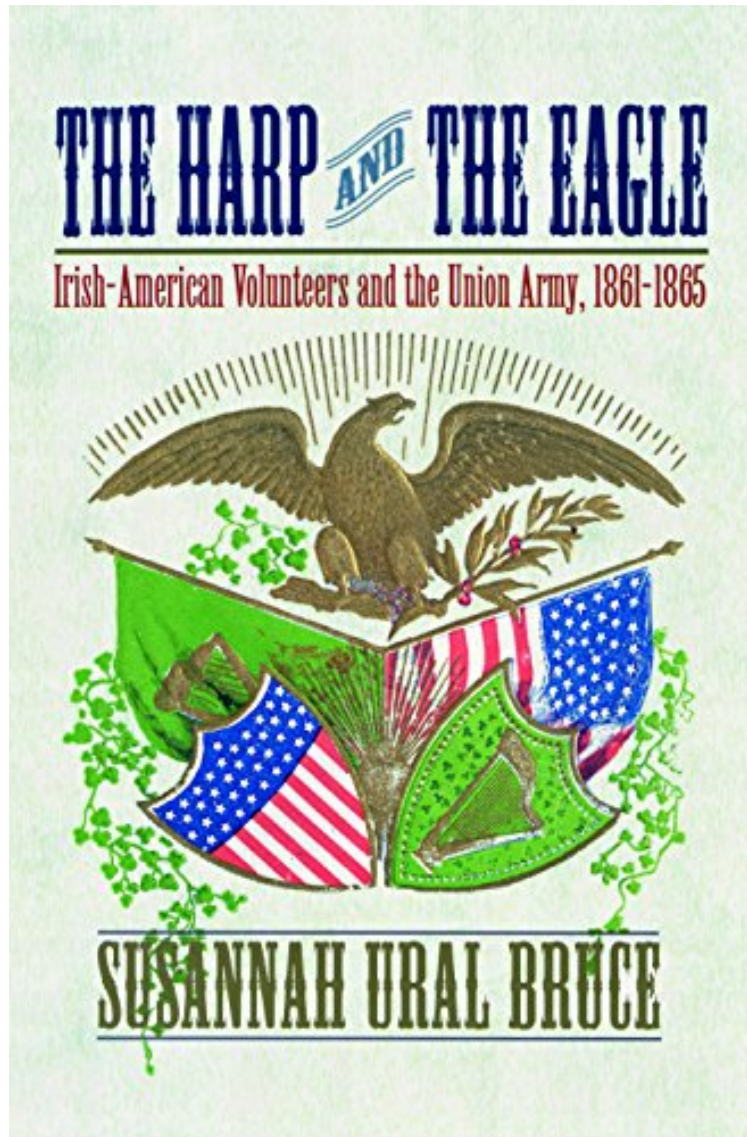


The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865

Susannah J. Ural

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Susannah J. Ural : The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Irish in the Civil WarBy Patrick YoungThe Irish are a problem

for Civil War historians. Irish filled the ranks of the Union Army, and Irish units like the Irish Brigade were well known for their bravery. Yet the Irish drank deeply of the Democratic brew of racism: They consistently opposed the Lincoln administration during the war, and they erupted in insurrection and race riots at the imposition of the draft. In *The Harp and the Eagle*, historian Susannah Ural Bruce tries to place the Irish army volunteer in the context of an Irish community that came to reject the Union war effort. She depicts an Irish soldiery that joins the Union Army as much for what their service will mean to Ireland as for any devotion to the United States. The Irish soldier may have seen himself more as an ally of the Union Army than as a member of it, in her view. While the book is engaging and covers new ground, it has too great a focus on Irish volunteers serving in identifiably Irish units. Only one in five Irish in the army was a member of a unit like the Irish Brigade. Most Irishmen served in mixed units that included native-born as well as immigrants from other countries. Unlike those who joined the Irish Brigade, these men may not have prioritized their Irishness over their Americanness. But we can't tell from Bruce, because she uses the Irish Brigade experience as a proxy for Irish American soldiers. That shortcoming aside, the book does a fine job of examining the politics of Irish New York and Boston at the outbreak of hostilities. These were new communities whose character had only been formed in the decade before the outbreak of the war. The Irish were collectively the poorest and most marginalized group of white people in America. Their communal leaders were new to America themselves and often guessed wrong about the future course of American politics. Those leaders devoted as much time to plotting the armed liberation of Ireland as to the development of their own communities in America, and the demands of Irish nationalism slowed assimilation and derailed economic advancement. Irish immigrants arriving in America faced violent discrimination, and that led many Irish to interpret the actions of the government through a lens of distrust. The Republican Party included many anti-immigrant Know Nothings, and the Irish assumed that President Lincoln was cut from the same cloth. When an Irish unit bled on a battlefield or an Irish officer did not get a promotion, many Irish saw the secret hand of the Know Nothings behind it. While no American press would ever be as quick to charge prejudice as the Irish American press of the 1860s (whether they had the evidence of discrimination or not) not all the allegations of discrimination were baseless. The destructive war for the Union chewed up the young men whom Irish families relied on for economic survival. The wives and orphans of soldiers who were killed at Antietam and Gettysburg were abandoned by widows' aid societies that only helped Protestants. Dead soldiers' destitute parents in Ireland were left to starve when the remittances sent by their sons were cut off by a bullet, and when the federal government refused to pay survivor benefits to family members living outside the US. This led to a feeling of abandonment by the Irish, who saw their sacrifices disregarded by the native born. Professional historians are only recently addressing the experiences of immigrants in 19th century America and Ural Bruce's contribution to this project helps give focus to a desperate community thrust into an apocalyptic situation. 13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Irish Democrats, Irish Nationalism, Fenians? By General Phil Sheridan Ms. Bruce breaks the "Irish Brigade" stranglehold on the Irish-American Civil War experience--which is very important. She describes Irish experience, in the 23rd and 90th Illinois, 10th Ohio, 116th and 69th Pennsylvania. However she doesn't connect all the dots. The 69th Pennsylvania elected Welshman Joshua T. Owen as colonel not because he was a fellow European, but because he was a Democratic politician. I feel the role of the Democratic party in helping form these units is very underplayed throughout the book---perhaps because 2006 Irish-Americans are assimilated Republicans today? Irish nationalism is also truly ignored. Although not every Irish-American was a Fenian, she emasculates the role of Irish nationalism. For instance she emphasizes the key role of Colonel Dennis O'Kane of the 69th Pennsylvania at the battle of Gettysburg, explaining that he was born, raised, and married in County Derry before moving to Philadelphia. Before Pickett's Charge O'Kane called on the officers and men of the regiment to defend "the soil of our native state" and didn't mention Ireland--a key point in her thesis. However she doesn't mention that O'Kane was a Philadelphia delegate to the great 1855 prewar Irish convention of Irish societies held in New York City. O'Kane was for peaceful, electoral removal of the British Empire--not a Fenian, but still an Irish Nationalist! By the way Ms. Bruce, C company--color company of the 69th Pennsylvania carrying the USA colors and regimental Irish flag--was called the EMMETT GUARDS--named not in honor of the famous American clown---but the Irish Patriot Robert Emmet, hung by the British government 20 September 1803. All in all, her book is well researched and breaks new ground, I found her writing style superior to most academics. Worth Buying. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *The Harp and the Eagle* By Donna Benichasa This book was bought as a gift for a friend who was born in Ireland. She found this book very interesting.

On the eve of the Civil War, the Irish were one of America's largest ethnic groups, and approximately 150,000 fought for the Union. Analyzing letters and diaries written by soldiers and civilians; military, church, and diplomatic records; and community newspapers, Susannah Ural Bruce significantly expands the story of Irish-American Catholics in the Civil War, and reveals a complex picture of those who fought for the Union. While the population was diverse, many Irish Americans had dual loyalties to the U.S. and Ireland, which influenced their decisions to volunteer, fight, or end their military service. When the Union cause supported their interests in Ireland and America, large numbers of Irish Americans enlisted. However, as the war progressed, the Emancipation Proclamation, federal draft, and sharp rise in

casualties caused Irish Americans to question and sometimes abandon the war effort because they viewed such changes as detrimental to their families and futures in America and Ireland. By recognizing these competing and often fluid loyalties, *The Harp and the Eagle* sheds new light on the relationship between Irish-American volunteers and the Union Army, and how the Irish made sense of both the Civil War and their loyalty to the United States.

With remarkable sensitivity and acuity Bruce goes digging among the personal and public accounts of the Irish soldiers in the Union army and presents these soldiers, and their families and communities, on their own terms so that they emerge as real people conflicted and changed by the demands of war and the obligations of 'community.' The result is a book of immediate interest. -Randall M. Miller, author of *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments* The best book ever published on ethnic units in the American Civil War. -*Journal of Southern History* Anyone serious about their Irish-American history will have to get *The Harp and the Eagle*. -*Irish Echo* Professor Susannah Ural Bruce's remarkable and highly readable study explores the complex political and historical motives that sent 150,000 Irish Catholic soldiers into the ranks of the Union Army during the Civil War. For the majority of Irish soldiers the cause of the union was inextricably linked to the cause of Irish independence and Bruce's wide ranging study paints a complex and evocative picture of the network of alliances and experiences that animated Irish participation in the war effort. Recommended. -*Irish Voice* About the Author Susannah J. Ural is Associate Professor of History at the University of Southern Mississippi and a Senior Fellow of the Center for the Study of War and Society. She is the author of *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* (NYU Press, 2006).