order’s chosen work and skills because of the foundresses’ nationality or the religious order’s country of origin. French nuns were viewed as teaching in exclusive schools, while the German nuns taught in less prestigious institutions. Nuns of both ethnicities were expected, if not required, to learn the mother-tongue of the order and were considered elitists by newspapers, with few exceptions. Italian and Polish nuns received less press than the other orders, and it tended to be even more narrowly focused on a single stereotype than the others. All ethnicities tended to have at least one religious order which worked with nursing and child-care such as orphan asylums or day cares. These institutions received an inordinate share of press coverage compared to other good works nuns engaged in.

Introduction

It was a surprisingly common threat in nineteenth-century America, that if anti-Catholic sentiment seemed to be getting out of hand, the priests and nuns in America would retaliate by riling up and setting loose “the vilest Irish, who might pull down your houses over your heads.”¹ The threats were more common than the follow-through, but beyond their obvious significance as indications of religious tensions in the nation as whole, such repeated instances also showed ethnic divisions in the Catholic Church, as it was neither Catholics as a whole who promised retaliation, nor Germans, Italians, Poles, or any other ethnicity, but the Irish alone who functioned as both sword and shield for the Catholic Church in America when nativist sentiments ran high. One other notable threat included that of Bishop John Hughes, who threatened to turn New York into “a second Moscow” remnant of Russia’s scorched earth policy in the face of Napoleon.² Violence done by angry Irish Catholics occurred at least twice, in Lowell, Massachusetts.³ and once in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.⁴ This study looks into the impact of ethnic identities on the lives of nuns and other women religious in nineteenth century (1865-1915) America, with a specific focus on Irish American women and their relationship with other immigrant groups/ethnicities. Ethnic diversity among Catholic Nuns and other women religious affected and influenced the lives of Irish American nuns and women religious living throughout America in multiple ways, although most prominently through their relationship with male hierarchies of power, even while such distinctions were enforced by those same hierarchies.

¹ Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013), pp. 57.

² Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners who Built America's Most Powerful Church*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), pp. 5.

³ McGuinness, pp. 58.

⁴ Cassandra L Yacovazzi, *Escaped Nuns: True Womanhood and the Campaign Against Convents in Antebellum America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 76.

Nuns typically viewed themselves first through their shared calling, then by their state or city of residence, followed by other dividing factors such as ethnicity, while male newspaper writers, as well as priests and other clergy, self-identified by ethnicity first, and location and shared calling secondly. Despite Irish nuns paving the way for greater social acceptance of all nuns in America, tension remained between Protestantism and Catholicism in America, with particular worry associated with groups that defied a heteronormative family model such as convents. One pastor claimed the emphasis in America to save the Christian soul of the nation needed to be turned towards building Christian families, rather than drawing Christians away from family life and into single gender charitable institutions.⁵

Nuns, particularly the Irish-identified Sisters of Charity and Sisters of Mercy, were alternatively viewed as evil temptresses or immoral disgraced women in anti-Catholic literature on ‘escaped nuns,’ or as ‘ministering angels’ who had relieved the suffering of thousands on the bloody battlefields of the Civil War. The hyphenated identities of “Irish-Catholic” and “Irish-American,” however, remained divisive and factionary even among individuals and groups that modern scholars might have been inclined to view as a whole.⁶ Despite this, the Irish religious orders were also those which were eventually viewed as the most ‘American,’ and even non-Irish religious orders came to view their work, especially teaching, as training the “daughters of gentlemen in America, or ‘New Ireland.’”⁷

⁵ “Christian Homes,” *The Christian Recorder*, October 21, 1880. *Accessible Archives*.

⁶ Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830 – 1920*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), pp. 16.

⁷ Ewens, pp. 258.

Irish women came to America in larger numbers as single women than most other ethnic groups,⁸ and Irish nuns often viewed immigration to America as a ‘promotion’ within the Catholic Church.⁹ Other ethnic groups viewed the establishment of American organizations as a moral duty to the Catholics already abroad, and because conditions could be incredibly poor, only the most devout sisters would travel to America.¹⁰ Americans had different approaches to the various ethnicities who practiced Catholicism, especially by the end of the time period for this study – the Irish, thanks to a strong impression made in the Civil War¹¹ were soon accepted and ‘Americanized,’¹² the Germans became ‘the enemy’ when World War One broke out,¹³ the Italians were simply the latest immigrants to ‘leech’ off of nuns and others social services,¹⁴ and the Polish were the new ‘rabble-rousers’ and malcontents.¹⁵ Irish nuns were also of particular value to convents in America at the beginning of this period because they came from a devout Catholic country and spoke English as a first language, unlike multiple other ethnic groups, either because of the number of Catholics in their country of origin, or because their native/first language was not English.¹⁶ Other immigrant nuns from Poland, France, Germany, and many more other countries, relied on native-born Catholics and the Irish to act as teachers and translators both to the nuns themselves and in the schools they ran.¹⁷ Throughout these changing

⁸ Suellen Hoy, "The Journey Out: The Recruitment and Emigration of Irish Religious Women to the United States, 1812-1914," *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 6 (Winter/Spring 1995: pp. 64-98), pp. 73.

⁹ Hoy, pp. 64.

¹⁰ Sheridan Gilley, "The Roman Catholic Church and the Nineteenth-Century Irish Diaspora" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 35 (April 1984), pp. 198.

¹¹ Morris, pp. 79-80.

¹² Fitzgerald, pp. 160.

¹³ Morris, pp. 132-134, AND: Mary Ewens, *The Role of The Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, (New York: Arno Press, 1978), pp. 257.

¹⁴ Morris, pp. 128-131.

¹⁵ Morris, pp. 123-128.

¹⁶ Margaret Susan Thompson, "Cultural Conundrum: Sisters, Ethnicity, and the Adaptation of American Catholicism." *Mid-America*, vol. 74 (1992: pp. 205-30), pp. 217.

¹⁷ Hoy, pp. 65 and 74; AND: Carol Mattingly, *Secret Habits: Catholic Literacy Education for Women in the Early Nineteenth Century*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), pp. 88; AND: Margaret Susan

characterizations, however, the Irish consistently outnumbered other ethnicities in terms of women religious, and non-Irish orders came to draw more heavily on the Irish as they too began to leave their strictly defined ethnic identities behind and become ‘American’.¹⁸ Among religious communities, to be Irish became synonymous with being American, and nothing else would suit an American town as well as ‘American’ nuns.¹⁹

The survival of religious-only communities in general both in Europe and America was heavily biased towards women’s institutions; only two monasteries existed in America prior to 1900, compared to countless nunneries.²⁰ Irish women immigrating to America in general would travel alone, but Irish women religious usually made the journey in groups wearing secular clothing.²¹ This was common for many women religious travelling to America, since anti-Catholic sentiments could and did turn violent at times during the nineteenth century.²² Towards the 1870s and beyond however, ‘secular dress’ used by nuns had become just as distinctive as their religious habits because of its outdated style.²³ Even as early as 1838, some male leaders objected to the practice of travelling in secular clothing, although this was in part because they mistakenly believed it to be a matter of vanity.²⁴

Thompson, “Sisters and the Creation of American Catholic Identities,” in *Education, Identity and Women Religious, 1800-1950*, ed. Dierdre Raftery and Elizabeth Smyth, (Routledge, 2016), pp. 103.

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, pp. 21.

¹⁹ Ewens, pp. 207.

²⁰ Margaret Susan Thompson, "Service As Sacrament: Sisters and the Meaning of American Catholicism," *Magistra* vol. 3 issue 1 (1977: pp. 32-39) pp. 32, AND: Margaret Susan Thompson, "The Validation of Sisterhood: Canonical Status and Liberation in the History of American Nuns," in *A Leaf from the Great Tree of God: Essays in Honor of Ritamary Bradley, SFCC*, ed. Margot H. King, (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1994, pp. 38-78), pp. 48.

²¹ Hoy, pp. 65 and 72-73.

²² Thompson, “Cultural Conundrum,” pp. 205, AND: Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith. *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 43.

²³ Ewens, pp. 211.

²⁴ Misner, pp. 97-98.

Because of their shared religion and status as sisters, the women had a motivation for immigration and shared a support system in the United States in common, even where some convents tried to maintain strict ethnic solidarity. In some cases, a shared religion served as enough of a common factor to unite individuals, as evidenced by the audiences of the various newspapers.²⁵ In other cases, however, ethnic difference and maintaining ethnic divisions, most clearly seen in language use, was important enough to risk the survival of a convent.²⁶ For the purposes of this paper, ethnicity also includes individuals born in the United States to immigrant parents. While they may have identified as the same ethnicity as the convent, it is possible their place of birth affected their status in the organization as well.²⁷ While nuns retained their ethnic designations, greater acceptance was extended towards the Irish because of their quick adaption to American circumstances, leading to the claim that they were ‘Americanized.’ Among the general immigrant population, ‘Americanization’ was marked by marriage later in life, the births of few children per couple, and changing patterns of church-going behavior, while in religious orders it related to their organizational structures, approaches to fund-raising, and greater degrees of engagement in good works. For the later Italian immigrants, ‘Americanization’ seemed to occur within three generations of arrival until the ‘foreign’ features of the group had matched trends made popular by the Irish-Americans.²⁸

The ‘Americanization’ of the Irish was viewed as a massive success by certain members of the Church, and the explicit goal of some segments of the population, although financial support for those left behind in Ireland also remained one of the primary goals for Irish/Irish

²⁵ The newspaper *The Catholic Telegraph* was published in Cincinnati for regional Catholics as a source of local, national, and occasionally international news.

²⁶ Thompson, “Sisters and American Catholic Identities,” pp. 102.

²⁷ Thompson, “Cultural Conundrum,” pp. 226-227.

²⁸ Morris, pp. 131.

American immigrants. Some social clubs and aid societies made it their primary goal to help Irish women adjust to America and find jobs.²⁹ Other women relied on informal networks to find their way in a sometimes hostile new country, with supposedly innocuous clues such as a clean room with a picture of the Virgin Mary visible from the street, as one contemporary Irish author, Con O'Leary, claims for two of his fictional characters.³⁰ While secular networks certainly existed for Irish women, they remained few and relatively small compared to both men's organizations and the support provided by women religious.³¹ Moreover, according to other characters in O'Leary's story, the Americanization process was comically quick among the Irish, and class differentials played a major role in how rapidly Irish immigrants were able to Americanize.³² Despite this visible trend towards adaptation to the American circumstances, much time and energy was also devoted to reproducing miniature Irelands in every city with a large Irish population in America.³³

The inter-war period between the American Civil War and World War One was chosen due to the dramatic growth in female-based formal religious organizations, and to minimize the known effect of war influencing ethnic identities.³⁴ The American Civil War saw a sharp divide in the treatment of women religious, as prior to the war church affiliation and native birthright/ethnicity were two of the biggest factors, aside from race, which split American

²⁹ Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters In America: Irish Immigrant Women In the Nineteenth Century*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 122.

³⁰ Con O'Leary, *The Lost Rosary; or, Our Irish Girls their Trials, Temptations, and Triumphs*, (Boston, 1870) pp. 137.

³¹ Diner, pp. 128-129.

³² O'Leary, pp. 126.

³³ Gilley, pp. 196.

³⁴ Florence Deacon, O.S. F., "More than Just a Shoe String and a Prayer: How Women Religious Helped Finance the Nineteenth-Century Social Fabric," *U.S. Catholic Historian* Vol. 14 (Winter 1996: pp. 67-89), pp. 69, provides a chart demonstrating the growth of four prominent religious orders from 1849 to 1899.

society.³⁵ With the war, with the exception of the draft riots,³⁶ there came a decrease in people identifying as various ethnicities during the war-years – in war people were Americans first, ethnic identities second, especially those women whose orders served as battlefield nurses.³⁷ After the war, nationalism faded and ethnic divisions resettled, with the added complication of including newly emancipated African-Americans into the religious communities, in some cases through desegregation, and in some orders and locations allowing them to join for the first time.³⁸ A similar homogenizing effect occurred at the onset of World War One to an even greater degree, as women religious had by this point proven their contributions to society were of substantial benefit to people, especially the sick, infirm, poor, and orphans, although their roles as leaders in the fields had been surpassed by others with professional training in some areas by World War One.

Complications in the analysis of Irish American nuns as distinct from nuns of other ethnicities include the religious hierarchy among women, which ranged from women religious, novices, lay sisters, all the way to Mother Superior of a convent. Among the Catholic women involved in the church, there are multiple ranks and titles to distinguish the women's level of commitment, some of which are informal, and others which have institutionalized meanings. Nuns are Catholic women who have taken "solemn vows" of strict obedience to certain

³⁵ Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, pp. 43.

³⁶ Morris, pp. 76-78.

³⁷ Thompson, "Cultural Conundrum," pp. 212; AND: Bernadette McCauley, "'Sublime Anomalies': Women Religious and Roman Catholic Hospitals in New York City, 1850–1920," in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* vol. 52, no. 3 (July 1, 1997): pp. 289–309), pp. 295.

³⁸ Shannen Dee Williams, "Forgotten Habits, Lost Vocations: Black Nuns, Contested Memories, and the 19th Century Struggle to Desegregate U.S. Catholic Religious Life," in *The Journal of African American History* vol. 101, no. 3 (July 1, 2016): pp. 231–260), pp. 232 and 245; AND: Cecilia A. Moore, "Keeping Harlem Catholic: African-American Catholics and Harlem, 1920-1960," in *American Catholic Studies* (Fall 2003: pp. 3-21), pp. 4; AND: Cyprian Davis O.S.B., *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1995) and "Black Catholics in Nineteenth Century America." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 5, no. 1 (1986: 1-17), pp. 109-110 especially shows some of these struggles, among other sources listed later in the chapter.

conditions or actions, which vary based on the religious order they are joining.³⁹ The Laity, or Lay members, were women who traditionally were servants of more well-to do women, drawn from the peasantry and without dowries, and would have done any hard labor needed within the convent such as cooking, cleaning, and other menial tasks.⁴⁰ Lay women were held to less rigorous standards compared to nuns, would have taken “simple vows.”⁴¹ This distinction also followed class lines, since nuns were by definition members of the Choir, or both able to read Latin and endowed.⁴² Although rarely seen in the United States, two more levels of involvement existed in Catholic religious society, the first being moderately educated women without vows but living ‘religiously’ in the community and conducting business outside the convent walls on behalf of the sisters, called Externs.⁴³ Finally, and most commonly seen among the Benedictines, was a final class comprised of older women and widows who took no vows but lived entirely within the convent walls, called Oblates.⁴⁴ Women religious is a broader term referring to Catholic women involved in religion at any level of this hierarchy, in part thanks to the uneven distribution and use of Externs as a category among Catholics in America.⁴⁵ The term “sister” applied only to vowed members of the community, either as choir members or the laity. These complications in the religious hierarchy of various convents make any generalizations about the status of certain groups difficult without appropriate specificity and a thorough understand of each order’s rules and approaches to these conflicts. In America however, these strict divisions between ranks frequently fell apart, either under various pressures

³⁹ Vatican, *Code of Cannon Law*, Can. 1192 §2

⁴⁰ Margaret Susan Thompson, “Sisterhood and Power: Class, Culture, and Ethnicity in the American Convent” in *Colby Quarterly* vol 25, issue 3 (September 1989), pp. 151.

⁴¹ Vatican, Can. 1192 §2

⁴² Thompson, “Sisterhood and Power,” pp. 151.

⁴³ Thompson, “Sisterhood and Power,” pp. 151-152.

⁴⁴ Thompson, “Cultural Conundrum,” pp. 214.

⁴⁵ Thompson, “Sisterhood and Power,” pp. 152.

facing newly immigrated convents, or from socially embedded democratic ideals which rejected blatant class-based social divisions even ethno-social distinctions were acceptable.

Additionally, during the period of this study a further distinction was made in some convents between Lay sisters and Choir members in their habits/uniforms, and their rights and responsibilities in church governance, although not always in their missions.⁴⁶ In some mixed ethnicity convents, only women of the founding member's ethnicity could rise beyond certain ranks in the convent.⁴⁷ In other mixed ethnicity convents, ethnicity and class could work against new members to prevent their promotions. Class also played a role in the social maneuverability of women even in preeminently single-ethnicity convents. Since the majority of the Irish immigrant nuns were members of the working class prior to their taking of the vows, determining which factor might account for changes in status for Irish nuns is complicated.⁴⁸ Some convents also chose to actively recruit to fill their laity from Ireland and Latin America, never intending for the women they recruited to join the order as full members and nuns.⁴⁹ This intentional pigeon-holing of Irish women by some orders calls into question how much significance should be given to an Irish sister's rank in the convent and if it should be noted as exceptional when an Irish women is listed above the rank of lay sister in a non-Irish religious order.

Also complicating matters is the autonomy present in some religious orders and convents that was absent in others. Some American convents and religious orders were entirely

⁴⁶ Sarah Mulhall Adelman, "Empowerment and Submission: The Political Culture of Catholic Women's Religious Communities in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Journal of Women's History* vol. 23, no. 3 (Fall 2011: pp. 138-161), pp. 149.

⁴⁷ Thompson, "Cultural Conundrum," pp. 221 and 225.

⁴⁸ Hoy, pp. 64-65, AND: Barbara Misner, *Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies: Catholic Women Religious in America, 1790-1850*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1988), pp. 107-110.

⁴⁹ Thompson, "Sisterhood and Power," pp. 160.

autonomous, having split completely or never been attached to a foreign body of leadership located in Europe,⁵⁰ beyond the Pope himself and are known as diocesan convents. Other American convents were cultivated by and maintained strong relationships with their European headquarters, deferring all questions of change or leadership back to Europe, the Pope, and the “Motherhouses”.⁵¹ All of these convents did, however, have to operate under the ‘protection’ of a bishop or other male leader no matter their level of connection to Europe, adding a second or third source of frustration to independently minded groups.⁵² Because of these distinctions, it may be unclear whether ethnic divides were organically produced or relaxed in America, or if they were manufactured and enforced from afar by individuals who never stepped foot in the country.

Data on ethnicities among members is often limited to informal sources as well. Biographical data was not always kept by the orders in the nineteenth century, and most data on women who left the order through anything other than death is nearly non-existent in official records, which makes tracing the intentionality of an orders’ status as single-ethnicity even harder.⁵³ Financial realities in America may have also succeeded in forcing ethnic pluralism where other factors had failed, as American communities did not have the land or other resources accumulated through the years that their European counter-parts did. Tightened circumstances may have forced a more accepting spirit towards a wealthy widow of a different ethnicity than

⁵⁰ Thompson, “Sisterhood and Power,” pp. 163.

⁵¹ Thompson, “Sisterhood and Power,” pp. 162.

⁵² Thompson, “The Validation of Sisterhood,” pp. 51.

⁵³ Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, "Creating Community and Identity: Exploring Religious and Gender Ideology in the Lives of American Women Religious, 1836-1920," in *U.S. Catholic Historian* vol. 14, no. 1 (1996: 91-108), pp. 96; AND: Barbara Misner, *Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies: Catholic Women Religious in America, 1790-1850*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1988), pp. 89-91 for some of the difficulties associated with this issue.

may have been present without such concerns,⁵⁴ although bequests could occasionally provide substantial support for a convent and frequently followed ethnic lines.⁵⁵ Additionally, ethnic tensions were no doubt complicated by socio-political tensions, such as Poland's partition from 1795 to 1918 and "occupation" by Germany as part of the Austro-Hungarian empire.⁵⁶

Secondary scholarship on Catholic nuns and women religious tends to focus on the history of these groups, their impact on American culture, and their work in education and healthcare. A few authors focus on the race or the ethnicity of the women religious/nuns, although again the emphasis remains on a single ethnicity's work, convents, or history, and less on the interrelations between convents of differing ethnicities, or women of differing ethnicities within the same convent. Much of the work is also national in scope, if not international, for example comparing New Orleans to the Midlands, the East Coast to Montreal, Canada, or the North to the South. Some authors of particular value who work with the history of nuns and women religious in the United States in general are: Margaret M. McGuinness, author of *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (2013); Charles R. Morris, author of *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (1997); Barbara Misner, author of *Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies: Catholic Women Religious in America, 1790-1850* (1988); Mary Ewens, author of *The Role of The Nun in Nineteenth-Century America* (1978); and George C. Stewart Jr., *Marvels of Charity: History of American Sisters and Nuns* (1994).⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, pp. 45.

⁵⁵ Multiple examples of bequests following ethnic lines can be seen in newspaper entries detailed in chapter three.

⁵⁶ Thompson, "Cultural Conundrum," pp. 223-224.

⁵⁷ Other authors in a similar vein include: Sarah Mulhall Adelman, author of "Empowerment and Submission: The Political Culture of Catholic Women's Religious Communities in Nineteenth-Century America"

Ethnicity has been a frequent focus for research on nuns and the wider Catholic population in America, and a number of people over the years have addressed the topic both in an exclusively Irish context, and in a wider comparative context. One author who has written extensively on the wider topic is Margaret Susan Thompson. Thompson has written five articles on women religious in America: “Service As Sacrament: Sisters and the Meaning of American Catholicism” (1977) on the evolution of the Sacrament in America as different from Continental/European ministry of the same; “Sisterhood and Power: Class, Culture, and Ethnicity in the American Convent” (1989) on “some of the causes, manifestations, and consequences of ethnic, cultural, and/or class conflict- or reasons for the absence thereof- within Catholic religious orders of women during the period prior to World War 1”⁵⁸; “Cultural Conundrum: Sisters, Ethnicity, and the Adaptation of American Catholicism” (1992) on how various American Orders dealt with problems of adaption to American customs and internal ethnocultural divisions; “The Validation of Sisterhood: Canonical Status and Liberation in the History of American Nuns” (1994) on the evolution of orders of women religious with and without formal recognition from the Vatican; and “Sisters and the Creation of American Catholic Identities” (2016) on the three ways Catholic women’s orders either maintained their ethnocultural identity, assimilated to an American identity, or integrated the two into a hyphenated identity. Additionally, Thompson has one up-coming book on the subject of

(2011); Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, authors of the article “Creating Community and Identity: Exploring Religious and Gender Ideology in the Lives of American Women Religious, 1836-1920” (1996) and the book *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (1999); Ilia Delio, author of “The First Catholic Social Gospelers: Women Religious in the Nineteenth Century” (1995); James J. Hennesey, author of *American Catholics: a History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (1981); and Bernadette McCauley, author of ““Their Lives Are Little Known”: Nuns and American Reform” (2005) and “Nuns' Stories: Writing the History of Women Religious in the United States” (2014).

⁵⁸ Thompson, “Sisterhood and Power,” pp. 150.

American nuns during the time period, *The Yoke of Grace: American Nuns and Social Change, 1808-1917*.

Authors of especial value for this study for their focus on Irish and Irish American people are: Hasia R. Diner, author of *Erin's Daughters In America: Irish Immigrant Women In the Nineteenth Century* (1983); Jay P. Dolan, author of *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815 – 1865* (1975); Sheridan Gilley, author of “The Roman Catholic Church and the Nineteenth-Century Irish Diaspora” (1984); Suellen Hoy, author of “The Journey Out: The Recruitment and Emigration of Irish Religious Women to the United States, 1812-1914” (1995); Mary C. Kelley, author of *The Shamrock and the Lily: the New York Irish and the Creation of a Transatlantic Identity, 1845-1921* (2005); Mary Peckham Magray, author of *The Transforming Power of Nuns: Women, Religion, and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750-1900* (1998); Colleen Mcdannell, author of “‘True Men as We Need Them’: Catholicism and the Irish-American Male” (1986); Thomas J. Shelley, author of “Catholic Greenwich Village: Ethnic Geography and Religious Identity in New York City, 1880-1930” (2003); and Nicole Anderson Yanoso, author of “Jacksonian Democracy, the Antebellum Period, and the Coming of the Catholic Irish to America (1824–59)” (2016).⁵⁹

Racial concerns permeated religious life towards the end of the century as much as ethnic worries in the aftermath of the Civil War. Cyprian Davis has written about Black and African American nuns in an article “Black Catholics in Nineteenth Century America” (1986), which he

⁵⁹ Other authors who dealt with ethnicity in their research include: Colman James Barry, author of *The Catholic Church And German Americans* (1953); Diana L. Hayes and Peter C. Phan, authors of *Many Faces, One Church: Cultural Diversity And the American Catholic Experience* (2005); Florence Mae Waldron, author of “Re-Evaluating the Role of ‘National’ Identities in the American Catholic Church at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: The Case of Les Petites Franciscaines De Marie (PFM)” (2009); and Rebecca Rogers, author of “Le Catholicisme Au Féminin: Thirty Years of Women’s History” (2013).

then expanded into the book *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (1995), with a specific chapter on women religious. Both form a broad-strokes history of Black Catholics in America through a series of anecdotes and personal histories of key figures, with a focus on Black-only institutions. Shannen Dee Williams also wrote about Black Catholics in a two-part article series for *The Journal of African American History*, split into “Forgotten Habits, Lost Vocations: Black Nuns, Contested Memories, and the 19th Century Struggle to Desegregate U.S. Catholic Religious Life” (2016) as the first part, and ““You Could Do the Irish Jig, But Anything African Was Taboo’: Black Nuns, Contested Memories, and the 20th Century Struggle to Desegregate U.S. Catholic Religious Life” (2017) as the conclusion. Both Williams articles looked at the desegregation and integration of Black Catholics into predominantly white religious orders, although mention is made of the Black-only groups which formed the focus of Davis’ writings. Others who wrote on Black Catholics include: Albert J. Raboteau, LaReine-Marie Mosely, and M. Shawn (Mary Shawn) Copeland, authors of *Uncommon Faithfulness: the Black Catholic Experience* (2009); John Thomas Gillard, author of *The Catholic Church and the American Negro* (1930); and Cecilia A. Moore, author of “Keeping Harlem Catholic: African-American Catholics and Harlem, 1920-1960” (2003). Moore’s article is of particular use thanks to its emphasis on Harlem in New York City, even though the period she focuses on is slightly past that of this paper.

Being a Black woman religious was in some contexts treated as an ethnicity, and Black women religious had three options for living with their ethnicity, which followed roughly the same three choices Thompson identifies for traditional ethnicities, such as German or French, had in building a religious life in America. When looking at all of the works on black nuns, three options are seen among the lives and choices made by these women. They could ‘pass’ as

white i.e., assimilate to American culture, they could attempt to pass and be outed as black but accepted i.e., integrate with Americans, or they could create a separate institution just for their ‘ethnicity’ and recruit amongst themselves. It should be noted however that Black women who attempted to pass as white before being outed were usually removed from their convent.

Occasionally they were moved to another convent a good distance away and their identity as black was kept secret by their former sisters, similar to the modern colloquialism regarding firing and rehiring elsewhere of poor/abusive teachers, known as ‘pass the trash.’ At other times, however, they were removed from the convent and word of their identity was shared with other convents to prevent them from joining another white sisterhood elsewhere.

Healthcare work by women religious in America began with the Civil War and has continued to this day, as has a focus on education – in part because the systems the Sisters used and created in these fields continue to this day. Due to the long history of these efforts, there is an almost equally long history of scholarship on the topics. Even in these modern investigations of religious education systems or religious healthcare systems ethnicity remains a factor to this day in the composition of some religious orders. Most of the changes these two systems have undergone has related to the turn-over of administrative duties to men.⁶⁰ A few sources that deal with religious education systems include: Elizabethada Wright’s *A Catholic English Education: The Development of the Discipline of English in Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth Century Schools Run by American Catholic Women Religious* (2019); Robert T. O’Gorman’s *Corporate Takeover of U.S. Catholic Education and the Effect on Catholic Identity: Models from the Church’s 19th-Century Schools and 21st-Century Hospitals* (2015); Mary Hatfield and Ciaran

⁶⁰ Peter J. Levin, “Bold Vision: Catholic Sisters and the Creation of American Hospitals,” in *Journal of Community Health* vol. 36, no. 3 (June 2011: pp. 343–347), pp. 347; AND: Robert T. O’Gorman, “Corporate Takeover of U.S. Catholic Education and the Effect on Catholic Identity: Models from the Church’s 19th-Century Schools and 21st-Century Hospitals,” in *Religious Education* vol. 110, no. 2 (March 15, 2015: pp. 212–230), pp. 214.

O'Neill's *Education and Empowerment: Cosmopolitan Education and Irish Women in the Early Nineteenth Century* (2018); and Carol Mattingly's, *Secret Habits: Cosmopolitan Education and Irish Women in the Early Nineteenth Century* (2016).

While avoiding diving too deep into the work of Catholic nursing nuns during the Civil War, a topic large enough for a separate book, a number of sources also look at nuns in healthcare after the war including: Dorthey Brown's *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (1998); Maureen Fitzgerald's *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (2006); Peter Levin's *Bold Vision: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (2011); Bernadette McCauley's *Sublime Abnormalities: Women Religious and Roman Catholic Hospitals in New York City, 1850–1920* (1997); Florence Deacon's "More than Just a Shoe String and a Prayer: How Women Religious Helped Finance the Nineteenth-Century Social Fabric" (1996); and Julie Miller's *Abandoned Foundlings in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (2008). Of particular importance for this study is Fitzgerald's book, thanks to its emphasis on Irish Catholic Nuns specifically.

A final topic of common inquiry for scholars of women religious and nuns in the United States is anti-Catholicism. Motives for anti-Catholicism prove a popular focus among scholars, with sensationalist news as the generally accepted means of propagation for the anger. Authors Sandra Frink, Cassandra L. Yacovazzi, and Kara French all wrote on the impact of news stories, such as that of Maria Monk, which framed Catholic convents as dens of inequity. Joseph G. Mannard, on the other hand, investigated reasons why Protestant women might voluntarily

convert to Catholicism, as they were 'lured away' by the promise of relative autonomy granted to women's religious orders.⁶¹

Hyper-identification with one's ethnicity has faded over the years in general in American society, although investigations into the role of ethnicity in the lives of nuns and women religious have remained an infrequently investigated but compelling area of study. Why, and to a lesser extent how, these ethnic definitions and divisions were created and maintained among immigrant women in America, already a minority due to their religion as well as their ethnic identifications, are two questions which remain unresolved despite existing scholarship. It is a known fact that Irish-immigrant nuns served as liminal figures, moving into varying religious orders and ethnic-based divisions, with more success incorporating into some predominantly single-ethnicity groups than others.⁶²

There were a number of Irish-based religious communities in the United States, including the Sisters of the Holy Faith,⁶³ the Sisters of Charity, and the Sisters of Mercy,⁶⁴ so what served as a lure to non-Irish ethnic orders for Irish women religious? Was there a status differential, as nuns in Ireland seemed to believe, in serving in America, and if so, was this affected by the community the sister eventually joined? In other words, if being in America was better than being in Ireland, was it better to serve in a non-ethnic based convent/community in America, or were certain ethnic groups more highly sought after by Irish nuns than others? Some questions these secondary sources bring up are: Did the Irish nuns set up intentionally Irish only convents?

⁶¹ Joseph G. Mannard, "Converts in Convents: Protestant Women and the Social Appeal of Catholic Religious Life in Antebellum America," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* vol. 104 (Spring/Winter 1993: pp. 79-90).

⁶² Gilley, pp. 202.

⁶³ Bernadette McCauley, "Nuns' Stories: Writing the History of Women Religious in the United States," in *American Catholic Studies* vol. 125, no. 4 (2014: pp. 51-68) pp. 56.

⁶⁴ Adelman, pp. 140-141.

If Irish nuns did not set up Irish-only convents, what made them different from the other ethnicities that their ethno-social ties were not as tight? Or, if Irish nuns did run exclusionary convents, what made them unremarkable in the eyes of newspapers of the times and scholars? Also, how important was knowing the English language in a convent? If convents wished to remain single ethnicity-based groups, why then bother to make an exception for Irish women? Were there other ethnicities or groups like the Irish which also valued shared religion over shared ethnicity? Were there certain ethnicities which more often than not would attempt to form an ethnic-based convent/did some ethnicities form ethnic-based convents more than others? Did one ethnicity give up on the idea of single ethnicity convents prior to other groups? Did any group face dissolution rather than accept other ethnicities?

Additionally, the reasons for these self-imposed ethnic boundaries, and the extent of influence such designations held in the varying communities are still unknown. Religious solidarity and ethnic solidarity could both provide companionship to women religious and nuns in America, yet it seems like for some religious orders ethnic solidarity was conflated with religious. While Irish American people have been the focus of general scholarship regarding ethnicity, the specific lives of women religious/nuns has not been thoroughly investigated. Considering the transitional role these women played in convents of other ethnicities as guides to English language and culture, the lack of focused research is intriguing. While some religious orders made it clear that the postulants/potential members would have an easier time in the convent if they were of the same ethnicity of the founding women, it is uncertain if the Irish-based convents were among this number.

Newspaper articles which were used as primary sources also emphasized women's country of origin/ethnicity when mentioning them in the news. Newspapers fell into two main

categories, either they were ethnicity focused, and happened to include news about women religious, such as *The Irish World*,⁶⁵ or they were religious focused, and made distinctions between religious orders and ethnicities in the body of the text, such as *The Catholic Telegraph*. It should be noted that *The Catholic Telegraph* was strongly Confederate during the Civil War, while the rest of the publications named here were pro-Union to various degrees, a position which could affect their perception of immigrant groups since both xenophobia and racism target groups of people for conditions in their lives beyond their personal control.⁶⁶

There were some exceptions with family magazines such as *Frank Leslie's Weekly*,⁶⁷ which was neither ethnic nor religious focused, but geared towards white lower/middle-class women, as compared to *Harper's Weekly*,⁶⁸ which was the more well-to-do paper/magazine.⁶⁹ Many of these newspapers reprinted news from around the world within their pages despite being located in the United States. News from the home country and news from Rome/the Vatican were the most common international news sites in these papers, for the obvious reasons. A number of authors in newspapers also worried about the impact of Catholic immigrants on American culture, although their focus was predominantly defensive to avoid accusations of attacking Protestantism in the country. Despite the unnecessaryness of such a stance, many of the Catholic-focused newspapers worked hard to convince readers Catholicism was not a threat, and that anti-Catholic literature is libel-filled fiction written by people who have never been a nun, a Priest, or in some cases even Catholic.⁷⁰ Protestant newspapers, on the other hand, did not

⁶⁵ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1931) vol. 4, pp. 298.

⁶⁶ Mott, vol. 2, pp. 77.

⁶⁷ Mott, vol. 2, pp. 437.

⁶⁸ Mott, vol. 2, pp. 469.

⁶⁹ Mott, vol. 3, pp. 276.

⁷⁰ One particularly lengthy article to this effect is "The Nun in Fiction," in *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 66, Number 37, September 16, 1897, pp. 1. *The Catholic News Archive*.

hesitate to print tales of nuns being abused by male clergy, as well as abusing their charges and each other.⁷¹

Frank Luther Mott, in his five volume work *A History of American Magazines* (1931), provides further names of major Catholic periodicals for investigation. These include New York City based works like *The Irish-American*,⁷² *Catholic World*,⁷³ *Catholic Review*,⁷⁴ *Catholic News*,⁷⁵ all of which are drawn upon over the course of this paper, in addition to numerous larger and smaller papers throughout the country of varying focuses and audiences. Mott's series also provides some contextual information on these papers, including for some their size, price, and the range of years the periodical ran.⁷⁶

Most secondary sources and scholars use various sources to demonstrate their conclusions, which include: firsthand narrative accounts of life within a specific convent or a specific religious order's convents, letters between nuns and people within and outside of convent life, the Annuals of religious orders, the memoirs of Mother Superiors and various sisters, archives of religious orders, and membership/mission records.⁷⁷ One source with a specific view of a predominantly Irish order of sisters in New York City can be found in Sister Marie de Lourdes Walsh's three volume work *The Sisters of Charity of New York, 1809-1959*

⁷¹ "Relations of Convent Life," *The Christian Recorder*, October 13, 1875. *Accessible Archives*.

⁷² Mott, vol. 2, pp. 77.

⁷³ Mott, vol. 3, pp. 68.

⁷⁴ Mott, vol. 3, pp. 70

⁷⁵ Mott, vol. 4, pp. 298.

⁷⁶ *The Truth-Teller*, *Sentinel of the Blessed Sacrament*, *Benziger's Magazine*, and the *American Celt*, later renamed the *Tablet* were other popular Catholic magazines although they were not cited in this study. Other prominent publications in Catholic news were two Boston-based periodicals, *Pilot*, and *Donahoe's Magazine*, both of which were owned by the same man.

⁷⁷ While it would be beneficial to have access to other materials, especially those written by nuns themselves, much of that material is located only in physical archives around the country and is unavailable in-person due to COVID. Furthermore, card catalogues are unavailable online, and shipping or scanning to access electronically frequently involves additional fees including for time spent researching relevant documents. As such, this project is limited in its primary sources to newspaper articles of the times and the occasional other material as happens to be available, usually as reprinted in a secondary source.

(1960), a series which includes multiple long quotes from letters and other primary archival material.

Chapter One: Ethnic Churches, Ethnic Nuns

The idea of a monolithic ‘American Catholic Church,’ began only around the start of World War One, although many claimed to speak for it before then. Prior to that time period, ethnicity was one of the most divisive issues among Catholics in America, and was used by American-based Bishops during visits to Rome to engender support from personal agendas under the threat that without papal approval for the latest scheme, riots would occur between the various ethnic catholic fractions in the country.⁷⁸ That ethnic tensions existed among the general Catholic population is undeniable, but its effects on women religious are more difficult to pin down. Ethnic tensions between immigrant groups affect some of the same areas as the Irish specifically experienced, but one of the more frequently studied areas of ethnic contention among women religious is that of racism.

Among the immigrant ethnicities, religious orders of women were sometimes stereotyped for the good works they conducted in addition to discrimination based on their members dominant ethnicity. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd provided job training and housing for ‘fallen women’ to ‘rehabilitate’ them, and because of this emphasis in their charitable works, they struggled to recruit young women of any ethnicity into joining the order. Initially a French order, the sheer number of Irish Catholics in America became the primary reason for the Sisters’ ethnic profile, although the emphasis remained on the women’s good works, rather than who the sisters were.⁷⁹ *Frank Leslie’s Weekly*, to this effect, ran a multi-page article with multiple engravings on the Sisters of the Good Shepherd which mentions repeatedly the “fallen women” who are among “the most hardened, the most abandoned, and the most loathsome of the human

⁷⁸ Morris, pp. 89-112 contains a long section on a series personal politics turned papal issues.

⁷⁹ Fitzgerald, pp. 21.

family,” that the Sisters care for, but never once describes the Sisters themselves.⁸⁰ Another article about the Sisters focuses on their education of girls from the Chippewa tribe in Colorado, complete with racist commentary on the children, but without mention of the Sisters beyond reference to their being white women.⁸¹ Other articles, however, use the various ethnicities of the nuns against them in a combination of nativism and anti-Catholicism.

Even among women religious of the same order, ethnic tensions could cause issues. One particularly notable moment in Europe which American newspapers reported on, the Russian Sisters of Mercy were captured by the German army and taken to work at a hospital alongside the German Sisters of Mercy. War-time tensions between the two countries however also affected the relationships between the nuns, and the German Sisters refused to work in the same hospitals as the Russian Sisters to the point where the army ended up sending the Russian Sisters back home.⁸² While such strident reactions did occur in America, they frequently remained somewhat subdued in order to present a united front against anti-immigrant political action groups.⁸³ In America these conflicts were usually between the Irish and the Germans, but all news of that sort sold well in America and went to print. German immigration was the second most numerous group after the Irish, so many newspapers dealt explicitly with German nuns as well as Irish, and the two groups American-based tensions.

⁸⁰ “The House of the Good Shepherd” in *Frank Leslie’s Weekly*. August 21, 1969. *Accessible Archives*.

⁸¹ “Good Work for Little Squaws: The House of the Good Shepherd” in *The Christian Recorder*, November 22, 1888. *Accessible Archives*.

⁸² “Russian Nuns Ill-Treated,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Oct 23, 1914, pp. 3, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁸³ Morris, pp. 60-63 demonstrates the danger groups such as the Know-Nothings posed nuns and other Catholics prior to the Civil-War.

The Polish Catholics in Chicago, for instance, not only frequently clashed with their assigned Irish and Germany clergy, they also routinely attempted to murder their fellow Polish Catholics for being radical-nationalist non-Resurrectionists or royalist Resurrectionists.⁸⁴ Most of the newspaper records about the Polish nuns in Chicago however, focus on their good works, as tends to be the norm for articles about women religious, with ethnicity serving more as a descriptor than anything else. When visiting the city holding cells by the courthouse, the Polish nuns were the ones to alert muckraking journalists to the horrid conditions individuals suffered there, including child petty-thieves and child witnesses, both of which were locked up in with the general population.⁸⁵ This connection to expository journalism seems to be unique to Polish nuns in Chicago, however. In another article many might wish present day Americans would emulate, the Polish in Chicago were mobilized at a remarkable rate to receive smallpox vaccinations after a Polish priest was informed that one of his flock had contacted smallpox and fled health officials to avoid going to the hospital.⁸⁶

Other ethnic immigrant groups, such as the French-Canadian Petites Franciscaines de Marie (Little Franciscans of Mary), struggled with their place in the wider American Catholic cultural context as well. This religious order was first brought together by a French priest, Joseph Brouillet, in Worchester, Mas., without the permission or knowledge of the local Irish-born Bishop, Patrick T. O'Reilly, a struggle which would define the formative years of the convent and clearly shows the effect of ethnic tensions among male members of the clergy, although not explicitly among the women, who advocated any church authority they thought

⁸⁴ Morris, pp. 127.

⁸⁵ "Horror Of Chicago: The Polish Nun Story Outdone--Children Dying in the City Black Hole," *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer (1852-1872)*, Aug 14, 1869, pp. 2, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁸⁶ "Told To Vaccinate: Polish Catholics Advised From The Pulpit," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, March 05, 1894, pp. 8. *ProQuest Historical Newspaper*.

would verify and endorse their order.⁸⁷ Part of this dispute was based in conflicting national identities, with French-Canadian-American women religious,⁸⁸ a French priest, and an Irish bishop, while part of the conflict also relates to contradictory definitions of what makes a ‘national’ identity.⁸⁹ Both Brouillet and O’Reilly, for example could have chosen a hyphenated American identity simply by virtue of living there even without citizenship, as multiple clergy members had chosen to do, and Brouillet could have also hyphenated as a French-Canadian. Instead, both instead identified as a culture under opposition, while the Sisters chose to self-identify based on their Catholicism, their actions, and their good works, before claiming a nationality, similar to the approach of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.⁹⁰ Other French orders had different approaches to creating distance from their ethnicity.⁹¹

Other French Sisters in North America also faced similar outside pressures to identify themselves and their beneficiaries along ethnic lines. In Canada, the Sisters of Charity maintained a strong French perception, in part thanks to the greater cultural tolerance for French as a language in Canada, which did not exist in America. These Sisters were also distinguished from their American counterparts by their diminutive nickname of the Gray Nuns, and in a New York article about the impressive good-works the nuns have accomplished, the French language is liberally sprinkled throughout the article despite the intended American audience.⁹² The Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Sisters of St. Joseph, and the Visitation Sisters were French

⁸⁷ Florence Mae Waldron, "Re-Evaluating the Role of ‘National’ Identities in the American Catholic Church at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: The Case of Les Petites Franciscaines De Marie (PFM)," *The Catholic Historical Review* vol. 95, no. 3 (07, 2009): pp. 515-545) pp. 525.

⁸⁸ Waldron, pp. 537.

⁸⁹ Waldron, pp. 531-533.

⁹⁰ Waldron, pp. 535, 540.

⁹¹ For example, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, a French-Belgian order, were required by their Constitution to speak the common tongue of the region, which also helped to redirect emphasis to their good works (Thompson, “Cultural Conundrum,” pp. 217).

⁹² Rayner, Emily. "Woman's Page." *Irish World and American Industrial Liberator*, 5 Aug. 1899, pp. 11. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

orders in the United States who had their share of newspaper coverage, although reactions to the orders varied by geographic location. The Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in New Orleans benefitted from the same French tolerance as the Canadian Gray Nuns, and their newspaper coverage reflects this. The daycare run by the Sisters for poor working women to have their children watched and educated was effusively praised by the people of the city. Moreover, it was entirely free to attend, and the Sisters paid for everything through their own industry and the generosity of a few benefactors, without the usual fairs, festivals, and other fundraisers other ethnic Sisterhoods frequently turned to in order to support themselves.⁹³

The Sisters of St. Joseph, on the other hand, settled in Philadelphia and were viewed with both gratitude and mild suspicion by the population. When the Orphan Asylum burned down, the existence of the institution was considered good, but the ability of the Sisters to care for the children was called into doubt. Preempting the safety issues which aggravated the death toll of the Titanic, while the Asylum had four-hose fire hydrant in the yard there were no uses with which to use it, and the gate to the building, a controversial feature in U.S. convents to begin with, had to be broken down by the neighbors during the fire. Adding scandal to the tragedy, the Sisters refused to speak with the press and had only reported one child to be definitively missing after the disorderly evacuation which scattered children throughout the city, although thirteen bodies were found in the ruins the next day when excavation began.⁹⁴ The Visitation Sisters at Mount de Sales in Maryland were also viewed as strange for their use of grating to visibly separate themselves from the world in the French style, although the induction of a young

⁹³ "A New Year Styles." *Daily Picayune*, 5 Jan. 1898, pp. 3. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

⁹⁴ "The Orphan Asylum Fire," *North American*, December 20, 1884, pp. 1. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

woman novice into the order also chose to focus on the educating work of the Sisters, rather than their ethnicity prior to joining the organization.⁹⁵

The Italians, by contrast, are frequently viewed as the recipients of nuns' charity rather than as nuns themselves, as can be seen in articles on the Sisters of Charity and Mercy. For this reason, the Very Reverend Mother Francesca Saverio Cabrini of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in New Orleans was viewed with fascination and exceptionalism. Unlike the other Mother Superiors mentioned in the newspapers and referenced throughout this paper, because of her country of origin Mother Cabrini was positioned as having a warm personal friendship with the Pope and special influence over American nuns of all ethnicities because of it.⁹⁶ This same 'Italian Connection' and its implied higher authority also applied to priests and other men of the cloth, as seen in the half-page spread devoted to the apostolic delegate to America Mgr. Sebastian Martinelli and his visits to various American schools and convents.⁹⁷

The 'German' nuns, a tricky distinction in and of itself do to Germany's comparatively late unification in 1871, faced similar problems for their own staunchly linguistic/ethnic convents, although some religious orders were more flexible than others in their language requirements. For almost the entirety of this study's period, the majority of German convents required the learning of German for all American-born recruits. The Bavarian Franciscans, for instance, only began optional retreats in English in 1912 and moved to say prayers in English and German on alternative weeks in 1914, while other groups persisted in using German in

⁹⁵ "Special to the Bulletin: Taking the Nun's Veil," San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, July 24, 1882, *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

⁹⁶ "Salesian Sisters Greet Their Chief," *Daily Picayune*, April 16, 1899, pp. 9. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

⁹⁷ "Mgr. Martinelli's First Visit Here." *Daily Picayune*, 26 Feb. 1897, p. 6. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

gradually reduced contexts through to the 1930s.⁹⁸ Despite the foreignness of the Bavarian Franciscans' language use, however, the emphasis in the newspapers remains as it has for the other ethnic convents in America on the good works of the Sisters. In Milwaukee, this referred to their sick visits and the building of a new hospital in 1883.⁹⁹ A St. Louis subset of the Bavarian Franciscan Sisters known as the Sisters of St. Mary, by contrast, were referred to as "German Nuns" when a few young American-born women joined in 1887, so evidently some locales were more tolerant of language differences than others, as the French sisterhoods also experienced.¹⁰⁰ The Bavarian King Ludwig the First, also fiscally supported American missions, usually with explicit stipulations that the benefitting convent speak only German and admit only German women, further enforcing outside ethnic considerations onto the women religious.¹⁰¹ Both the German-originating Sisters of the Holy Cross and School Sisters of Notre Dame, while keeping their official records in German, had the Sisters learn to speak English within a few years arrival in America, and actively worked to recruit women of other ethnicities and those with English as a first language.¹⁰² The Sisters of Notre Dame, in part because of their intentional efforts to cultivate a multi-national community, also had some of the largest incoming classes of novices and nuns among any of the orders studied in this paper, although focus remained on the ceremony and women's work, rather than ethnic origins.¹⁰³

Ethnic divisions among migrant groups might then be an imposition on women religious forced upon them by male clergy whose own access to power, which women were excluded

⁹⁸ Thompson, "Cultural Conundrum," pp. 218.

⁹⁹ "Local Events." *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, July 9, 1883, pp. 5. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

¹⁰⁰ "German Nuns," *St. Louis Post - Dispatch (1879-1922)*, Nov 27, 1887, pp. 4.

¹⁰¹ Colman James Barry, *The Catholic Church and German Americans*, The Bruce Publishing Company, (Milwaukee: 1953) pp. 11.

¹⁰² Thompson, "Cultural Conundrum," pp. 217, 219.

¹⁰³ "Local Events." *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 20 Aug. 1883, pp. 5. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

from, was based on nationalistic identities. Racism among women religious however, appeared and mattered among women religious in ways similar to male migrant ethnic divides because it created hierarchical power relations among the women the same way identifying as Irish was an advantage to American-operating priests and bishops. Many women religious order would accept immigrant novices, yet would refuse to accept African American, Haitian, or other visibly black women. Women who could 'pass' as white might be accepted in main-stream religious orders, but only so long as no one knew of their heritage.¹⁰⁴ The French-originating Sisters of the Sacred Heart, for instance, accepted Indian and other 'lesser' women into their frontier convents, but would refuse them in East-coast cities.¹⁰⁵ One Indian woman named in religion Mother Mary Catherine managed to become the Prioress-General of a Sacred Heart convent in North Dakota, which exclusively recruited Indian women.¹⁰⁶ Because of the frequent dismissal of young women on account of their race from most major convents, many chose to form and later join separate convents explicitly for black women, although many of the initial convents did not survive beyond the lives of their founding members.

The first group for black women in the United States was an auxiliary branch of Sisters of Loretto in Kentucky in 1824, which attracted three young women before the Belgium priest who was their sole institutional support passed away very shortly after.¹⁰⁷ Other orders met similar fates as their initial support network was reassigned to different parishes or passed away.¹⁰⁸ The Oblate Sisters of Providence were one of the few successful black convents, founded by a

¹⁰⁴ Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, pp. 109-110.

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, "Sisterhood and Power," pp. 4-5.

¹⁰⁶ "Saintly Death of an Indian Nun." *Irish World and American Industrial Liberator*, May 27, 1893, pp. 5. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

¹⁰⁷ Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, pp. 98.

¹⁰⁸ Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, pp.

number of Haitian immigrants with the support of a French priest,¹⁰⁹ after which they were championed by a Bavarian priest.¹¹⁰ One of the founding Oblate Sisters, Sister Theresa, was later accused of insubordination and shuttled between convents until her death in 1892,¹¹¹ doing this time of personal insecurity she also helped establish Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Pennsylvania, an order which first took pains to erase her race, and then her life at all, from the history of the order as they became exclusively white.¹¹² The white-washing of black women religious occurred at various times both as a personal choice of the women, and as an institutional rejection of their race. Among one of the women to personally denied or hid her African American ancestry was Martha Healy, who self-identified as Irish.¹¹³

Despite these firm distinctions between women of various ethnicities being highlighted in the newspapers of the day there are occasional glimpses into the lives and opinions of the women themselves, and these frequently differ from the statements made by male newspaper writers and clergy. The multi-cultural aspects of convents were still couched in terms of dismissiveness by male authors, although articles about women religious in the women's pages of papers, which were written by sympathetic female authors, avoid the issue by never explicitly identifying nuns with specific ethnicities beyond the readers' own assumptions based on the name of the order. In one article by a male author about two nuns traveling to a mission to the Pacific Island of Tahiti, now part of French Polynesia, the author adopts a mildly condescending tone to discuss the three differing ethnicities between the two nuns and their charges. Most of the women's work in the

¹⁰⁹ Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, pp. 99.

¹¹⁰ Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, pp. 103.

¹¹¹ Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, pp. 105.

¹¹² Shannen Dee Williams, "Forgotten Habits, Lost Vocations: Black Nuns, Contested Memories, and the 19th Century Struggle to Desegregate U.S. Catholic Religious Life" *The Journal of African American History* vol. 101, no. 3 (July 1, 2016: pp. 231–260), pp. 231-232.

¹¹³ Williams, "Forgotten Habits," pp. 240.

island is gently mocked, such as using artificial flowers to decorate the chapel and convent in a tropical paradise, never mind that most of the flowers created there were sold for use in Paris and other less climatically fortunate locales.¹¹⁴ The Mother Superior returning to Tahiti always kept the children of her convent's schools in the front of her mind, although her devotion to them was the source of another quick joke for the journalist. The Mother Superior rewarded children of the "babies" class in the six schools with bonbons as rewards for their learning progress and wanted to have a treat for every child in that age group upon her return to the island.¹¹⁵ Rather than frame the narrative in that way however, the male journalist chose to present her as claiming that she would like a great deal of cheap bonbons in response to his 'question' of if all her needs had been met for the return journey, before presenting her elaboration as to the why.¹¹⁶ The 'silly women' theme in the article is begun, however, with the fact that the Mother Superior is an older French woman, and the other nun a young Irish 'girl'.¹¹⁷ According to the article's author, the Mother Superior spoke only French, and the Irish woman spoke only English despite her years of training at a Parisian convent, leaving the two travelling companions unable to speak to each other, although the idea that the younger spoke no French despite living in France for years and being on her way to a mission in a French colony where the only languages spoken were native Tahitian and French is a far-fetched if a convenient ploy to subtly denounce multi-ethnic convents.¹¹⁸

The articles on nuns in the women's pages, by contrast, treated all their work with seriousness, respect, and admiration, without explicitly defining the women by their ethnicities.

¹¹⁴ "Missionary Life in Tahiti" *Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier*, Jan. 5, 1898. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

¹¹⁵ "Missionary Life in Tahiti."

¹¹⁶ "Missionary Life in Tahiti."

¹¹⁷ "Missionary Life in Tahiti."

¹¹⁸ "Missionary Life in Tahiti."

The French-Canadian Gray Nuns, for instance, were known as French-Canadian by virtue of their physical location in Quebec and chosen names in religion, not because it could or was proven in the article that the women were ethnically French-Canadian.¹¹⁹ Instead of repeated reminders of the nun's identities throughout the article as is the case in most male-authored articles, which often explain the international origins of a religious order, this article's near full-page spread was broken down into the various good works the nuns ran on their property, its benefits to the local community, how it is funded, and a brief history of the local convent.¹²⁰

More demonstrative of this were two articles on a "Sister Irene," creator of the Foundling Asylum in NYC. In an article in the general paper, Sister Irene is praised as a good mother-figure despite her vows, and the article enjoys listing off some of the requests prospective families made about the children's attributes, such as for a "smart, stout, saucy boy of 6, Irish parents."¹²¹ Rather than reject this reaffirmation of ethnic division among foundling babies of uncertain heritage, the author boasts "Good Sister Irene never fails to fill their orders, as she has all kinds of babies in assorted sizes."¹²² While the children's ethnicity may be uncertain, it remains important for this author to clarify that the Sisters can confirm a child's ethnic heritage to prospective parents and foster families. In an article about the Sister's death a few years later which was printed in the women's pages however, no mention of her ethnicity, the ethnicity of her sisters in religion, the ethnicity of the children under the care of the Foundling Asylum, or the ethnicity of the other mourners was made.¹²³ Instead, only the good works performed at the

¹¹⁹ Emily Rayner, "Woman's Page: A Unique Institution" *Irish World and American Industrial Liberator*, 5 Aug. 1899, p. 11. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

¹²⁰ "Woman's Page: A Unique Institution."

¹²¹ "Sister Irene's Big Family." *Portland Oregonian* [Oregon Territory], 1 Mar. 1890, p. 10. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

¹²² "Sister Irene's Big Family."

¹²³ Emily Rayner, "Woman's Page: Sister Irene" *Irish World and American Industrial Liberator*, 22 Aug. 1896, p. 6. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

Asylum and the details of the funeral service were remarked upon, including the fact that the Foundling Asylum took in its 23,000 child, mentioned without any insinuations of ethnicity, shortly before her passing.¹²⁴

Unfortunately, the attempts at minimizing ethnicity made by both the nuns themselves and the female press were not picked up by the majority of other newspapers, who delighted in highlighting nuns' foreign births or descent from immigrants. These two trends were particularly popular for use and reference to Irish nuns, although they occurred in newspaper coverage about women of other ethnicities as well. Additionally, some orders had an Irish-ethnic reputation because of either the religious orders country of origin or due to the simple predominance of women of that ethnicity within a convent.

¹²⁴ "Woman's Page: Sister Irene."

Chapter Two: Recognizing the Irish

While Irish immigrants and Irish American women religious could be found in nearly every religious order in the United States, there were four religious orders they could most frequently be found in which received press coverage. Three of these religious orders were founded by Irish-born women, while the fourth was originally French and founded in America by a second or third-generation American of French and English descent.¹²⁵ In newspapers of the time, the French order the Sisters of Charity received the most press coverage, which primarily focused on their work as nurses and educators. The Sisters of Charity in America also had the largest number of Irish and Irish-American women involved in their good-works, although not the largest percentage.¹²⁶ The Irish order the Sisters of Mercy, sometimes referred to as the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, received the second most frequent mentions in newspapers of the day and had the second largest number of Irish/Irish-American women in their order, who amounted to the largest percentage overall.¹²⁷ Newspapers of the time also recognized the differences in population size among the various orders, which could potentially influence the identification of an order with a certain ethnicity even without a large number of any particular ethnicity.¹²⁸ The Sisters of Mercy's portrayal in newspapers took a more anti-Catholic stance than those of the Sisters of Charity, with stories similar to that of *Maria Monk*, although their charitable work also made the papers quite frequently. A third Irish-founded religious order, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, are mentioned exclusively in the context of

¹²⁵ Tannenbaum, "Bayley, Richard (1745-1801), physician and surgeon" *American National Biography*. AND Spalding, "Seton, Elizabeth Ann Bayley (1774-1821), founder of the American Sisters of Charity and Roman Catholic saint" *American National Biography*.

¹²⁶ Barbra Misner, *Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies*, pp. 123 and 124, listed under the heading "Emmitsburg" for the east coast branch, and "Nazareth" for the semi-autonomous Kentucky branch.

¹²⁷ Misner, pp. 124 under the abbreviated heading "OLM," AND: George Stewart, pp.

¹²⁸ "A Prodigious Work. The Nuns of the Nation. Their Way and Work. A Remarkable Exhibit." *Indianapolis Sentinel* (Indianapolis, Indiana) XXII, no. 185, June 16, 1874: pp. 7. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

education, and most commonly in school advertisements, rather than in full-length articles.¹²⁹ Meanwhile, the Irish order the Sisters of Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (henceforth referred to as the Sisters of Presentation) received attention in few newspaper articles at all, and shortly after its organization in the United States, became quickly multi-ethnic albeit comparatively quite small.¹³⁰ All newspapers used in this study were produced in America unless otherwise noted.

The Sisters of Charity are arguably both the most and the least ‘Irish’ of the religious orders which make up the focus of this chapter. The religious order itself originated in France and was brought to America by a woman of English and French descent.¹³¹ Yet in the origins of the women who joined the order, and in the perceptions of the newspaper writers of the time, the Sisters of Charity were considered to be socially and/or culturally ‘Irish.’ In addition to the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph, as the American-founded Emmitsburg, Pennsylvania branch of the order was known, the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who were initially an independent Philadelphian community that later merged with the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph under one set of rules, was formed by a group of five Irish women who emigrated to America at the urging of Father Patrick Costello.¹³² The Sisters of Charity in all its branches relied on Irish-born women and the children of Irish immigrants to populate its ranks.¹³³ The Irish and American character of the Sisters as founded by Seton also meant that some prohibitions followed by the French order on which she based the community were not only impractical but could spell doom for a community in America, hence the removal of a prohibition against

¹²⁹ Thompson, *Service as Sacrament*, pp. 34.

¹³⁰ Stewart, George. *Marvels of Charity*, pp. 157.

¹³¹ Spalding, “Seton, Elizabeth Ann Bayley.”

¹³² McGuinness, pp. 47-48.

¹³³ Fitzgerald, pp. 21.

working with the elite and the insertion into their constitution a calculated ongoing income from a tuition school, although when finances made running both a free school and tuition school impossible, it was the tuition school which was closed.¹³⁴ Irish-on-Irish contentions as highlighted in the so called “school-wars” between Irish-born Archbishop Hughes and the Irish/Irish-American Sisters of Charity in New York City, also fed into the perception of the order as predominantly Irish although far less positively than most other views of the Sister’s work, although newspaper coverage of the dispute was slight thanks to the Sister’s hesitance to involve the public.¹³⁵ Partly confusing the ethnic profile of the Sisters of Charity was the fact that the most prestigious academy schools were taught, although by Irish women in the French school model,¹³⁶ however, the “decorative arts” taught remained based in ethnic ‘specialties’.¹³⁷ Later in the schools, when Italian immigrants began to arrive in larger numbers, Irish-dominated institutions run by the Sisters of Charity were both themselves viewed as Americanized, and viewed as “Americanizing” Italian children.¹³⁸ These same patterns of perception of the Sisters of Charity are also visible in the newspapers of the times.

Multiple newspapers of the time point to the Irish character of the Sisters of Charity, some more explicitly than others. *The Catholic Telegraph*, in 1901 makes this first explicit mention of the national/ethnic origins of new novices who emigrated with the sole intention of joining the Sisters of Charity. The twelve girls mentioned came exclusively “from Ireland and Germany.”¹³⁹ In the *Irish Standard*, a notice on the front page recognizes these same two

¹³⁴ Fitzgerald, pp. 37.

¹³⁵ Fitzgerald, pp. 46-50.

¹³⁶ Ewens, pp. 263.

¹³⁷ Mattingly, pp. 147, 149.

¹³⁸ Fitzgerald, pp. 160

¹³⁹ “Novices from Afar.” *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 70, Number 39, 26 September 1901. *The Catholic News Archive*.

countries as the primary pool which the religious order drew recruits from, with forty-one Irish and nineteen Germans emigrating in order to join the Sisters of Charity in the United States in 1911.¹⁴⁰ The Irish girls joined the convent after being educated in convent schools in Ireland, while the German girls' backgrounds were unlisted.¹⁴¹ Of the nearly sixteen million immigrants to pass through Ellis Island from 1890 to 1917, one might reasonably expect a similar pattern in numbers between the Irish and Germans, however this was not the case. Germany sent nearly one million immigrants in those years, while Ireland sent around 860,000 immigrants.¹⁴² The difference amongst numbers of women religious, then cannot be written off as a side effect of larger patterns of migration, as Stewart also points out.¹⁴³

Many prominent members of the Sisters of Charity were either explicitly recognized as Irish or bore Irish names prior to their induction, although an emphasis on this fact is typically limited to articles printed in the *Irish Standard*, with limited references made in other papers. A noteworthy example of the identification of the Sisters of Charity with the Irish by a non-Irish newspaper can be seen in the *New York Times* obituary for Mother Euphemia, Mother Superior of the Sisters of Charity in the United States and Superior of Mount St. Joseph's Academy.¹⁴⁴ Mother Euphemia was born in Dublin, Ireland as Catherine Blenkinsoff in 1816, before emigrating "as a girl" to America, where she quickly earned a name for herself due to her impressive work in education.¹⁴⁵ Another woman firmly identified with both the Sisters of Charity and the Irish in the *New York Times* was Mother Mary Agatha, Mother Superior of the

¹⁴⁰ "Irish Girls Enter Convents of the Incarnate Word Order." *The Irish standard*. (Minneapolis, Minn.), 02 Dec. 1911. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Pp. 1.

¹⁴¹ "Irish Girls Enter Convents of the Incarnate Word Order."

¹⁴² Stewart, pp. 271.

¹⁴³ Stewart, pp. 271.

¹⁴⁴ "Mother Euphemia Dead: Head Of The Sisters Of Charity Of The United States." 1887. *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Mar 19, pp. 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁴⁵ "Mother Euphemia Dead: Head Of The Sisters Of Charity Of The United States."

St. Aloysius convent.¹⁴⁶ Born Eleanor Hurley in Cloyne, County Cork, Ireland in 1826, Mother Mary Agatha emigrated with her parents in 1835, was recognized in the papers for celebrating her golden jubilee after 50 years in service as a Sister of Charity.¹⁴⁷ Much like Mother Euphemia, Mother Mary Agatha focused her service in education, and at her jubilee was also honored with a cablegram from Pope Leo expressing congratulations and a benediction.¹⁴⁸ A third Irish woman was Sister Isidore, formerly Ellen Treacy.¹⁴⁹

Many women who rose to prominent positions in the Sisters of Charity outside of New York were also Irish or had Irish family names, although papers with a smaller readership did not always elaborate on their backgrounds beyond a sentence or two. In the *Catholic Telegraph*, Sister Mary Paul Hayes, was born in Cashel, county Tipperary, Ireland before emigrating with her mother and brothers at the death of her father when she was 20 years old.¹⁵⁰ Mother Amadeus, Mother General of the Cleveland Diocese was another of these Irish-named women, as she was born Katherine O'Neill.¹⁵¹ Another potential woman of Irish descent in the Sisters of Charity was Sister Martha Seton, her own name prior to joining the order unmentioned but “a daughter of the late Ezra Dadisman,”¹⁵² as was Sister Octavia, formerly of the surname McKenna,¹⁵³ and Sister Francis McEnnis, a pioneering Sister in California.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁶ “Her Golden Jubilee: Mother Mary Agatha, Superior of St. Aloysius', Celebrates.” 1894. *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922), Dec 14, pp. 9. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁴⁷ “Her Golden Jubilee.”

¹⁴⁸ “Her Golden Jubilee.”

¹⁴⁹ “Death of Clergymen and Religious.” *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 65, Number 14, 2 April 1896. *The Catholic News Archive*.

¹⁵⁰ “Death of Sister Superior Mary Paul Hayes, of the Sisters of Charity.” *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 60, Number 16, 16 April 1891. *The Catholic News Archive*.

¹⁵¹ “Mother General” *The Catholic Telegraph*. Vol. 70, no. 24, June 13, 1901. *The Catholic News Archive*.

¹⁵² “Sister Mary Seton” *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 58, Number 46, 17 October 1889. *The Catholic News Archive*.

¹⁵³ “Annals of 1893.” *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 63, Number 2, 11 January 1894. *The Catholic News Archive*.

¹⁵⁴ “Mother Seton’s Daughters” *The Monitor*, Volume 51, Number 13, 21 August 1909. *The Catholic News Archive*.

While not a Sister of Charity herself, another woman of Irish lineage who through her good works came to be associated with the Sisters was Mrs. Thomas Fortune Ryan, born Ida Barry.¹⁵⁵ While Mr. Ryan was amassing his fortune, Mrs. Ryan was giving it away to women's religious orders, including two sizable donations to the French orders of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart and Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, and the construction of two hospitals for the Sisters of Charity, in addition to construction of numerous other hospitals and charitable institutions.¹⁵⁶ Mrs. Ryan spent an estimated one million dollars a year in building hospitals and churches, in addition to the time she spent knitting children's clothing, which she would then proceed to give away to "many a humble hard working woman."¹⁵⁷

Irish American newspapers also acknowledge the difficulty of tracing the origins of nuns in America as being limited to family names. In the *Irish Standard*, an article on the "Nun of the Battlefield", recognizes the origins of the women in the four religious orders who served as nurses in the Civil War, the orders being the Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of Nazareth, and the Sisters of the Holy Cross.¹⁵⁸ Both the Sisters of Charity and the Sister of Mercy were firmly identified as Irish before the women's family names were involved, and both of these religious orders made up the majority of women who served in the war.¹⁵⁹ The *Irish Standard* credits most of the war-time nurses as Irish, claiming:

In response to direct and personal communication with the heads of the several orders, there has been received an official list of the sisters who

¹⁵⁵ Ann T. Keene, "Ryan, Thomas Fortune (1851-1928), financier." *American National Biography*. 1 Feb. 2000.

¹⁵⁶ "A Generous Woman." *The Irish standard*. (Minneapolis, Minn.), 07 Sept. 1907. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Pp. 1.

¹⁵⁷ "A Generous Woman."

¹⁵⁸ "Monument to 'Nun of the Battlefield.'" *The Irish standard*. (Minneapolis, Minn.), 24 July 1915. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Pp. 1 and 4.

¹⁵⁹ "Monument to 'Nun of the Battlefield,'" pp. 1, and "Honoured Her Calling." *The Irish standard*. (Minneapolis, Minn.), 20 May 1905. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Pp. 1.

did service during the war, such list containing family names and names in religion. Distinctively Irish are the majority of those family names, borne by distinguished men and women of the “Isle of Saints.” While the sons of Ireland did dauntless duty under the flag, Ireland’s daughters, unafraid, undismayed by the terrors that met them at every turn, shared that duty by unflinching service for the wounded, the dying and the dead that strewed the gory fields.¹⁶⁰

Of those names given for the nurses, this trend holds true, although how intentionally selective this nationalistic/ethnocentric narrative may be is unclear considering that any newspaper with a nationality/ethnicity in the title is evidently proud to be identified with that group.

Interestingly enough, it is also in the *Irish Standard* that earlier that same month a similar, much shorter article was published in recognition of the Sisters of Charity’s service in the Civil War. This short vignette features an unknown veteran treating a Sister of Charity to an expensive meal through a middle-man of a “colored waiter”, as a form of thanks for the service she and her fellow sisters provided in the war.¹⁶¹ It is made particularly clear in one article “An Irish Nun Beatified”, that the *Irish Standard* places an undue emphasis on the Irish character of the nuns, even when the numbers do not support such a focus.¹⁶² In 1871, ten Sisters of Charity were massacred in China, and on the 29th anniversary of their deaths, these women were beatified by the Church.¹⁶³ Only one of the ten nuns was Irish, yet the entire article focuses on her life, service, and death, to the near exclusion of the other nine women who met their ends that day and were also beatified for it.¹⁶⁴ The *Irish Standard* also acknowledges the Sisters of Charity’s work in promoting useful industry for the young women of Ireland, including the

¹⁶⁰ “Monument to ‘Nun of the Battlefield.’” Pp. 1.

¹⁶¹ “Honored Her Calling.”

¹⁶² “An Irish Nun Beatified.” *The Irish standard*. (Minneapolis, Minn.), 07 July 1900. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Pp. 1.

¹⁶³ “An Irish Nun Beatified.”

¹⁶⁴ “An Irish Nun Beatified.”

renowned Irish lace.¹⁶⁵ These Sister's schools and their products are likely the same items which the *Godey's Ladies Book* praises for their fine quality and tasteful designs.¹⁶⁶

There are, however, also newspaper articles which down-play or ignore the Irish character of the Sisters of Charity, and at least one instance within those articles found for this study related to anti-Catholic sentiment in America. In numerous articles, the Sisters of Charity are included only among a list of other attendees to important events.¹⁶⁷ The Sisters of Charity were praised as "ministering angels" for running orphanages.¹⁶⁸ This particular praise of the Sisters, which features as part of a long speech about what the good Catholics in America have accomplished, may represent an intentional attempt to separate the Sisters from a single ethnic/social identity and to better "Americanize" their services. As seen in other articles, connecting religious orders to the Civil War through their hospitals and nursing frequently also connects these women to the Irish brigades which fought in the war, although exceptions are possible. While wars in general help to erase conflicting identities outside of those which underpin the overall struggle, the Civil War, being what it was, could not provide a complete "Americanization" to nuns' ethnic identities because the war itself was about the fate and continuing character of America itself. One of the exceptions to the connection between the Civil War, nuns, and the Irish, can be made by stressing the French origins of the order and the fact that the nuns cared for all victims without reservation, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or

¹⁶⁵ "Work of Nuns." *The Irish standard*. (Minneapolis, Minn. ;), 21 July 1894. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Pp. 1.

¹⁶⁶ Kathrine Armstrong, "Work Table: Hints on Linen Marking" in *Godey's Lady's Book*. February 1888. *Accessible Archives*.

¹⁶⁷ For just one example of this phenomenon, see: "Honors for Mgr. Preston: Many Priests and Laymen Attend Services in His Church." 1890. *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Nov 18, pp. 8. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁶⁸ "Catholic Church Highly Praised." *The Irish standard*. (Minneapolis, Minn.), 20 Feb. 1909. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Pp. 1.

side in the war.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, in numerous articles, the Sisters of Charity are included only among a list of other attendees to important events.¹⁷⁰ The anti-Catholic sentiment faced by the Sisters of Charity was also comparatively minor in the years following the Civil War next to the treatment of the Sisters of Mercy, and this may in part be due to the dual French-American origins of the order, since it originated in France, but was begun in America by an American women instead of being imported by immigrants as the other order was. One example of this lack-luster disappointment in the order is seen in: “if the daughter said ‘I intend to join the Sisters of Charity’ . . . I’m afraid there wouldn’t be so much rejoicing.”¹⁷¹ Prior to the war however, the Sisters of Charity were simply another order of Irish catholic nuns in the eyes of their detractors, and in 1844 a convent of the Sisters of Charity was burned to the ground by mob in Philadelphia.¹⁷²

The Sisters of Mercy have a similarly “Irish” reputation among newspapers of the period, a fact which is only enhanced with the origin of the order in Ireland itself.¹⁷³ The Sisters of Mercy were less strictly hierarchical than the Sisters of Charity and Sisters of Presentation, a situation which both helped and hindered their uniform characterization in the papers.¹⁷⁴ The diversity means that what features appear repeatedly in various localities can be considered truly universal among the Sisters, unlike the potentially artificial standardization of the Sisters of

¹⁶⁹ For just one example of this tactic, see: “The Sisters of Charity” in *Frank Leslie’s Weekly*. December 16, 1865. *Accessible Archives*.

¹⁷⁰ For just one example of this phenomenon, see: “Honors for Mgr. Preston: Many Priests and Laymen Attend Services in His Church.” 1890. *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Nov 18, pp. 8. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁷¹ “A View of Convent Life.” *The Monitor*, Volume 27, Number 34, 28 May 1884. *The Catholic News Archive*.

¹⁷² Yacovazzi, pp. 76-77.

¹⁷³ Stewart, pp. 157-158. AND: “A Prodigious Work. The Nuns of the Nation. Their Way and Work. A Remarkable Exhibit.” *Indianapolis Sentinel* (Indianapolis, Indiana) XXII, no. 185, June 16, 1874: pp. 7. *Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁷⁴ Magray, pp. 48.

Charity. This separation did at times allow greater resistance to male attempts at controlling these independent women's orders, since each convent represented a new struggle over authority.¹⁷⁵ Although this separation also makes any "top-down" decisions and generalizations about their organization somewhat suspect.¹⁷⁶ In the context of Civil War nursing, Archbishop Hughes objected to the Sisters of Mercy joining the war effort because of their regional independence compared to the Sisters of Charity.¹⁷⁷ The Sisters of Mercy also intensely focused their work on caring for young single women of "good character," under the belief that these aid-beneficiaries would then share that support beyond themselves to their families, and when family obligations were complete, give back to the church itself.¹⁷⁸ The Mercy Sisters also expanded into orphanages and similar institutions for children, particularly in the wake of the 1875 Children's Law which required each child be housed in an institution run by members of the child's religion to prevent evangelizing and coerced conversions.¹⁷⁹ Educational imbalances grew between Protestant and Catholic women in the 1890s as Protestant women's colleges grew in size and respectability, however, which helped add to the increasing conflation of stereotypes between nuns and the Irish in general as uneducated,¹⁸⁰ even as sisterhoods were being increasingly dominated numerically by Irish and Irish-American women.¹⁸¹ The Sisters of Mercy were also relegated to lower-class good works and roles in education when under bishop and diocesan control if other convents were available to educate the upper-classes,¹⁸² and took to supporting their good works by doing laundry and other services also characterized as immigrant

¹⁷⁵ Ewens, pp. 286.

¹⁷⁶ Magray, pp. 121-126.

¹⁷⁷ Ewens, pp. 225.

¹⁷⁸ Fitzgerald, pp. 54.

¹⁷⁹ Fitzgerald, pp. 132.

¹⁸⁰ Ewens, pp. 263.

¹⁸¹ Fitzgerald, pp. 199.

¹⁸² Mattingly, pp. 151-152.

or poor people's work.¹⁸³ The good works done by the Sisters of Mercy include prison visits, finding domestic servant jobs for young women, and physical aid distributed in the form of clothes, food, and money.¹⁸⁴ While the Sisters of Mercy and most other Irish convents drew recruits primarily from the lower-classes after their initial founding years (which always relied on wealthy benefactors and new nuns' dowries), the 'escaped nun' dramas like *Maria Monk*, always positioned the 'escaped' women as upper or middle-class,¹⁸⁵ and those who committed the 'atrocities' as Irish priests.¹⁸⁶ It was especially the Irish domestic servants who owed their employment to a convent such as the Sisters of Mercy, that in anti-Catholic literature 'lured' young women to become nuns themselves,¹⁸⁷ a story taken in a very different tone in the Catholic newspapers.¹⁸⁸ Both in and outside of Catholic life, then, the lower-class Irish identity was considered a hallmark of the Sisters of Mercy.

Much like the Sisters of Charity, one of the more obvious connections to the women's Irishness was their place of birth or birthname as shown in their obituaries or other articles. One example of this is Sister Mary Bernard O'Dwyer, who was born in County Tipperary, Ireland and emigrated to America as a young woman.¹⁸⁹ Miss Mary Lynch also joined the Sisters of Mercy as an Irish immigrant to the United States from County Cavan, Ireland,¹⁹⁰ as did Sister Mary Francis formerly of Dublin, who was in charge of the Women's Asylum in San Francisco

¹⁸³ Ewens, pp. 217, 275.

¹⁸⁴ "Fair for the Sisters of Mercy at Palace Garden." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, May 09, 1865, pp. 5. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁸⁵ Frink, pp. 247-248.

¹⁸⁶ Frink, pp. 238.

¹⁸⁷ Frink, pp. 253.

¹⁸⁸ "A Nun's Strange History." *The Monitor*, Volume 62, Number 46, 16 March 1907, pp. 2. *The Catholic News Archive*.

¹⁸⁹ "Religious Intelligence." *San Francisco Bulletin (San Francisco, California)* XXVII, no. 132, March 13, 1869: pp. 3. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁹⁰ "Local Affairs." *Columbian Register (New Haven, Connecticut)* LXIV, no. 3301, February 26, 1876: pp. 3. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

run by the Sisters.¹⁹¹ In the article on the Women's Asylum, the author made it a point to write quotes from the patients in dialect form so that it would be obvious even to a casual reader that most of the women within the care of the Sisters were Irish.¹⁹² Beyond that, at one night's entertainment the patients danced Irish jigs, it was reported that only three of the patients in the home were not Irish, two French and one American.¹⁹³ Mother Elizabeth, formerly Mary E. Calanan, was also an Irish-born leader among the Sisters of Mercy.¹⁹⁴ Mother Agatha of the Dubuque, Iowa convent,¹⁹⁵ was another, as was a young unnamed woman in Massachusetts, formerly of Ireland, who seemed to be followed by religious phenomena typically seen with saints prior to her early death.¹⁹⁶ Another young woman in Massachusetts, Miss Margaret Moran, was not Irish-born, but did have an Irish surname, and also joined the Sisters of Mercy.¹⁹⁷ When four young women joined the convent in Chicago, all four were born in America with Irish surnames.¹⁹⁸ A few years later, when thirteen more young women joined, a number also were also of Irish descent based on their last names, while one woman among their number was born in Ireland.¹⁹⁹ When inducting new members into various ranks of the sisterhood, even the priests' surnames were also predominantly Irish as well.²⁰⁰

¹⁹¹ "Helpless Woman's Asylum the Home for Aged and Infirm Females and Its Inmates." *San Francisco Bulletin* (San Francisco, California) XLVII, no. 84, January 4, 1879: pp. 4. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁹² "Helpless Woman's Asylum the Home for Aged and Infirm Females and Its Inmates."

¹⁹³ "Helpless Woman's Asylum the Home for Aged and Infirm Females and Its Inmates."

¹⁹⁴ "End of A Noble Life" *Irish World* (New York, New York), December 13, 1890: pp. 5. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁹⁵ "Death of Clergymen and Religious." *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 63, Number 14, 5 April 1894. *The Catholic News Archive*.

¹⁹⁶ "Singular Case: Interesting Physical Phenomena." 1871. *Chicago Tribune (1860-1872)*, Jul 24, pp. 1.

¹⁹⁷ "County News. North Brookfield." *National Aegis* (Worcester, Massachusetts) 73, no. 2, January 10, 1874: pp. 6. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁹⁸ "Taking The White Veil: Four Young Women Renounce The World For The Church." 1886. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, Sep 25, pp. 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁹⁹ "Thirteen Young Women Give Up Homes to be Enrolled in Sisters of Mercy." 1904. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, Apr 05, pp. 5. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰⁰ "Made Sisters of Mercy." 1893. *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Jan 24, pp. 2. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

The Sisters of Mercy also retained an Irish flavor in their newspaper coverage outside of articles on individual women, including a few direct statements to that effect in addition to a number of looser allusions. The description of the order in a summary of nuns in America places it as Irish explicitly.²⁰¹ When praising the work of Florence Nightingale, it was claimed that the Sisters of Mercy from Ireland were some of Miss Nightingale's best assistants.²⁰² When the Portland convent was raising funds for a new "home for the aged," the fair they held was Irish-themed.²⁰³ Irish women could find comfort and support in their old age from the Sisters of Mercy, including a woman who emigrated during her nineties.²⁰⁴ Even opinion articles on proposed laws made the connection between the Irish and the Sisters of Mercy, as was the case in 1865. There was a proposed law to mandate congressional oversight for prisons and other federal facilities which had a clause which would have included the educational institutions like those run by Sisters in the same category, and commentators claimed such an invasion of privacy "if introduced. . . during the first or second year of the war, when the Irish Catholic recruiting fever was raging, the clause . . . would have been instantly stricken out."²⁰⁵

When circulating a petition for reimbursement from damages to their property done in the Civil War, on account of the nursing services the order provided, a number of the signatories were "numerous prominent officers of the Irish brigade."²⁰⁶ An article about the Democratic National Convention in 1866, worries about voters going Republican, and strikes hard at the

²⁰¹ "A Prodigious Work. The Nuns of the Nation. Their Way and Work. A Remarkable Exhibit."

²⁰² "Florence Nightingale." *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 71, Number 23, 5 June 1902. *The Catholic News Archive*.

²⁰³ "Irish Fair Will Be Held." *Portland Oregonian* [Oregon Territory], 20 Nov. 1898, p. 24. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

²⁰⁴ "A Centenarian." *San Francisco Bulletin* (San Francisco, California) XLI, no. 31, November 12, 1875: pp. 3. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰⁵ "The Anti-Catholic Movement Begun." *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio) XXX, no. 102, February 27, 1865: pp. 1. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰⁶ "Telegraphic. Latest News By Cable: Sisters of Mercy." *Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), February 6, 1869: 1. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

“Irish-bloc” with an appeal to: “Remember, Irishmen, that the party that now invites you to enlist under its banner is the same that burned your churches and convents, insulted your religion and outraged your Sisters of Mercy in Charleston, Massachusetts.”²⁰⁷ This same ethnic-political connection also causes the Sisters of Mercy some aggravation in New York.²⁰⁸ State and local governments had made land leases to the Sisters of Mercy at extremely low rates for the running of their good works, which an anti-Catholic article blames on the political power of the Irish.²⁰⁹ In another article, a reporter attempts to understand the state of religion in Chicago and takes time to point out that the local Catholic priest is an “Irish gentleman” and the school is run by the Sisters of Mercy.²¹⁰ Another of these looser social connotations which connect the Sisters of Mercy to the Irish occur in chapel design for new construction. Many of the massive Catholic construction projects, most notably St. Patrick’s cathedral in New York City, were financed by the wages and savings of poor Irish Catholics.²¹¹ In this more detailed context, the construction of a chapel in Omaha by the Sisters of Mercy as an exact copy of interior of St. Patrick’s cathedral gives a seemingly neutral construction project a distinctly Irish sense of pride.²¹² This characterization by the Sisters of Mercy in Omaha was unusual however, since most nuns actively worked to mitigate their ethnic identification with varying strategies and degrees of success.

²⁰⁷ “Tone Of The Morning Press.” *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, New York), June 28, 1866: pp. 1. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰⁸ “Putnam’s Magazine: Our Established Church.” *New-Bedford Mercury* (New Bedford, Massachusetts) 63, no. 25, June 18, 1869: pp. 2. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰⁹ “Putnam’s Magazine: Our Established Church.” AND: “Board Of Councilmen: Grant Of Thirty-Four Lots Of Ground To The Sisters Of Mercy.” 1865. *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Dec 22, pp. 8. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²¹⁰ “Saints, Sinners and Such Religion in Chicago.” *Pomeroy's Democrat* (Chicago, Illinois) VIII, no. 6, February 5, 1876: pp. 4. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

²¹¹ Stewart, pp. 271-272.

²¹² “The Catholic World” *The Catholic Telegraph*. Vol. 60, no. 3, January 15, 1891. *The Catholic News Archive*.

The Sisters of Mercy, much like the Sisters of Charity, also tried to prove their “Americanism” and step away from an ethnic characterization, although they took a more active approach to the newspapers and their press image than the Sisters of Charity did, likely because the association with the Irish was more firmly entrenched with the Sisters of Mercy than the Sisters of Charity. One of the more pointed articles to this effect details the decision of the Sisters of Mercy in Chicago to hang the flag outside every day after a law from which religious organizations were exempt was passed to require it of public schools, because, as the Sister Principal claimed, “we try to be patriotic here.”²¹³ This concern with presenting an “American” image can also be seen in the notices put out by Catholic newspapers that the Church does not object to any form of government, or in some cases, the Church prefers a republican form of government.²¹⁴ Additionally, Irish-American author Patrick Sullivan reiterates this point both generally and historically in a longer article published by *The Women’s Tribune* in 1888.²¹⁵ Another approach was more passive, characterizing the Sisters by their building projects and good works, rather than by the women who performed them. In the Oklahoma newspaper *The Indian Advocate*, the Sisters of Mercy ran two multi-page articles in 1905²¹⁶ and 1908²¹⁷ about the history of the order in the area, where the only ethnicity mentioned in relation to the Sisters is that of the pupils at their schools – the Native American children they were educating. The Sisters also assumed at times an anti-Irish appearance, usually in contrast to the stereotype of the

²¹³ “Old Glory is Flying.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, Sep 12, 1895. pp. 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²¹⁴ “The Church and Government.” *Irish World* (New York, New York), December 13, 1890: pp. 5. *Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²¹⁵ Sullivan, Patrick. “Roman Catholicism not Antagonistic to American Institutions” in *The Women’s Tribune*. February 25, 1888. *Accessible Archives*.

²¹⁶ “The Sisters of Mercy.” *The Indian advocate*. ([Sacred Heart, Okla.]), 01 Dec. 1905. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Pp. 405-406.

²¹⁷ “Miscellaneous: Sacred Heart Abbey, Okla.” *The Indian advocate*. ([Sacred Heart, Okla.]), 01 Dec. 1908. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Pp. 407-409.

‘evil Irish’ - in one sensationalized article, a nun refuses to allow the Irish ‘detective’ Feeney to take one of her charges without the permission of the girl’s father, even when she is threatened at gunpoint.²¹⁸ Interestingly enough, Irish Catholics are frequently positioned by various religious orders as the ‘stick’ to beat back nativism and anti-Catholic sentiment in the country, while the Sisters’ charitable work is placed as the ‘carrot’ for good behavior.²¹⁹ The Sisters of Mercy also created for themselves a small connection to the French, with the publication of a book of meditations translated to English from French in 1869.²²⁰ Unfortunately, because of how well known the good works of the Sisters were, their name was also on occasion used by scammers, and earned the women some bad press.²²¹

The Sisters of Presentation appeared much less frequently in newspapers than either the Sisters of Mercy or the Sisters of Charity, and a number of these appearances are divorced from an Irish ethnicity as well, although there are also some which retain an Irish character. This is partly due to the controversy over some of the various mother superiors’ self-positioning, which resulted in strong push-back from male church leadership. The Sisters of Presentation’s convent mothers claimed prior to the mid-to-late 1800s that they were the equivalents of Christ on earth, an assertion which would place them on par with the priests who were nominally in charge of these communities of women religious.²²² By the 1890s, papal decree banned this usurpation of male control by women in various convents, although it particularly affected the women who had

²¹⁸ “Nun Holds To Polly: Mrs. Lillian Stiles Tries To Abduct Her Daughter.” 1895. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, Apr 27, pp. 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²¹⁹ A small sampling of the threats made by women religious to sic the Irish-Catholics of the area on their detractors can be seen in Morris, pp. 5; McGuinness, pp. 58-59; Yacovazzi, pp. 76-77, and pp. 133.

²²⁰ “An Anti-Sunday lawite perpetrates the following which we publish for the benefit of all concerned.” *Vincennes Gazette (Vincennes, Indiana)*, July 3, 1869. *Accessible Archives*.

²²¹ For one example of a scam run under the name of the Sisters of Mercy, see: “Lock Up ‘Sisters’ As Bogus: Police Raid Home For Orphans, 203 Thirty-Sixth Street. Head Of The Place Escapes.” 1908. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, Sep 09, pp. 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²²² Magray, pp. 48.

identified most strongly with this statement, among which the Sisters of Presentation were some of the most vocal.²²³

Much like the other orders, the names of young women at the time of their induction into the Sisters of Presentation are a useful source for recognizing the social perception of the order's ethnicity. When five young women joined the Sonora convent, three of them bore Irish surnames.²²⁴ The majority of the Irish connections amongst the Sisters of Presentation can be gleaned from announcements of fairs and other fundraisers, where the majority of the surnames for the women, and occasional men, organizing the event are of Irish origin. One of these was a fair to fundraise for the Sister's school in 1870, with notable Irish last names of the women including McGill and Coleman.²²⁵ At the 1887 "Fancy Fair," among the Irish men involved with the fundraiser, a Mr. Harnett was secretary for the planning board and a Mr. Cooney involved in organizing the band.²²⁶ Additionally, nearly all of the ladies involved and mentioned by name have Irish surnames including: O'Brien, McGlynn, McGowen, McDermott, Fitzsimmons, Fitzgerald, Keane, Moran, and Travers, among others.²²⁷ In the 1906 operatic performance for the benefit of the Sisters, many of the thespians playing main roles also bore Irish surnames.²²⁸ The 1914 "Forest Carnival" for the benefit of the Sisters of Presentation received at least three different articles over the course of a year in advance of the event, one in May and two in September. The May article focuses on the notable men who will be involved in the various

²²³ Magray, pp. 48-49.

²²⁴ "Weekly Summaries: Sonora." *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 30, Number 45, 9 November 1861, pp. 1. *The Catholic News Archive*.

²²⁵ "Local Brevities: The Fair." 1870. *Courier-Journal (1869-1922)*, Feb 04, pp. 4. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²²⁶ "The Presentation Convent: Preparations for the Approaching Fancy Fair." 1887. *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)*, Jan 24, pp. 2. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²²⁷ "The Presentation Convent: Preparations for the Approaching Fancy Fair."

²²⁸ "Old Comic Opera to be Revived by Convent: Sisters of Presentation Will Again Produce the Popular 'Pirates Of Penzance.'" 1906. *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)*, Apr 05, pp. 9. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

activities, including an Assistant District Attorney Brennan, and Judge Griffin.²²⁹ The September articles bring the attention back to the women's activities, whose last names included Phelan and McEnerury.²³⁰ The later September article, however, is the most valuable in terms of connecting the Sisters to the Irish by way of surnames, since it includes lists of organizers and guests among the local upper-crust.²³¹ Charitable announcements of sums given to the Sisters of Presentation also connect the order with its Irish origins, since some chose to leave their bequests to the foundation in Ireland proper, rather than to any of the American schools, including James Collins of Boston,²³² and Mrs. Margaret Gorman of Ireland in the only Irish newspaper of this study.²³³

The Sisters were predominantly Irish, but that did not prevent them from cultivating relationships with clergy of other ethnicities or attempting to distance their social presentation from their ethnicity. In one announcement, it was the pastor of the local German church who is connected to the Sisters of Presentation, as he was the individual chosen for the honor of laying corner stone of a new school for the Sisters.²³⁴ In a different location, the Sisters of Presentation hosted a quest lecturer on the topic of epic poetry from Finland.²³⁵ Yet another announcement,

²²⁹ "Special Trains Carry Many to 1915 Ground: All is Ready for Forest Carnival." 1914. *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)*, May 08, pp. 2. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²³⁰ "Form Carnival To Aid Convent: Sisters Of Presentation And Alumnae To Hold A Notable Affair At The Palace." 1914. *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)*, Sep 20, pp. 60. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²³¹ Teazle, Lady. "Charity Finds Warm Support in Smart Set: Forest Carnival for Benefit of Sisters of Presentation to be Made Attractive Affair by Local Society." 1914. *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)*, Sep 29, pp. 7. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²³² "To Charity." *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 68, Number 22, 1 June 1899, pp. 7. *The Catholic News Archive*.

²³³ "Law Intelligence: Court of Chancery--Yesterday Rolls Court--Yesterday Daniel V. Sladen and Others." 1873. *The Irish Times and Daily Advertiser (1859-1874)*, Jun 13, pp. 6. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²³⁴ "City News in Brief." 1868. *The Daily Morning Chronicle (1868-1869)*, Sep 29, pp. 4. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²³⁵ "Presentation Academy: Crowded with Guests to Hear Mrs. Hayward's Lecture." 1897. *Courier-Journal (1869-1922)*, Dec 14, pp. 8. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

this one divorced from ethnicity entirely, was on the commencement ceremony for a school run by the Sisters.²³⁶

While these three religious orders were each presented as stand-alone institutions, it is clear in the eyes of the American public that there was not always much difference between Catholic women religious' orders. In a summary of Catholic Sisterhoods in the United States, the Sisters of Presentation are merely one of a list of catholic teaching orders, although both the Sisters of Charity and the Sisters of Mercy receive a paragraph in the order's history.²³⁷ Little distinction was made between the teaching orders in the territories beyond which Native American tribe each order was responsible for educating.²³⁸ In four different back-to-back front page articles in the *Irish Standard*, both the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of Charity are praised for their skill as nurses and the self-sacrifice such a task frequently requires.²³⁹ Religious revolutionary Pere Hyacinthe also makes no distinction between the good works of the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Charity when praising them as "an honor and glory to the very name of womanhood."²⁴⁰ Other articles do not mention by name any of the religious orders investigated in this chapter, although surely they would have come to mind in a contemporary audience.

There was also a great interest in America about convent life both in America and in Ireland. There was a great deal of misinformation and dramatization about the lives of nuns in

²³⁶ "Presentation Commencement." 1914. *Courier-Journal (1869-1922)*, May 29, pp. 5. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²³⁷ "Religious News: Growth of Catholic Sisterhoods in the United States." 1874. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, Jun 21, pp. 6. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²³⁸ Little, Blanche E. "Catholic Schools for Indians in the Oklahoma and Indian Territories." *The Indian advocate*. ([Sacred Heart, Okla.]), 01 Oct. 1899. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress. Pp. 101-104.

²³⁹ "They Tend Lepers," "The Case of Clemenceau," "Lives Without Blemish," and "Soldiers, Present Arms." *The Irish standard*. (Minneapolis, Minn.), 05 April 1913. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress. Pp. 1.

²⁴⁰ "The Pere Hyacinthe" in *The Revolution*. Edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. December 23, 1869. *Accessible Archives*.

convents, with articles both perpetuating and rejecting common views frequent in the press. The Irish interest was particularly focused on those convents supported by alums collected in America for relief of the poor in Ireland.²⁴¹ One article illustrates how beneficial entering a convent could be for a woman beyond its education of modern young women, by pointing out that Benedictine convents in the middle ages could afford to feed the women within its walls meat more often than the average peasant could afford.²⁴² Another follows the conversion of a Protestant family into Catholics, with both the mother and one daughter becoming nuns, because they were so impressed with the devotion they saw in their Irish domestic servant.²⁴³ Irish-American women were also scattered throughout a general report on the state of “The Church” in the report of *The Catholic Telegraph*,²⁴⁴ feature strongly in the organization of a Catholic Women’s Congress in 1893,²⁴⁵ and worked outside of convents in voluntary organizations.²⁴⁶ Meanwhile, statistics on emigration from Ireland were the only country specific emigration report included in *The Catholic Telegraph*, also showcasing the importance both real and perceived of Irish and Irish-American women in the American Catholic Church.²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ Redpath, James. "Irish Convent Life." *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 12 Dec. 1880. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

²⁴² "Nunneries." *Frank Leslie's Weekly*, April 6, 1867. *Accessible Archives*.

²⁴³ "A Nun's Strange History."

²⁴⁴ "The Church" *The Catholic Telegraph*. Vol. 55, no. 1, January 7, 1886, pp. 1. *The Catholic News Archive*.

²⁴⁵ "Women in a Big Crush." *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 19 May 1893, pp. 5. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

²⁴⁶ Margaret Hamilton Welch, "Club Women and Club Work." *Harper's Bazaar* vol. 31, no. 15, April 9, 1898, pp. 311. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

²⁴⁷ "Emigration from Ireland." *The Catholic Telegraph*, Volume 60, Number 17, 23 April 1891, pp. 3. *The Catholic News Archive*.

Conclusion

The ethnicity of nuns in religious orders was of primary concern to male members of the clergy and male newspaper authors. Additionally, ethnicity was used as a means to distinguish between convents' "specialty" among good works. Stereotypes to this effect made the Irish nuns and their associated convents into a jack of all trades because of their prior knowledge of English. French nuns were usually viewed as excellent educators, as were German nuns, although the French were viewed as teaching exclusive schools while the Germans taught less prestigious institutions. Polish nuns, by contrast, had a unique relationship with investigative journalism and reform campaigns. Italian nuns were simultaneously viewed as being endowed with a special authority thanks to their perceived connection to the Pope, and as unusual exceptions to the general view of Italian immigrants as leeches on society and welfare groups resources. All ethnicities tended to have at least one religious order which worked with nursing and child-care such as orphan asylums or day cares. In contrast to male authors' constructed view of ethnicity as connected to the good works done by nuns, female authors repeated the ethnic disinterest of the women themselves, and refocused conversations about the nuns' work on the work itself, rather than the identities of the women who were doing it.

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