"When Bridget is Good She is So Very good ... When She is Bad, She is Horrid": Portrayals of Female Irish Immigrants in America during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Cara Smith
The College at Brockport

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"When Bridget is Good She is So Very good...When She is Bad, She is Horrid":
Portrayals of Female Irish Immigrants in America during the Late Nineteenth and Early
Twentieth Centuries

by

Cara Smith

A thesis submitted to the department of History of the State University of New York
College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
of History

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"When Bridget is Good She is So Very good...When She is Bad, She is Horrid":

Portrayals of Female Irish Immigrants in America during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

By Cara Smith

Approved By:

Advisor

Second Reader

Chair, Graduate Committee

Date

Date

Date
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Abstract

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Irish women accounted for more than half of all Irish emigrants to leave Ireland. A great portion of these women settled in urban centers on the East coast of the United States where a large percentage took jobs as domestic servants. The great number of Irish women involved in domestic service led to the emergence of the negative stereotype of the Irish maid “Bridget,” in popular entertainment and literature. Further research into the literature and data of the time shows positive contemporary descriptions of Irish women involved in American domestic service. These positive descriptions add an opposing view of Irish-American identity that stands in contrast to the common negative stereotypes.

These positive descriptions, along with examples of hard data show how the reality of Irish women in America often stood in sharp contrast to the stereotype presented by way of the Irish maid “Bridget.” By looking at the involvement of Irish women in the American workforce one can trace the rather rapid move towards Americanization from the first generation into the second and third. Irish-American women quickly distanced themselves from the negative connotations present in domestic service and began to follow the employment patterns of native-born American women as well as adopting American values and culture. Through education, industriousness, and the willingness to adapt, Irish women helped bring a large portion of the Irish-American community into the American middle-class.
“When Bridget is Good She is So Very good... When She is Bad, She is Horrid”: Portrayals of Female Irish Immigrants in America

Cara Smith

Chapter One:
A Historiography

The majority of historical studies on the Irish in America have focused on the impact of male immigrants and their experiences in America. Female Irish immigrants have received far less attention. With the exception of several studies, information on Irish women in America tends to be allocated to specific chapters or sections of larger social histories of Irish Americans. Similarly to other studies focusing on women, information on Irish women in America is often placed within the larger study of Irish families. Most histories of the Irish in America break down immigration patterns into chronological time periods.

The first time period includes colonial America up until the Great Famine in the 1840s. Such early histories are not as numerous as those concerned with the later time periods. The second time period covers the generation who emigrated from Ireland during the time of the Famine. The third time period generally focuses on the

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several decades following the Famine, including the later half of the nineteenth century into the first decades of the twentieth. The last time period covers the later portion of the twentieth century up until the present day. The time period of the Famine, and the decades following it have received the most attention by historians, particularly those interested in Irish females, as the greatest number of them immigrated to America within these years.³

During the time of the Famine the majority of Irish women emigrated within a family group. In the decades following the Famine however, Irish women increasingly began to emigrate on their own. Between the years 1885 and 1920, of the 1,357,831 people who left Ireland to settle elsewhere, women accounted for more than half of those who made the journey from Ireland. Single women under the age of twenty four made up eighty nine percent of the women who emigrated during this time period. Such statistics were unique to the Irish. Compared to other European immigrant groups only Swedish women immigrated alone in any sizable numbers. Historians have come up with several theories to explain the unique immigration experience of Irish women. For the majority of studies the changes in Ireland brought on by the Famine contributed greatly to the high numbers of young, single, Irish women choosing to emigrate.⁴

In her book, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York’s Welfare System, 1830-1920*, Maureen Fitzgerald argues that young, unmarried women made for the best individuals to initially send to America, as they

often found work quicker than their male counterparts. Despite the high number of Irish women traveling alone, and the difficulty such a journey would entail, historians have placed little focus on the contemporary literature providing advice for prospective emigrants. Such literature often warned against the immoral influences present in American urban centers and the American workforce.

Similarly, historians have also mainly neglected to place much focus on the possible outcome of exposure to such immoral influences; such as Irish women’s involvement in prostitution and crimes against chastity in American cities. Some historians have commented on the corrupting affect the American workforce could have on Irish women. Kevin Kenny, in his book *The American Irish: a History*, for example, points out that the common occurrence of sexual exploitation of domestic servants by their male employers has not received enough attention by historians.

The ability of Irish women to avoid the corrupting influences in American urban centers and within the American workforce has also received little to no attention from historians.

Several historians have highlighted the common practice of Irish women sending money to relatives still living in Ireland. In her book *Irish Americans: Identity and Assimilation*, for example, Marjorie R. Fallows claims that along with the practice of sending money back to Ireland, many Irish women financed the journey to America for both their male and female relatives. Irish women also aided

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family members in “arranging for jobs or lodgings as their brothers, sisters, cousins, or parents joined them in America.”

Ide O’Carroll estimates that “about 34 million pounds in remittances between 1848-1887, two fifths of which came as pre-paid passage,” were sent back to Ireland from family members who had immigrated to North America. Prior to that time, in the year 1845, Faye E. Dudden estimates in her book *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America*, that “The British Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners calculated that remittances from America transmitted through shipping and banking firms totaled at least 1,730,000 pounds.”

Along with the financial assistance many Irish women sent home letters to their female relatives describing their positive experiences in America.

According to several historians, women in Ireland needed little encouragement from those in America to emigrate, due to the oppressive conditions for women in post-famine Ireland. Pauline Jackson, in her article “Women in Nineteenth Century Emigration,” for example, argues that the high levels of female immigration resulted from Irish women using immigration to escape their deteriorating social position in Ireland. Jackson describes Irish women’s post-famine position as “to a level below that of a head of cattle.” She concludes that “the post-famine emigration of women was a refusal to accept the servile role allotted to them in their society and a rejection of the patriarchal values underpinning it.” In this sense,

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Jackson saw emigration and Irish women's involvement in the labor-force as an escape, and as a step towards independence.\textsuperscript{12}

Once Irish women reached America they often did not have trouble finding work. This relatively easy entrance into the American workforce came as a result, in part, from their willingness to take certain jobs that other ethnicities did not pursue in large numbers. Most notably Irish women took jobs as domestic servants. Kevin Kenny states that:

Domestic service was the single biggest form of employment for Irish women in America between 1850 and 1900. In New York City as early as 1855, seventy four percent of all domestics were Irish and forty five percent of all Irish-born women aged under fifty were employed in this line of work.\textsuperscript{13}

Faye Dudden estimates that as early as 1825 sixty percent of the applicants to the "Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants," a placement agency in New York City, came from Ireland.\textsuperscript{14} The presence of Irish women in domestic service persisted into the early twentieth century. In his book \textit{Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America}, David Katzman estimates that fifty four percent of all Irish women in the workforce were involved in domestic service, while "of the 320,000 foreign-born servants in 1900, forty-one percent had been born in Ireland."\textsuperscript{15}

Several historians have theorized as to why such high numbers of Irish women upon arriving in America entered into domestic service, especially when native women and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Pauline Jackson. "Women in Nineteenth Century Irish Emigration," \textit{International Migration Review}, Vol. 18, No. 4, Special Issue: Women in Migration. (Winter, 1984), 1018.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Kevin Kenny. \textit{The American Irish: a History}. Pearson Education Limited, Essex, 2000, 110.
\end{itemize}
women from other immigrant groups tended to avoid employment in the service industry.\textsuperscript{16}

In her book \textit{Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920}, Janet A. Nolan theorizes that domestic service in the homes of urban Americans acted as "an important transition from rural to urban life,"\textsuperscript{17} for Irish women in America. Adding that, "Irish-born women in the United States chose jobs that were extensions of their traditional domestic skills."\textsuperscript{18} Nolan emphasized domestic service as a temporary and transitional work for Irish women. The majority of Irish women involved in domestic service left the labor-force upon marriage. Nolan highlights the negative aspects of domestic service leading to high turn-over rates. She cites the "disdain felt by many native-born Americans for the Irish was also a major factor in a servant's dislike of her work."\textsuperscript{19}

David Katzman also describes the involvement of Irish women in domestic service in America as an extension of skills and traditions learned in Ireland. Katzman describes Irish women as coming from a "service tradition" stating that "domestic labor had been the single largest employer of women in Ireland."\textsuperscript{20} Katzman also argues that the lack of formal education available for women in Ireland effected the type of work Irish women in America were capable of getting. Similarly, Katzman


cites other aspects of Irish culture as having an affect on Irish women’s choice of employment. For example, Katzman states that Irish women were more likely “to work a life time in an employer’s family without marrying,” and that this was “an accepted custom on the Emerald Isle.”

Kevin Kenny argues that the lack of an adequate explanation or evidence for the high number of Irish women involved in domestic service in America has led most historians to take that as a “starting point for an argument that domestic service was considerably more liberating than oppressive. Domestic service thereby becomes the vehicle for women’s self-assertion and liberation.” Kenny argues against this positive view of domestic service and believes that “the degree of social oppression inherent in the servant relationship has been underestimated by historians.”

Kenny argues that the social oppression inherent in domestic service grew from the nature of servile work. Domestic servants worked very long hours, often with little time off. They took care of their employer’s children, cooked, cleaned, took care of the laundry, sewing and mending, and a myriad of other household tasks. A hierarchy existed within the realm of domestic service, with head cooks at the top and scullions at the bottom. Kenny insists that although “such a job, [domestic service] at its best, was better than anything available in Ireland it does not necessarily entail women’s liberation.” He theorizes that Irish women in America took domestic jobs

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in part because they came from a place of social and economic oppression in Ireland, and domestic jobs acted as a logical transition.\textsuperscript{25}

He also believed that Irish women entered America at the bottom of the social hierarchy, a placement which lent itself to servile jobs. Kenny insisted on the importance of historians not to "romanticize domestic service, and to remember that it was based ultimately on domination and subordination."\textsuperscript{26} Although Kenny presents a negative view of domestic service he does outline some of the benefits to the industry:

Wages and conditions were considerably better in service than in factory or sweatshop labour. Servants had no expenses for food and transportation. Their diet was generally much better than that of factory workers, even if it took the form of left-overs.\textsuperscript{27}

Lawrence J McCaffrey, in his book \textit{Textures of Irish America}, comes to a similarly positive conclusion concerning domestic service. He claims that domestic service offered young Irish women "rooms in comfortable homes, nourishing food, clean clothing, a taste for civilized living, and salaries that compared favorably with those in factories and mills."\textsuperscript{28} McCaffrey argues that there were no social boundaries keeping Irish women from entering stranger's homes as domestic servants. Such boundaries seemed present in other immigrant groups as well as within the native-born community, which kept them from entering into domestic service. McCaffrey also notes a lack of "social snobbery," amongst the Irish towards working in the field.


\textsuperscript{28} Lawrence J. McCaffrey. \textit{Textures of Irish America}. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1992, 16.
of service.29 Majorie R. Fallows coincides with this more positive outlook on Irish women’s involvement in domestic service, arguing that, being native speakers of English, young, Irish women were actually in higher demand by employers than other immigrant groups.30

Although Fallows describes how most Protestant middle and upper-class Americans would have preferred a non-Catholic household servant, Irish women still received a high percent of domestic service jobs.31 Similarly, in her article “Making Sense and Providing Structure: Irish-American Women in the Parish Neighborhood,” Deirdre Mageean argues that the high need for domestic servants over-turned the want for non-Irish-Catholic servants amongst native-born prospective employees. Mageean states that “American families could not afford to be choosey,” a reality of which many domestic servants used to their advantage.32 While the current historical studies concerning Irish domestic servants focus briefly on both the negative and positive aspects of the job, further research is needed to create a more complete picture of Irish domestic’s experiences in American households.

The large percentage of Irish women in domestic service, often allowed for those who wished to speak against the Irish and Catholics to discuss the supposed “servant problem,” in terms of ethnicity and religion. Consequently, the Irish “Bridget,” became the stock stereotype of all domestic servants of the time, appearing not only in household literature but popular publications and stage performances as

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well. In her book Serving Women: Household Service in the Nineteenth Century, Faye E. Dudden theorized that if a larger diversity of ethnicities had been present in the service industry than "perhaps employers...would not have been so quick to blame their servant problems on the 'Irish Race.'"  

Although several historians have argued that Irish women entered into domestic service in America after coming from a service tradition in Ireland, many also cite Irish women's inability to perform American housework as the main complaint of American employers. Faye E. Dudden claims that "most Irish women had not grown up in households that provided them with useful experience in housework." Dudden describes how the lack of experience on the part of the Irish domestic servants served as a source of contention and frustration for the American women who hired them. Young American women unaccustomed to dealing with servants found it disruptive to train their inexperienced Irish servants.  

Dudden, however, does not place all of the blame on the servants, but places some of the blame on the Mistresses as well. Stating that"

Of course women who did not regularly spend the whole of their days at housework were apt to make poor instructors, either from outright ignorance of the work or of realistic work standards, or simply from the desire to get the girl "broken in" as quickly as possible.

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Although the seemingly deteriorating relationship between servant and mistress resulted as a consequence of the actions of both involved, the stereotype of Irish servants prevailed in the literature of the time.38

Literature of the time that discussed household servants, such as household guides, magazine articles, and cook books, written mainly for a middle and upper-class female readership, often represented servants using the unflattering Irish stereotype. In her book *Never Done: a History of American Housework*, Susan Strasser describes the representation of servants in this literature as women who “put on airs, stole from their employers, left their positions with out notice, and performed their duties with out skill or care.”39 According to many historians these anti-Irish sentiments were often anti-Catholic in nature.40

Faye E. Dudden, for example, argues that: “for many employers, Irish girls made less satisfactory servants because of their religion. Increasing religious differences converted a potential source of reconciliation into grounds for profound conflict between servant and employer.”41 Anti-Catholic sentiment was present in much of the household literature concerning servants. Some of the literature made outlandish claims against Catholic domestics. The literature claimed that Irish domestics were actually spies for the pope that these women secretly baptized their

employer's children, and Catholic cooks poisoned the food of their Protestant employers.⁴²

Anti-Catholic sentiment can also be seen in David E. Sutherland's book *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States 1800-1920.* Sutherland has a rather negative view of the impact that Irish immigrant women had on the service industry, arguing that the influx of immigrants such as the Irish into the field of domestic service corrupted and deteriorated the service industry. Sutherland argues that:

Two of the most scorned groups of foreigners, the Irish and the Chinese, became widely recognized symbols of the American servant. As such, they attached all of their supposed vice, ignorance, and poverty to service, further degrading it and disqualifying it as a civilized respectable Christian calling.⁴³

Sutherland states that Irish Catholics were "accused of being dirty, greasy, uneducated, undisciplined, immoral, and a host of other unpleasantries,"⁴⁴ and that "not one in a hundred was capable of learning the intricacies of adjusting to life in a civilized, Christian home (Catholics were not Christians)."⁴⁵ Sutherland accompanies this rather harsh view of Irish Catholic women with a brief description of those who defended the character of the Irish. Sutherland argues that these defenders "were almost defensive in pointing out Irish virtues and in trying to ignore their

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Catholicism.”46 The current historical studies concerning Irish domestic servants includes little to no examples of positive descriptions of Irish women’s adherence to the Catholic faith. Sutherland does give a brief example of conflicting stereotypes, arguing that the “dirty, ignorant Paddy and Bridget was often overshadowed by that of the genial, fun-loving lad and lass who attracted sympathy and won hearts wherever they went.”47

Concerning the appearance of “Bridget” in more popular publications, John J. Appel briefly discusses the popular stereotype of “Bridget,” in his article “From Shanties to Lace Curtains: The Irish Image in Puck, 1876-1910.” The article showcases the changing attitudes towards the Irish through the cartoons of the popular satirical American magazine “Puck,” published in New York City. The article focuses mainly on the stereotypical view of Irish men, commenting briefly on the view of Irish women as “Bridget,” the “Queen of the kitchen.” Popular stereotypes of Irish women described them as ignorant, disorderly, prone to theft, drunkards, vehemently Catholic, hard-working but unpredictable, scheming, and as lording it over their employer’s family.48

Several historians argue that despite the anti-Irish and Catholic sentiments present in household literature and popular publications, protestant families still hired high numbers of Irish domestic servants. In his article “No Irish Need Apply: A Myth of Victimization,” Richard Jenson states that Irish domestic servants did not

"proselytize or interfere with household religious activities,"\textsuperscript{49} despite the fear that they would. The high numbers of Irish-Catholic women employed in the homes of Protestant Americans suggests that American families saw the benefits of employing Irish servants outweighing possible anti-Catholic beliefs.\textsuperscript{50} The existing research on Irish female domestic servants does not include many contemporary positive descriptions of Irish women, and argue that most of the contemporary literature includes negative descriptions. The existence of positive descriptions of Irish female domestic servants goes against the previous anti-Irish and anti-Catholic arguments, adding another dimension to the question concerning why the Irish were so heavily represented in the service industry.

Although several historians have described the participation of Irish women in the service industry, most studies have focused almost exclusively on their involvement as servants in private residences. The participation of Irish women in other sectors of the service industry, such as hotel and restaurant work, has received far less attention. In her article "'She Earns as a Child-She Pays as a Man': Women Workers in a Mid-Nineteenth Century New York City Community," Carol Groneman briefly mentions hotel and restaurant workers preferring this type of service to private domestic service, as it allowed them "more time to escape the drudgery of housework because they were not expected to be available beyond required working hours."\textsuperscript{51} More study is needed to decipher the experience of Irish women in hotel and

\textsuperscript{51} Carol Groneman "'She Earns as a Child-She Pays as a Man': Women Workers in a Mid-Nineteenth Century New York City Community," in \textit{Immigrants in Industrial America, 1850-1920}, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville (1977): 36-37.
restaurant work, and to come to a conclusion as to why second and third generation women were more likely to enter this sector of the service industry and not service in private homes, as most first generation immigrants had done.

Following domestic service, the majority of Irish women in America found employment in the manufacturing industry, most notably in textile production. Kevin Kenny referred to this type of work as "needle trades." These trades commonly included "seamstresses, milliners, dressmakers, shirt and collar makers, embroiderers and makers of lace fringe, tassel and artificial flowers." Such production had traditionally been done in the home, but increasingly took place in factories or sweatshops. Kenny estimates that one third of Irish women in New York City in 1855 worked in the needle trades. He insists that "work in the needle trades was always more of a necessity than a choice for Irish immigrant women." Despite this, he estimates that Irish women accounted for 33.8% of all seamstresses in the United States by 1900.

Several historians have also concerned themselves with the marital status and household demographics of the Irish in America. Irish American women tended to marry later in life and leave the workforce upon marriage. Lawrence J. McCaffrey argues that Irish-American women often took control of the family's finances even though they themselves did not earn a wage, and that the supplemental income earned by children helped many Irish-American families afford the purchase of their homes. He claims that in Irish-American families:

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It was common for husbands and working children living at home to turn over their paychecks to wives and mothers, who gave them an allowance. Combined incomes managed by matriarchs made it possible for Irish-American families to buy houses.\textsuperscript{55}

Irish women in America acting as strong matriarchs did not only occurred in the setting of a nuclear family, but also in the relatively high number of single parent Irish-American families as well. Kevin Kenny estimates "a disproportionately high number of Irish women in the famine period seem to have fended for themselves, often with the support of working children, but with no able-bodied male present in the household."\textsuperscript{56} Rates of male desertion and widowhood in Irish families were higher in America then in Ireland in the post-famine years. Daniel J. Walkowitz estimates that 28.8% of the Irish Mill families in Cohoes, New York, had only one parent, compared to only 14% of other ethnicities. The majority of these single-parent households were headed by women.\textsuperscript{57}

Despite the relatively high number of female-run, single-parent households, very few historians have studied in detail the experiences of single Irish mothers. One historian who places some focus on this topic is Deirdre Mageean. In her article "Making Sense and Providing Structure: Irish-American Women in the Parish Neighborhood," she discusses the sometimes unfortunate consequences of single-parent families headed by women in Chicago. Single mothers often found work in restaurants, sales, textile production, and at clerical work. The income earned from such work often did not cover the financial needs of the family. Children often added

\textsuperscript{55} Lawrence J. McCaffrey. \textit{Textures of Irish America}. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1992, 16.


supplemental income to the household, but this did not always cover the family’s financial needs. Evictions of single mothers and their children were common place. The younger children of working mothers were often placed in charity day care services, commonly run by Catholic nuns. More research on Irish single mothers is needed to create a fuller picture of the female Irish experience in America.  

Discussions of second and third generation Irish women have not received much attention from historians. One area in which some focus has been paid is Irish women’s involvement in the profession of teaching. Deirdre Mageean discusses how second and third generation Irish-American women held a substantial percentage of the teaching jobs in American public schools. She also argues that education was traditionally important in Ireland and that this importance remained in the Irish-American community. Mageean estimates that during the 1890s 95% of Irish immigrants to America were literate. Second and third generation Irish-American girls tended to go on to receive high-school educations, as several charitable organizations existed to fund their higher education.

The current historical studies available place a large focus on theorizing why such a high number of Irish women emigrated from Ireland, and not on their experiences upon arriving in the United States. The studies that do focus on Irish women in America primarily center on their employment as domestic servants; theorizing on whether this was a negative or positive experience for the women.

involved. Examples of positive descriptions of Irish women in America are largely absent from the current historiography, or are often overshadowed by the choice of some historians to focus on the negative representations of Irish women; upholding the stereotype of “Bridget,” as the common native-born view of Irish-American women. This focus on the negative excludes the possibility that employers often saw Irish women as desirable employees and not as their stereotype described them.

Further research into the literature and data of the time shows positive contemporary descriptions of Irish women involved in American domestic service. These positive descriptions add an opposing view of Irish-American identity that stands in contrast to the common negative stereotype. The contemporary positive descriptions of Irish women often center on attributes gained through their adherence to the Roman Catholic faith. Several contemporary authors describe Irish women as honest, trustworthy, morally pure, and devoted to their faith; attributes they see as desirable in prospective employees. Such positive descriptions add a new dimension to the existing historical studies on Irish-American women, as much of the previous research concerning Irish women, tended to focus on the anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiments of native born Americans.

The involvement of Irish women in the American workforce beyond domestic service has also received little attention by modern historians. Further research into contemporary literature and data of the time has shown that positive descriptions of Irish women also appeared in regards to other areas of industry outside of domestic service.

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service. Contemporary authors often describe how Irish women’s moral purity protected them against the corrupting factors present in industrial and urban environments, making them attractive as prospective employees. The move away from the service industry also shows a conscious decision by Irish women to adopt employment patterns commonly attributed to native-born women.

This shift in employment patterns is most noticeable when comparing the data concerning the job choice of the first and second generations. The study of the second and third generation has been largely overlooked by modern historians. Further research into this topic however, is imperative in creating a fuller picture of the Irish-American experience. Using contemporary literature and hard data from the time show the importance that the second generation of Irish women in America had on the Americanization of the greater Irish-American community. The often high-level of education earned by this generation of Irish-American women allowed them to closely follow the employment patterns of native-born women, entering more “white-collar,” work such as teaching, sales, and clerical work. The move into more highly skilled and better paying jobs allowed these women to financially contribute to their families and communities; helping them to economically push them into middle-class America.

These positive descriptions, along with examples of hard data show how the reality of Irish women in America often stood in sharp contrast to the stereotype presented by way of the Irish maid “Bridget.” By looking at the involvement of Irish

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women in the American workforce one can trace the rather rapid move towards Americanization from the first generation into the second and third; women who contemporary authors often described as American and not Irish. Irish-American women quickly distanced themselves from the negative connotations present in domestic service and began to follow the employment patterns of native-born American women as well as adopting American values and culture. Through education, industriousness, and the willingness to adapt, Irish women helped bring a large portion of the Irish-American community into the American middle-class.
Chapter 2:

"In Domestic Service Her Merit is Fully Recognized": Irish Women’s Involvement in Domestic Service, the Emergence of "Bridget," and Moving Beyond the Stereotype.

MISTRESS- Why, Bridget, what are you doing to that chicken?
BRIDGET- Shure, ma’am, you told me to dress an’ stuff it, an’ Oi’ve jist got the doll baby’s dress an’ am doin’ thot same, an’ as to stuffin’, it’s got ‘nuff insides av its own.62

The high numbers of single Irish women immigrating to America in the post-Famine years caused many contemporaries in Ireland to worry about the negative effect of what they saw as immoral forces present in East Coast American cities. The Irish saw their own women as morally sound, and as such, devoted sections of their immigration guides to protecting them from those in America who would intend them harm.63 Native born Americans of the time did not always portray Irish women in such a positive light, accusing them of such negative characteristics as clannishness; citing their common practice of sending money home and bringing family members over to America as evidence.64 Like most of the negative accusations of character flaws, clannishness, in the hands of those who spoke positively of Irish women, had a positive connotation as well. Irish women’s contribution to their communities focused

mainly on their involvement with their Parish church; following the pattern of positive characteristics attributed to Irish women stemming from their religious beliefs and practices.65

Conflicting negative and positive descriptions of Irish women also appear in contemporary books and pamphlets concerning domestic service; the most common form of employment for first generation Irish women in America. The large number of Irish women employed as domestic servants in private homes led to the emergence of "Bridget;" the stereotypical caricature of an Irish maid. Ignorant, lazy, bossy, prone to theft, clannish, fiercely loyal to her faith and Ireland, overly-emotional, dirty, and troublesome, Bridget encompassed all of the negative characteristics that native-born employers complained of in regards to their household servants.66 The stereotype of Bridget quickly found its way into popular culture, appearing in joke-books and vaudeville performances of the time.67

More positive descriptions of female Irish domestic servants appear in several household guides, pamphlets, and government reports. Concerning the relationship between the Irish domestic servant and her female employer, often described as a negative arrangement, some contemporary authors place equal, and occasionally more, blame on the American mistress and not the Irish servant. Often the authors

instruct the mistress that it is her responsibility to teach her immigrant servants American customs and traditions, and that it is unfair to blame an immigrant for not being familiar with the middle-class, American way of life. Such suggestions commonly coincided with positive descriptions of Irish women as very willing and able to adapt and learn.68

Trustworthiness and moral purity also appear in positive descriptions of Irish women, with several contemporary authors claiming that such attributes derived from Irish women’s adherence to the Roman Catholic Faith. These attributes often coalesce into an argument over how such characteristics make Irish women the ideal employee for those looking for domestic servants.69 The positive description of Irish immigrant women as honest and morally pure as a result of their religious devotion was common not only in descriptions of domestic servants, but also of Irish women involved in other jobs in the service industry, as well as jobs in manufacturing and mechanized laundries.

As the immigrant guides warned, the urban American workforce could prove a corrupting force on an immigrant woman’s morality. The common stereotype of an ignorant Bridget falling prey to the advances of her male employer found its way into popular culture of the time.70 Despite this several contemporary authors argued that, due to their faith and religious practices, Irish women possessed a strong moral defense against immoral forces present in the workforce and in the urban

70 New Irish Joke Book: Compromising a Selected Collection of the Best and Latest Irish Jokes, Anecdotes, Funny Sayings, Stories, Monologue, etc. I. & M. Ottenheimer, Baltimore (c. 1907).
environment. Consequently, personal morality and adherence to religious practices may have accounted for the Irish's low percentages in crimes that are traditionally associated with women, such as prostitution. Several argue that this morality made Irish women desirable to employers in the service industry and manufacturing, as they had a reputation for not falling easily to corruption. The repetitive nature of some Catholic practices also attracted some employers as it could prepare Irish women for the repetitive nature of manufacturing work.

Prior to immigration to America the Irish printed several "emigrant guides," in hopes that they would help the Irish achieve success upon arrival in America. While the authors focused the majority of the advice towards a male audience, certain sections of the guides concerned issues specific to female emigrants; both married and single women. In his *Penny Emigrant Guide*, Vere Foster, founder of the Irish Female Emigrant Fund, adamantly encouraged Irish emigrants to immediately move into the interior of the country upon arrival at an American port city. Emigrant guides often warned of the demoralizing effect of city-life and urged that the interior offered the best chance at moral and economic success.

Foster offered charts of the different routes into the interior, the different travel options available, and an estimated cost of such a journey. Foster also urged Irish women to "make arrangements through the Bank of Ireland... or some other safe

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channel,”74 and “to have a sum of money varying from 20s to 30s at least for each adult immigrant, deposited in secure hands at the port of arrival in America, to be given them there, to enable them to proceed up the country.”75 He further insisted on moving into the interior after receiving this money, as the city environment could have a corrupting effect on the Irish and led them to spend their money on immoral vices such as alcohol and gambling. For those who could not afford the journey out of the city, Foster provided estimated wages for domestic servants in American and Canadian cities. For an unskilled domestic servant Foster estimated that women could earn “from four to eight dollars a month, besides their board,” and that “newly arrived emigrants must not expect four dollars, and good cooks may, in large house, after a time get as much as twelve dollars.”76

In a similar emigrant guide, Irish Emigrant Guide to the United States, the Reverend John O’Hanlon’s advised “In the case of a single female emigrant we would advise her to travel accompanied by a faithful male protector.”77 O’Hanlon also suggested that the “male protector,” immediately upon arrival in America “place her in charge of friends or relations.”78 He insisted that the “innocence and inexperience of Irish female emigrants have frequently exposed them to the practices

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of cheats and swindlers, not to speak of others whose acts may be directed to more
unworthy ends.”79

In his pamphlet, *The Irish in America*, John Francis Maguire also concerns himself with the safety of Irish women in American cities. Maguire argues that an Irish woman’s devotion to her faith is “her own best preservation against danger.”80 Despite his insistence in the strength of Irish women’s virtue, Maguire worries that “there are in some of the great cities circumstances not favorable to female virtue; and these are attended with occasional injury to the reputation of Irish girls,”81 and that “The panderers to the lust of great cities are constantly on the watch to drag into their dens of infamy the young, the innocent, and the unsuspecting.”82 Despite the warning of their countrymen many Irish women chose to emigrate alone and settle in American urban centers, where opportunities for employment were more readily available than in the interior or at home in Ireland.

The Irish were not the only ones concerned with the corrupting affect American urban centers could possibly have on Irish women. In her study *Slavery of Prostitution: a Plea for Emancipation*, American author Maude E. Miner places the blame on immigrant women and not the atmosphere of American cities. Miner argues that foreign women, of whom she includes the Irish, were particularly susceptible to exploitation due to their “ignorance of American customs, language, and agencies to which they might turn for help.”83 Miner holds a relatively negative view of

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immigrant women. While she admits that prior to coming to America "comparatively few had been leading a life of prostitution,"\textsuperscript{84} she also claims ""Many foreign girls in this group [prostitutes] had been immoral before coming to America,"\textsuperscript{85}

Despite such statements against the moral standing of immigrant women, of whom the Irish made up a sizable portion, crimes traditionally associated with women, such as prostitution and crimes against chastity, did not represent a large percentage of the crime that the Irish were found guilty of. In a government report on \textit{Immigration and Crime}, several tables were created ranking the numbers and percentages of women of various nationalities found guilty of prostitution in several different locations including Chicago, New York City, and Massachusetts. The following table represents prostitutions percentage of all the crimes committed by various nationalities found by the New York City magistrate and Chicago police arrests:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>New York City</th>
<th>Chicago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentages of prostitution for the Irish are lower than most of the other nationalities in both locations.\textsuperscript{86} The report also shows that "crimes of prostitution...compose a considerably larger percentage of the total offenses of the French than of those of any other nationality."\textsuperscript{87}

Similarly, in a table charting the "Relative frequency of offenses against chastity: Chicago police arrests, 1905 to 1908," the Irish only received 1.4 percent, while the average of the twenty nationalities represented equaled 3.685 percent.\textsuperscript{88} Of all the 'crimes against chastity,' the report "reveals the fact that those connected with disorderly houses are the most common."\textsuperscript{89} The report describes a "disorderly house," as "usually...a house of ill-intercourse, or a "stale-beer dive."\textsuperscript{90} The Irish received a similar low percentage in a table charting "Relative frequency of offenses against chastity: Massachusetts penal institutions, October 1, 1908, to September 30, 1909 (percent of all crimes)." Concerning those not born in the United States, crimes against chastity only accounted for 1.1 per cent of Irish crime; while the average amongst other nationalities was 3.0 percent.\textsuperscript{91}

Several authors argue that Irish women's faith and moral purity protected them from those who wished to lure them into immoral acts. If that is the case than it

\begin{table}[h]
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Nationality & 1907 & 1908 \\
\hline
Russian & .7 & 7.9 \\
Scottish & .1 & 1.4 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

can be assumed that Irish women’s morality and piety can account for the low percentages in crimes that are traditionally associated with women, such as prostitution and crimes against chastity. Many Irish women avoided the corruptive influence of American cities despite going against the suggestion of the emigration guides by making the journey alone.

Although they often made the move to America alone, Irish women commonly had help financing their journey from female relatives who had already settled in America. In George A. Birmingham’s *The Lighter Side of Irish Life*, Birmingham describes how the letters and photographs sent home by Irish women in America enticed those still in Ireland to emigrate by showcasing the wealth and finery available in America. Birmingham recreates a common exchange between female family members when he states:

Sarah goes and somehow gets a situation in New York, earning what sound like fabulous wages. So we learn from her first letter home. The next letter brings a photograph of Sarah, strangely transformed from the girl we knew. She has a large feathery hat on her head. She has a fur boa round her neck. Her dress is of a grandeur past imagining. On her wrist is a bracelet which looks as if it might be gold.92

Birmingham then describes how such letters and photographs convinced more female relatives to immigrate to America, as the descriptions of life in America seemed preferable to life in Ireland. Birmingham claims that after interest in immigration was peaked, the female relative in America would then finance the journey of their female relative still in Ireland:

the imagination of little Molly is fired. “Isn’t it better to be wearing grand hats and fine frocks than to be slobbering barefoot across a muddy yard with a tub of boiled turnips for the pigs?” The old people sigh and wonder, but Molly is sure. The next few letters from Sarah contain hints of a possible future for Molly if only Molly were in America. Then comes the fatal letter which contains a ticket for New York, paid for and ready for Molly to use. There are tears, excited preparations, the final heart-breaking farewell at the railway station when the emigrant train steams out.

Several authors argue that the working conditions for women in Ireland did not make it difficult for those writing home to convince their female relatives that conditions in America were preferable. In his pamphlet entitled *The Irish Emigration and the Tenure of Land in Ireland*, The Rt. Hon. Lord Dufferin, K.P., describes the conditions of laboring women in Ireland; conditions which George A. Birmingham argues women saw as less appealing than immigrating to America. Lord Dufferin claims that “Bad as is the condition of the agricultural labouring man, the condition of female employes on farms is even worse. Their wages are lower and they work as hard, in many cases, harder than men.” Lord Dufferin describes the manual labor common for female Irish farm laborers, claiming that they often “carry on their backs, in wicker baskets, manure to the fields; go to the bog and carry home turf.”

Along with the improved working conditions available in America, the availability of higher wages also made work in the United States more appealing to Irish women. In a “Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States,” the author quotes an earlier newspaper article, estimating that the

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wages of immigrant women working in the service industry "in New York, Boston, and Philly, is at least double what they could obtain in England, and four times the wages given in Scotland or Ireland." It was the availability of higher wages that allowed many Irish women to send money home, as well as finance the journey to America for both female and male relatives. In a government report entitled *Steerage Conditions: Importation and Harboring of Women for Immoral Purposes*, the author estimates the amount of money sent to Ireland by Irish immigrants in America for the year 1906:

The British postmaster-general estimated that in 1906 there was remitted through the post-office alone to Ireland, by Irish immigrants in the United States, £800,000 (approximately $4,000,000). Statistics from 8 out of 9 large American banking houses show £1,075,375 remitted to Ireland through them during the same year. Estimating remitted to Ireland through them during the same year. Estimating an equal share to the ninth, it would make about £1,200,000, or $6,000,000, sent to Ireland through banks. This makes $10,000,000 remitted by Irish immigrants during the year 1906 through the post-office and banks.

The common practice of financing the journeys of relatives to America, as well as close familial and ethnic ties within the Irish community in America, left Irish women open to a criticism commonly attributed to Irish men; that of "clannishness." In his *Letters on Irish Emigration*, Edward E. Hale argues that "The Clanish Spirit of the Irish, which has ruined them in one country, and does a great deal to ruin them in another, attracts them at once to persons to whom they have the slightest tie of

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consanguinity or neighborhood."98 Despite such allegations of clannishness, some described Irish women’s close ties within the Irish-American community in a positive light. Those who described Irish women’s involvement in the Irish-America community in a positive light, often focused on their involvement in their Catholic Parishes. John Francis Maguire, for instance, positively describes the financial contributions of Irish-American women to their local parishes when he states:

The Irish girl—whether in store, factory, hotel, or domestic employment—takes pride in renting a seat in her church, which she has so materially helped to erect; and in nearly every city in the Union she may be seen occupying her place in her pew, neat in person, modest in deportment, and collected in manner.99

The ability of Irish women in America to contribute financially to their parishes and to finance the journeys of family members to the United States was due, in part, to their willingness to take jobs in the service industry. Jobs in the service industry, particularly domestic service, offered a fairly decent wage and often included room and board. This allowed Irish women to save a portion of the money they earned. In her report “Mothers who Must Earn,” Katharine Anthony discusses how many women who left the service industry upon marriage found it difficult to earn enough money to cover the family necessities by working out of the home. Anthony states that “the cost of rent, food, and fuel can barely be met out of their present earnings, and savings cannot be thought of.”100 In light of this common occurrence, she argues that “some of the middle-aged Irish and German women recall

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their years at Service as a sort of golden age in their lives and declare that if they did not have children to provide for they would gladly return to that mode of life.”\textsuperscript{101}

Anthony’s inclusion of German women in her discussion of domestic servants proved not uncommon in the literature concerning the service industry, as several other ethnicities took part in the industry alongside the Irish. In her “Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States,” Helen L. Sumner argues that the female Irish experience and participation in the service industry followed a common pattern to most immigrant groups; stating that “new immigrants have always furnished the largest portion of servants. At first, the great mass of these immigrants were English and Scotch then Irish, later Germans, and still later Scandinavians.”\textsuperscript{102}

The entrance of immigrant groups into the American workforce often received criticism from some native born Americans who argued that immigrant labor drives down wages. Irish domestic servants did not escape from such criticisms. Despite the fact that they did not appear to take jobs from native-born women as native-born women did not make up a sizable proportion of the women involved in the service industry. In her book \textit{The Servant Girl Question}, Harriet Prescott Spofford reiterates earlier sentiments that “whatever labor, to which mere strength with little skill will suffice, is to be done, will be done not at the English price, but at an approximation to the Irish price.”\textsuperscript{103}

The service industry employed a sizable percent of women in America, in her study entitled “Immigration as a Source of Supply for Domestic Workers,” Mary Gove Smith discusses the number of women involved in the service industry in Boston according to the 1895 Massachusetts Census. Smith also claims that the numbers present in Boston reflect national trends. According to Smith “the total number of females then engaged in domestic service in private families in the city of Boston was 16,694. Of these, 3,487 were native-born, and 13,207 were foreign born...about 80 per cent.” Smith argues that these numbers were not due to a lack of native-born women in the workforce, but the result of native-born women actively avoiding work in the service industry. Smith describes the phenomenon that stigmatized service work in America. “The spirit of democracy, of freedom, is consciously or unconsciously in the heart of the American-born, and to be a servant is to be peculiarly bound to the will of another.”

In a government report entitled *Occupations of the first and second generations of immigrants in the United States; Fecundity of immigrant women*, the author supplies national numbers for women involved in the service industry, based on the federal census of 1900. The report claims that:

domestic service still represents numerically the leading occupation for this sex, as is indicated by the fact that at the census of 1900 the number of women and girls reported as servants far exceeded the number reported in any other occupation and comprised, in fact, nearly one-fourth (24.1 per cent) of the total number reported in all occupations.

In regards to the Irish, the report states that “With the exception of the Swedes, there is no class of immigrant working women that includes so large a proportion of servants as the Irish, 54 per cent of the total number being reported in this occupation.”

The common practice of immigrant women taking part in domestic service often resulted in immigrant women being blamed for any problem that arose within the industry. Harriet Spofford argues that “It is not upon nationality nor upon religion that the trouble hinges altogether,” adding “though these things have very much to do with it.” Spofford compares several ethnicities, finding fault in nearly all of them; suggesting for example that an employer “may think, for instance, that nothing could be worse than your Irish girl, till you get an African one.” Springer also faults the ignorance of Swedish women, the “sprightliness of the French maid,” which she refers to as “aggravating in its own way,” and argues that “the stolidity of the German makes you long for the blarneying tongue of Bridget once again.”

Despite the inclusion of other ethnic and racial groups in the discussion of domestic servants, a common stereotype of the “Irish maid,” or “Bridget,” emerged in much of the household literature of the time, along with popular entertainment such as cartoons, joke-books, and vaudeville performances. The most common complaint

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against Irish women involved in domestic service, a complaint also commonly made against other female immigrant groups involved in service, was their lack of training and knowledge of how American households and kitchens were expected to run. These complaints often resulted from class and ethnic differences between the employer and the employee. In her household manual *Vocations: Homemaking Volume II*, Marion Harland argues that this disconnect between employer and employee is due in part to the fact that American life and "democratic institutions have removed the superincumbent pressure which in the Old World confines the servants to a regular orbit."\(^{112}\)

Harland further argues that immigrant women are ignorant of American culture and have unrealistic expectations of life in the United States. "They [immigrant women] come here feeling that this is somehow a land of liberty, and with very dim and confused notions of what liberty is."\(^{113}\) Reiterating common stereotypes of ignorant and emotional Irish women, Harland expresses surprise that even though most domestic servants are "part of the raw, untrained Irish peasantry,"\(^{114}\) and that "with all the unreasoning heats and prejudices of the Celtic blood, all the necessary ignorance and rawness, there should be the measure of comfort and success there is in our domestic arrangements."\(^{115}\) Despite her claim that most domestic arrangements end in success, Harland still finds fault in female Irish domestics, claiming that "The quality of any work is ranked largely according to the quality of the person that

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performs it. When Irish girls were introduced into the household service they carried the service down with them."¹¹⁶

Along with complaints of her lack of knowledge concerning American household practices, native-born employees often complained that Irish women were bossy, loud, rude, temperamental, gossipy, lazy, dirty, ignorant, prone to theft, clannish, fiercely loyal to her homeland and her religion, and tended to cause trouble not only between fellow employees but often with their employers as well. Harriet Prescott Spofford in her book *The Servant Girl Question*, describes an Irish domestic servant at her worst:

As Bridget rules the roast in the kitchen, so she rules the toast at the table, and gives tone to conversation in the parlor. Nor is the trouble confined to the region above the stairs. Bridget and Nora in their turn discuss the situation, gossip over the personalities of the house, and establish conspiracies between themselves for extorting this advantage and doing away with that exertion.¹¹⁷

Marion Harland, in *Vocations: Homemaking Volume II*, describes the actions of female Irish domestic servants in a similar way when she recounts the hiring of an Irish woman into a New England home:

A lady living in one of our obscure New England towns, where there were no servants to be hired, at last, by sending to a distant city, succeeded in procuring a raw Irish maid-of-all-work, a creature of immense bone and muscle, but of heavy, unawakened brain. In one fortnight she established such a reign of Chaos and old Night in the Kitchen and through the house, that her mistress, a delicate woman, encumbered with the care of young children, began seriously to think that she made more work each day than she performed, and dismissed her.¹¹⁸

Harland mentions the Americanization of the Irish present at the time of her publication, but still refers to them as a separate race and makes a point to remind readers how Ireland's "first ignorant representatives appeared to our rigid New England parents. Alien in thought, habits, and religion, almost in speech."\textsuperscript{119} She further claims that "the early Irish immigrants occupied a position at the North almost as distinct as that of the colored people at the South, and 'Paddy' had somewhat the same meaning as nigger."\textsuperscript{120} Although Harland states that "The Irish race has become so assimilated with our own,"\textsuperscript{121} she still refers to the Irish as a separate and distinct race and refers to female Irish domestic servants in such negative and dehumanizing ways as "a creature of immense bone and muscle, but of heavy, unawakened brain."\textsuperscript{122}

Such complaints and descriptions of the Irish domestic servant, or "Bridget," found their way into popular entertainment such as joke-books and vaudeville performances. In \textit{The New Irish Joke Book: Compromising a Selected Collection of the Best and Latest Irish Jokes, Anecdotes, Funny Sayings, Stories, Monologues, Etc.}, most of the jokes and anecdotes concerning women centered around the ignorance of Irish domestic servants. Along with the common stereo-type of an ignorant Irish maid, the joke-books extremely exaggerated the dialects of the Irish women they described. The following joke is similar to several others that describe female Irish domestic servants as ignorant to customs of an American household and kitchen:

\textsuperscript{119} Marion Harland. \textit{Vocations: Homemaking Volume II}, Hall and Locke Company, Boston (1911): 158.
\textsuperscript{120} Marion Harland. \textit{Vocations: Homemaking Volume II}, Hall and Locke Company, Boston (1911): 158.
\textsuperscript{121} Marion Harland. \textit{Vocations: Homemaking Volume II}, Hall and Locke Company, Boston (1911): 158.
MISTRESS: Bridget, clean out the stove, and be sure to sift the ashes. (A few hours later.) Why, Bridget, what are you doing with that flour sieve?

BIDGET: Shure, ma’am, you tould me to sift the ashes, but devil a sift can Oi git out of this thing.\textsuperscript{123}

The New Irish Joke Book also pokes fun at the stereotype that female Irish domestic servants commonly invited friends and family members into their employers’ homes:

MRS. NEWLIWED (Entering the kitchen, where the “help” is entertaining two of her male friends.)—Mary, is it usual for girls to receive as much company as you do, in the kitchen?

MISS RAFFERTY—No, mum. Leastways, none of the young leddies of my acquaintance are as much favored as I am.\textsuperscript{124}

LADY—Bridget, I want you to run down to the store and order some cakes; I expect company to-night.

BRIDGET—Shure, ma’am, Oi wuz jist comin’ to tell you to run down and order some, for Oi’im expictin’ company mesilf to-night.\textsuperscript{125}

Similar representations of female domestic servants appear in vaudeville stage routines and humorist articles published in popular magazines and newspapers. In “Biddy’s Trials Among the Yankees,” originally published in Harpers Bazaar, for example, the unidentified author, under the guise of an Irish domestic servant writing to a female acquaintance in Ireland, describes the constant misunderstandings between the mistress of the house and herself as a result of the Irish woman’s ignorance of American household appliances and her difficulty in understanding an American accent. The author writes in a highly exaggerated Irish dialect and

\textsuperscript{123} New Irish Joke Book: Compromising a Selected Collection of the Best and Latest Irish Jokes, Anecdotes, Funny Sayings, Stories, Monologue, etc. I. & M. Ottenheimer, Baltimore (c. 1907): 15.

\textsuperscript{124} New Irish Joke Book: Compromising a Selected Collection of the Best and Latest Irish Jokes, Anecdotes, Funny Sayings, Stories, Monologue, etc. I. & M. Ottenheimer, Baltimore (c. 1907): 34.

\textsuperscript{125} New Irish Joke Book: Compromising a Selected Collection of the Best and Latest Irish Jokes, Anecdotes, Funny Sayings, Stories, Monologue, etc. I. & M. Ottenheimer, Baltimore (c. 1907): 75.
represents the Irish domestic servant as an ignorant girl from the country who constantly makes excuses for her ignorance and places the blame on her employee.\textsuperscript{126}

The author starts the letter by stating “Faith! Ann Holigan, an’ I don’t deny that these Amerykans has plinty o’ beautiful convanyences to work wid in their kitchens,”\textsuperscript{127} perpetuating the stereotype of an ignorant Irish peasant by adding “more’niver the likes cud be found in the whole of ould Ireland, where we was usen to bake the brid and cook the petaties all in the same iron pot.”\textsuperscript{128} The author makes the first excuse in the opening paragraph by insisting “shure, along wid so many bewilderin’ things, it was be ixpicted that a girl wud make a mishtake sometimes.”\textsuperscript{129}

Throughout the piece the author describes the confusion over the American dialect, for instance when the Irish domestic servant exclaims:

   What wud ye think, Ann Hooligan, of bein’ axed the firsht day as ye lived at a place if ye cud pail (provincialism for milk)/ the k-e-o-w! Fur that’s the outlandish way thim paple has o’ sayin’ cow. Of course it’s not fur the like o’ me to be braggin’, but I can pale petaties an’ apples wid the bisht o’ thim. But to take the palin’ off of a cow! Howly St. Patrick! Did they take me for a bootcher?\textsuperscript{130}

Mary M. Dodge’s “Miss Maloney on the Chinese Question,” also written under the guise of an Irish domestic servant writing to a female acquaintance in Ireland about their complaints concerning their job and more specifically their employee. Unlike “Biddy’s Trials among the Yankees,” “Miss Maloney on the

\textsuperscript{126} Anonymous. “Biddy’s Trials Among the Yankees,” in Choice dialect and vaudeville stage jokes :containing side splitting stories, jokes, gags, readings and recitations in German, Irish, Scotch, French, Chinese, Negro and other dialects, as told by such well known humorists as Ezra Kendall, Geo. Thatcher, Lew Dockstader, Rogers Bros., Weber and Fields, Joe Welsh, Marshall P. Wilder, J.W. Ransom and others. F.J. Drake, Chicago (c. 1902): 53-58.
\textsuperscript{127} Anonymous. “Biddy’s Trials Among the Yankees,” 53.
\textsuperscript{128} Anonymous. “Biddy’s Trials Among the Yankees,” 53.
\textsuperscript{129} Anonymous. “Biddy’s Trials Among the Yankees,” 53.
\textsuperscript{130} Anonymous. “Biddy’s Trials Among the Yankees,” 53-54.
Chinese Question,” deals with the stereo-types concerning female Irish domestic servants’ relationship with fellow servants and other ethnicities as well as their relationship with their employee. Mary A. Dodge describes the faults of Miss Maloney through her training of a new, male, Chinese servant. The new male servant copies Miss Maloney’s actions exactly, including her bad habits, which eventually leads to Miss Maloney loosing her job. Similarly to the woman in “Biddy’s Trials among the Yankees,” Miss Maloney is constantly making excuses and blames her faults on her employee and the new Chinese servant.131

Miss Maloney also upholds the stereotype of the Irish as clannish, fiercely loyal to their religion and consequently seen as unwilling to associate and accept people outside their religion and ethnicity. Miss Maloney has harsh words for several other ethnicities within the piece, in her description of French waiters she claims that they “wid their paper collars and brass rings on their fingers, isn’t company for no gurril brought up dacint and honest.”132 Miss Maloney’s description of the new Chinese servant is even harsher:

Holy fathers! May I niver brathe another breath, but there stud a rale haythen Chineser a-grinnin’ like he’d just come off a tay-box. If you’ll belave me, the crytture was that yellor it ‘ud sicken you to see him; and sorra stitch was on him but a black night-gown over his trowsers, and the front of his head shaved claner nor a copper biler, and a black tail a-hangin’ down from behind, wid his two feet stook into the heathenesest shoes you ever set eyes on.133

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132 Mary A. Dodge. “Miss Maloney and the Chinese Question,” 38.
133 Mary A. Dodge. “Miss Maloney and the Chinese Question,” 39.
Miss Maloney later describes how, by imitating her actions, the Chinese servant got her in trouble with her employee. Miss Maloney describes how she “now and then take out a sup o’ sugar, or flour, or tay, an’ wrap it in paper and put it in me bit of a box tucked under the ironin’ blanket;” after receiving the weekly grocery delivery, claiming this theft “cuddent be bodderin’ any one.” Later on the new Chinese servant copied the same action in front of their employee, showing her the box in which Miss Maloney had hidden what she stole. Miss Maloney continues to blame the Chinese servant, despite the evidence:

He’s a haythin nager,” says I. “I’ve found you out,” says she. “I’ll arrist him,” says I. “It’s you ought to be arrested,” says she. “You won’t,” says I. “I will,” says she; and so it went till she gave me such a sass as I cuddent take from no lady, an’ I give her warnin’ an’ left that instant, an’ she a-pointin’ to the doore.136

The morality of Irish women often came into question in the stereotype of Bridget as well. Mistresses often accused their domestic help of having inappropriate relationships with their husbands, other male relatives, or other male servants. The New Irish Joke Book has multiple examples of Irish maids acting inappropriately with their employee’s husband. This behavior did not always suggest blatant immorality on the part of the Irish woman, but reiterated the stereotype of an ignorant maid, who was easily taken advantage of by the head of the household:

WIFE—Bridget, what was that noise in the dining room about?
BRIDGET—Shure, ma’am, your husband wuz hugging me, and said he loved me so he felt like hugging me all day. Shure, ma’am, that’s all.137

136 Mary A. Dodge. “Miss Maloney and the Chinese Question,” 40.
137 New Irish Joke Book: Compromising a Selected Collection of the Best and Latest Irish Jokes, Anecdotes, Funny Sayings, Stories, Monologue, etc. I. & M. Ottenheimer, Baltimore (c. 1907): 14
Immoral representations of foreign-born domestic servants appeared in literature of the time as well. In her study of prostitution for example, Maude E. Miner claims that a “large percentage of young women in prostitution…come from domestic service and factory work.”¹³⁸ She does not, however, place all of the blame on the immorality of immigrant women, but, similarly to descriptions in popular literature, Miner describes foreign-born women as ignorant and easily corrupted. Miner suggests these women may have “been seduced by the husband or son of the family, butler chauffer, or other employee.”¹³⁹

Miner further argues that domestic service in itself did not lead to immoral acts, but that it’s lack of respectability and desirability among native-born women and certain immigrant groups; meant that the women who chose to enter into domestic service had no other option and were more susceptible to corruption. Miner gives a rather harsh description of the types of women who took jobs in domestic service; upholding the common negative stereotype of domestic servants, of whom the Irish made up a sizable percentage. Miner describes these women as:

ignorant, low grade, mentally deficient girls, handicapped both by heredity and environment. Girls released from orphan asylums and different institutions, immigrants who cannot secure other work, and girls physically or mentally handicapped.¹⁴⁰

Although much of the literature and popular stereotypes concerning Irish domestic servants placed all the negative attributes on the Irish women alone, many authors placed equal blame on the American employer. In her book *The Servant Question*, Harriet Prescott Spofford, for example, argues that female domestic servants often placed the blame of failed work relationships on their female employer. Spofford claims that many domestic servants had a very negative view of their mistress, claiming:

> They think you are an upstart, for your grandmother was perhaps a shoemaker’s wife, and if you were over-seas you would be a shoemaker’s wife too...to them you have more faults than anybody else in the world,—so many, indeed, that they recur almost fondly to the recollection of the first mistress, whom at the time they lived with her they held to be an ogress...they despise your ignorance, and are sure that you would starve but for them; they think you are lazy, airy, exacting, selfish, tyrannical, of a different race, of a different religion, while they are of an ancient race and of the true religion.\(^{141}\)

Although Spofford supplies a negative description of the American female employer, it is done so through the assumed viewpoint of an Irish domestic servant. Even in this description Spofford makes her disdain for Irish domestic servants evident, and upholds the common stereotype of “Bridget,” when she goes on to say “there would be some wrong with the mistress too, when a creature so unlearned and so unwise [an Irish domestic servant] can afford to look down upon her.”\(^{142}\)

Other authors similarly distributed the blame of failed domestic relationships between both the Irish domestic servant and her employer. George A. Birmingham, in his book *The Lighter Side of Irish Life* admits that Irish domestic servants are not


accustomed to the fixed routines of American households, but insists “An Irish servant is of all people in the world the most anxious to please, and, when possible, to do exactly as she is told even when the commands laid on her are entirely unreasonable.” As an Irishman, Birmingham unsurprisingly suggests change on the part of the employer and not the Irish domestic servant to create a positive working relationship. He advises employers to adjust to Irish cultural norms, and insists that although many employers “find it difficult to deal with Irish servants. In the end, if they are intelligent they do come to understand.” Birmingham believed that adjustments by employers were worth the effort as he argued against the negative stereotype of “Bridget,” and touted the positive characteristics of Irish domestic servants.

Household guides also offered advice for dealing with the hiring and management of domestic servants. In a book entitled *The Domestic Blunders of Women*, the author, who simply refers to himself as “A Mere Man,” discusses the relationship between the female Mistress and her female servants, as well as the daily running of an American household. The author places blame on both women, claiming that gender is at fault in failed household business arrangements, as women are incapable of managing anyone and therefore are incapable of managing their own homes. The author argues that a “Woman’s mission is to always put the blame on someone else. Eve began it. She put the blame on the serpent, and her daughters have since blamed the serpent on the hearth—the servant.” The author however, while

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admitting that some of the fault lies with the servant, places most of the blame on women's inability to manage others. 146

The author states "We can get rid of our servants, but not of our wives and daughters, who, I candidly believe, are really the most to blame,"147 citing the "deplorable state of the servant market,"148 as evidence of women's mismanagement of their female servants. The author argues further "Men manage shop-girls, waitresses, factory girls, and all sorts of women engaged in their business; but men cannot stop at home to manage servants, and if they could, they could not prevent their wives and daughters from interfering."149 The author's solution to the servant problem is to fire all female servants, replace them with male servants, and place the management of the servants under the control of the father or husband. He claims that "Men-servants will cost a little more, but one man can do two women's work,"150 and suggests that "Chinamen make capital servants; so do Hindoos."151

Most of the household literature of the time did not go to such extremes as The Domestic Blunders of Women, most literature instead suggested that the Mistress of the house train and educate her domestic servants to adhere to the common practices of an American middle or upper-class home. In her household guide entitled The Law of a Household, Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher offers suggestions for America women looking to hire household servants. Beecher outlines hiring criteria, such as making sure you "obtain servants from some well-known agency, or by advertising.

147 A Mere Man. The Domestic Blunders of Women, Funk & Wagnalls, New York (1900), 45.
Demand credentials, and telephone last position if possible,”152 and “Have them understand that they are entering into a strict business arrangement, and that they must give full equivalent for money received.”153

Beyond the practical criteria of checking future employees credentials, Beecher makes further addendums concerning the personal characteristics and beliefs of possible domestic servants when she advises employers to “ask to what religious denomination they [domestic servant applicants] belong.”154 Such criteria suggests that Beecher believed women of certain religious backgrounds were not ideal for domestic service jobs in American homes. Along with hiring criteria, Beecher also includes guidelines for the firing of domestic servants. The reasons that she deemed acceptable to result in the firing of a domestic servant focused on disrupting behaviors on the part of the domestic servant, such as “a servant who gossips or talks in a loud voice in the house is liable to dismissal.”155 Beecher also insisted that “servants are required to bathe often, to air their clothes, and keep their closets and bureaus neat and orderly.”156

Such rules and guidelines for expulsion, along with the question of religious affiliation, created a description of a type of woman least suited to domestic service in an American home. This negative image closely mirrored the negative stereotype of “Bridget,” the Irish domestic servant. Despite this correlation high numbers of Irish women did gain employment in domestic service, regardless of the stereotype. This discrepancy between the stereotype and the hiring of Irish women into American

households, may lead one to believe that the reality of female Irish domestic servants
did not closely resemble the description and popular representation of “Bridget.”

Similar to Beecher’s suggestions concerning the control of the personal
appearance and hygiene of one’s servants, several authors also set down guidelines
for employers after the hiring of female servants. In her household guide Putnam’s
Handbook of Etiquette, for example, Helen Lefferts Roberts reminds her readers “it is
highly important for the head of any domestic establishment to remember that by her
servants, their appearance and demeanor, her own temperament and capacities are
quickly estimated.”157 She reiterates the importance of polite servants and reminds her
readers that, because of their background, servants may not have the same customs as
them and that “it consequently behooves a mistress to teach courteous customs to her
employees, who may fail to practice them more through ignorance of their existence
than through any want of good will or good temper.”158 Manners and etiquette alone
did not account for all that some suggested to teach one’s servants. As early as 1852,
in his Letters on Irish Emigration, Edward E. Hale argued that “She who teaches a
servant girl to read does a great deal.”159

Roberts also strongly suggests that the Mistress of the house adhere to the
same manners and etiquette that she requires from her servants and that if she acts
appropriately she can mold new servants to act how she sees fit. Roberts argues that it
is important for a Mistress to set a good example for her servants, and treat them with

the type of respect she wishes to receive in return. Roberts states that a good Mistress does not:

- correct their maids sharply in the presence of strangers, or even of other members of the household; they do not discuss one servant with another, or enter into heated arguments, joke familiarly, or indulge in sarcasm at the expense of, and in the presence of, their domestics. Servants of every grade respect the employer who keeps her temper and dignity and assumes no familiarities. They do not very highly esteem the mistress who is either quarrelsome and sharply fault-finding, or who, on the other hand, is obviously afraid to correct and exact regular and careful fulfillment of their duties. 160

Roberts is not alone in her sentiments towards the important role a Mistress must play in teaching her new domestic servants. Harriet Prescott Spofford argues that an employer has no right to complain about a newly arrived immigrant’s lack of knowledge in American household practices. She claims that “we have, indeed no right to expect perfection from rude and imperfect materials,” 161 (meaning Irish immigrant women) and likens a female Irish immigrant to clay that needs to be “molded,” by the expert hand of her new employer. Spofford insists that “she is completely ready to be moulded by our wish,” and argues that “if we do not model our clay to the thing we want-if after years of life with us the girl is not the desirable handmaiden of our house...can it be that she herself is more responsible for the fact than we who had such power to shape her ends?” 162

Spofford’s description of female Irish immigrants as adaptable commonly occurs in the literature concerning Irish women; most authors list it as an admirable or

positive quality of Irish women. This insistence on the adaptability of Irish women stands in sharp contrast to the popular stereotype of an ignorant Irish domestic servant, set in her ways and unable to function successfully in American homes. Spofford herself, after listing their common faults, even refers to Irish women as “fresh, emotional, strong, willing, [and] full of energy.”163 Similar to Spofford, many authors, when listing the positive aspect of Irish immigrant women, do so in regards to how these attributes make them good or ideal household servants.

In her report on Immigration as a Source of Supply for Domestic Workers, for example, Mary Gove Smith argues that “The Irish of Celtic stock, are used to work, and are more adaptable to housework than most of the foreign women.”164 Smith describes how these women and girls often came from small farms and that “their life has made them, as a rule, strong in endurance, and they are naturally of a quick wit.”165 Smith also insists that Irish women can easily adapt to the customs of an American household, claiming that “the majority quickly adapt themselves to the new methods, and are soon fairly competent cooks, waitresses, or laundresses.”166

In his work The Irish in America, John Francis Maguire repeatedly insists that an Irish woman’s adherence to her faith is the cornerstone for all of her other admirable qualities; most notable her purity and trustworthiness. Maguire argues that:

In domestic service her merit is fully recognized. Once satisfied of the genuineness of her character, an American family will trust in her implicitly;


and not only is there no locking up against her, but everything is left in her charge. Occasionally she may be hot-tempered, difficult to be managed, perhaps a little ‘turbulent’--- especially when her country is sneered at, or her faith is wantonly ridiculed; but she is cheerful and laborious, virtuous and faithful. ¹⁶⁷

Maguire insists that “the most unlimited trust is placed in the Irish girl,”¹⁶⁸ and reminds his readers that “There are thousands of houses in the United States in which everything is left to her charge and under her control.”¹⁶⁹ Arguing that “the more devoted she is to the practices of her religion, the more is she respected and confided in by those with whom she lives.”¹⁷⁰ Mary Gove Smith makes similar arguments in the support of the trustworthiness and moral purity of Irish women when she states “The Irish are, as a rule, honest, among the most moral of all nationalities, and agencies agree in pronouncing them excellent household workers.”¹⁷¹

The study of contemporary literature and data concerning the involvement of Irish women in the American domestic service industry results in conflicting views of a female Irish-American identity. The high numbers of first-generation Irish women involved in domestic service led to their association with the negative female Irish stereotype “Bridget,” whose emergences coincided with the height of Irish involvement in domestic service. Bridget encompassed all of the negative characteristics that middle and upper-class American women attributed to the worst domestic servant; while also including several negative characteristics often associated specifically with the Irish.

Despite the prevalence of the negative stereotype of "Bridget," in popular entertainment of the time, such as joke books and vaudeville acts, positive descriptions of Irish domestic servants in contemporary literature suggests a more complex and positive view of Irish domestic servants and their involvement in the relationship between native-born mistress and her servant. These positive descriptions of Irish domestic servants often directly oppose the negative characteristics represented by the common stereotype. In household literature were often described as honest, trustworthy, morally pure, and willing and able to learn. These attributes stood in contrast to the negative descriptions of 'Bridget,' as prone to theft, a gossip, easily susceptible to corruption, and most commonly, ignorant.

Hard data from the time tends to uphold the more positive descriptions of Irish domestic servants, and not the negative image portrayed by 'Bridget.' The high number of Irish women involved in the industry in itself speaks to a certain level of trust native-born Americans must have had in Irish women to offer them employment inside their homes. Even though Irish women often did not have the knowledge or experience to immediately understand American customs or household management, native-born women must have believed that Irish women had the capability to learn these customs or they would not have hired them in such large numbers.

Along with the data concerning the number of women involved in domestic service, numbers concerning crimes traditionally associated with women such as prostitution and crimes against chastity also upheld a more positive view of Irish women in America. Despite the common description of Irish women in popular culture as easily corruptible, the data suggests that prostitution and crimes against
chastity did not account for a large percentage of the total number of crimes committed by the Irish. Positive descriptions of Irish women persevering against immoral influences appeared not only in literature concerning domestic servants and in data concerning crime, but also in discussions of Irish women in other areas of the American workforce. In the service industry outside of private homes, for example, Irish women often found employment in hotels and restaurants.\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{172} L.S. Chumley. \textit{Hotel, Restaurant, and Domestic Workers}, "I.W.W. Publishing, Chicago (c.1913).
Chapter Three: Part One:

"Through the Ordeal of These Fiery Furnaces of Temptation
She Passes Unscathed:" First Generation Irish Women Employed
Outside of Domestic Service; Moving Away From the Stereotype of
'‘Bridget.'

L.S. Chumley, in an investigation made by the Juvenile Protective Association
in Chicago circa 1913, stated that "In the first-class hotels the chambermaids were
Irish and German, and in most of the low-class hotels they were colored or Americans
of the 'down and out' type."173 The predominance of Irish women as chambermaids
in first-class hotels speaks well of their character and work-ethic as "Chambermaids
and expert ironers are paid the largest salaries,"174 of all female hotel workers. In a
first-class hotel chambermaids could earn $16.00-$18.00 a month including room and
board, and without room and board $20.00-$30.00 a month.175

Despite occupying the highest paid position in first-class hotels the report also
surmised that in many hotels "the hotel managers trouble themselves very little about
the food and sleeping accommodations provided for their employees,"176 and that
these hotels often violated ordinances from the State Board of Health concerning the

size of their employee's living space and the over-crowding of rooms. Along with the poor living conditions, some argued that employment in a hotel, even in some first-class hotels, placed innocent women in danger of moral corruption.

In *Slavery of Prostitution: a Plea for Emancipation*, a report on prostitution in New York City, Maude E Miner argues that the hotel environment can lead towards immorality and in some cases prostitution. She claims that:

In many hotels and restaurants, girls are subjected to great temptations. As chambermaids and hall maids, they are on duty at all hours of day and night, and are associated with men and women who often take it for granted that they are immoral.

L. S. Chumley gives an example of such an occurrence in an interview with a female hotel worker, who "said that she knew for a positive fact that some of the chambermaids had been led into immorality by guests of the hotel."

Several authors writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries claim their morality and religious practices protected Irish women from the corrupting factors present in the hotel industry; this made them particularly desirable to employers. John Francis Maguire, for example, argues:

In the hotels of America the Irish girl is admittedly indispensable. Through the ordeal of these fiery furnaces of temptation she passes unscathed. There, where honesty and good conduct are most essential, she is found equal to the test, while in cheerful willing industry none can surpass her. Such is the testimony which is readily borne to the Irish girl in every State of the Union.

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Such statements stand in contrast to the popular description of “Bridget,” as an ignorant and easily corrupted woman.

The fear of the corruption of women involved in the American workforce extended beyond the hotel industry. As Maguire insisted “the panderers to the lust of great cities are constantly on the watch to drag into their dens of infamy the young, the innocent, and the unsuspecting.” The manufacturing industry, often located in urban centers, also represented a possible location for the corruption of young immigrant women. According to a government report entitled *Occupations of the first and second generations of immigrants in the United States*, based on the 1900 federal census, “Manufacturing and mechanical pursuits,” made up the second highest percentage of employment of female Irish immigrants; with the service industry holding the largest percentage.

The report claims that 49,317 first generation Irish women held employment in manufacturing, which equaled 20.1 per cent of all first generation Irish women employed in the United States. The highest percentages of Irish women held employment in the needle trades, as textile mill operators, and dressmakers; making up 7.5, 7.4, and 4.7 percent of all employed Irish women. Despite the high number of Irish women involved in manufacturing, an area of employment that many argued had immoral effects on women, it was often said that Irish women had moral defenses against such immoral factors. In a study entitled *The Economic Position of Women*, the author states that “Taken as a whole, it cannot be said that the Irish girl’s entrance

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into industry has corrupted her as a woman."\textsuperscript{184} He further argues that despite the fact that she may find herself "surrounded by temptation, keenly enjoying pleasure, the Irish girl yet possesses that combination of reserve, good taste and self-possession that protects her more surely than any mere parental inhibition."\textsuperscript{185}

This study also represents Irish women's religious beliefs and practices as a positive personal attribute in the workplace. The author of the study describes a typical Irish woman as "a religious girl, a devoted Catholic."\textsuperscript{186} As a devoted Catholic the author claims that an Irish woman has "ever before her...a picture of the ideal woman, Mary Mother of God."\textsuperscript{187} Along with the ever present good example of Mary, he argues that the daily adherence to Catholic practices gives Irish women an added defense against corruption, when he states:

\begin{quote}
[Hail Mary]...is said daily by thousands of Irish girls before they go to work and before they lie down to sleep. Mechanical as this may often be, it is a mental habit as strong as any physical habit. And habits serve as a prop to the will when stress comes.\textsuperscript{188}
\end{quote}

As to the reasons behind the low level of corruption among female Irish workers in the industrial sector, the study concludes "Whatever the reason—Catholic training, native chastity, an inborn sense of restraint and good taste, or all these together, Irish

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{188} Anonymous. \textit{The Economic Position of Women}, The Academy of Political Science, Colombia University, New York (1910): 84.
\end{footnotes}
girls form but a small element of the group of women workers in danger of corruption."¹⁸⁹

Maude E. Miner, in her study on prostitution in New York City, also sites faith and religion as an important factor in protecting young women against immorality. While not speaking specifically of the Irish, or of a particular faith, Miner does argue that "the religious element is essential in the growth of character."¹⁹⁰ She argues further for the protective power of religious practice, believing that it is the most important personal attribute in the fight against immorality, stating that "nothing else has such power to subdue rebellious impulses, to turn imagination into productive channels, to full life with splendid interests, to give to it deep meaning. Nothing else reaches beyond the physical and the intellectual to the very soul, and gives the highest ideals of service and love."¹⁹¹

Although many often described Irish women as moral, some saw this morality as a learned attribute from pious American born women. In her report on the actions of the American Female Guardian Society, entitled "Woman’s Work among the Lowly," Sarah R.I. Bennett describes an encounter with a young Irish woman, at first claiming "there is nothing in her appearance to render her interesting. Uncouth in dress, face and manner, she gives, at first glance, indication of no higher moral culture than the greenest Irish girl might do, just landed, homeless and friendless in

our streets." After this initial impression she states that "to our surprise, fuller inquiry elicits tokens of a soul not wholly without some traits of moral life."193

She further describes how the young woman had learned passages of Scripture from an American woman in an Industrial school, and that she remembered and often repeated the Scripture to herself and others. Bennett uses this as evidence that the efforts of the American Female Guardian Society "was not in vain,"194 and places a great deal of importance on teaching young woman Christian values and the benefits of being a member of an organized religion. Maude E. Miner mirrors such sentiments, arguing that "In supplying this religious motive, we should look to the church for more vital spiritual teaching. It should be the greatest source of inspiration to the youth of the country and should make religion a more important factor in daily living."195 Concerning the Irish, Bennett argues that Irish women are capable of learning morality and religious practice, stating that the Society women's teachings were able to take hold with the young woman because "they seemed to have been seed sown in good soil."196

Such statements reiterated a common description of Irish women as capable of adapting to American culture, due in part to their positions of employment close to American families; even employed within their homes. The high level of adaptability on the part of Irish women goes against the popular stereotype of ignorant maids

incapable of learning the ways of an American household. John Francis Maguire describes the occurrence of adaptability and strong moral center when he states:

The poor Irish emigrant girl may possibly be rude, undisciplined, awkward—just arrived in a strange land, with all the rugged simplicity of her peasant’s training, but she is good and honest. Nor, as she rapidly acquires the refinement inseparable from an improved condition of life, and daily association with people of cultivated manners, does she catch the contagion of the vices of the great centers of wealth and luxury.  

Maguire further insists that Irish women maintain a sense of morality, regardless of their place in society, “Whatever her position, and it is principally amongst the humble walks of life the mass of the Irish are still to be found,—she maintains this one noble characteristic—purity.”

Irish women’s ability to quickly adapt to American culture led some to seek employment outside of household domestic service; a job traditionally seen as immigrant work and often seen as a last resort for American born women. As an alternative to household service, many Irish women took jobs in commercial laundries. According to the government report Occupations of the First and Second Generations of Immigrants in the United States, based on the 1900 federal census, laundry work accounted for 6.5 per cent of all employed first generation Irish women, or 15,925 women in total. Behind servants and waitresses, which made up 54 percent of the first generation female Irish workforce, and textile mill operators (7.4 percent), jobs in the laundry industry accounted for the third largest employer of first generation Irish females in America.

Although the previous report classified laundry work under the larger grouping of "domestic and personal service," and did not differentiate between commercial laundries and individuals taking in laundry in their own homes, another government report published the following year entitled *Report on Condition of Women and Child Wage Earners in the United States: Employment of Women in Laundries*, did differentiate between hand and mechanical laundries. The report, which looks at the conditions of laundries in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn, generally considers laundries factories and not part of individual service. In New York State for example, factory inspection laws state that "A shop, room, or building where one or more persons are employed in doing public laundry work by way of trade or for purposes of gain is a factory within the meaning of this chapter in the same manner as any other factory."200

The report argues that often those who did take laundry into their homes only did the sorting there and then sent the clothes to the larger commercial laundries to finish the job.201 The majority of the report centers on the descriptions of 539 women employed in the laundry industry. The interviews were conducted and recorded by government appointed physicians and covered a variety of topics including age, marital status, country of origin, living conditions, number of children, general health, and personal thoughts or complaints concerning work in a laundry. Of the 539 women interviewed the Irish make up a sizable portion, coming in second in numbers only

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behind the Germans. The interviews in the report create a small cross-section of the female Irish workforce, supplying a variety of demographic information.\textsuperscript{202}

Several of the Irish women interviewed mentioned their previous employment in domestic service, and expressed a preference for laundry work. Woman number 199 for example, complained that while employed as a domestic she had "too much work from morning to bedtime for little money."\textsuperscript{203} Similarly, woman number 201 believed that "laundry work [was] hard, but prefers it to domestic work as no harder, giving more time after work hours, and being paid better."\textsuperscript{204} Several Irish women described how they were unable to meet the high expectations of their former employers in domestic service. Number 241 for example, claimed that she had "tried to do housework, but found she was not able to do what was required of her and found laundry work easier."\textsuperscript{205} Number 205 had a similar complaint, stating that she did not stay in domestic service long as "the mistress expected her to do more work than she was able."\textsuperscript{206} Not all the Irish women spoke negatively about domestic service and their former employers. Number 209, for example, said that she "always had a kind mistress and did not find work hard."\textsuperscript{207}

Along with the discussions of previous employment, the majority of the interviews also made mention of the women's educational background. Of the 94

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
interviews that mention the woman's educational background, only nine women have no education at all. The report listed the majority of women (15) as able to read and write, while the second largest group (14 women), are listed as staying in school until the age of 16. The education level of the 124 Irish women interviewed in the study breaks down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Read and Write</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Read Only</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the age of 12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the age of 13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the age of 14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the age of 15</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>To the age of 16</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>To the age of 17</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>To the age of 18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The educational background of Irish women coincides nicely with the common description of them as able and willing to learn. Not only did the majority of Irish women in this grouping have at least some educational background, but a fairly large number of them stayed in school well into their late teens. Compared to the German women in the study, the only group that outnumbered the Irish (126 to 124), the Irish had noticeably more girls educated until the ages of 16 and 17. The Irish had 14 girls educated to the age of 16, whereas the Germans had 4. Similarly, the Irish had 10 girls educated until the age of 17, whereas the Germans had 2. Having a good education, or at least being able to read and write, might have made Irish women more appealing to employers. The education level present in the laundry workers in this study also goes against the common description of Irish women as ignorant.210

In a 1914 report conducted for the Association of Neighborhood Workers of New York City, entitled *The Girl and her Chance: A Study of Conditions Surrounding the Young Girl Between Fourteen and Eighteen Years of Age in New York City*, the author Harriet McDoual Daniels claims, of the age range studied, 27 percent of Irish girls were enrolled in school; 15 percent of whom were between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Compared to other groups within the study the Irish fared relatively well. In the sixteen to eighteen range they had a higher percent than native-born girls, who only had a 7.5 percent. Similarly to the numbers present in the laundry workers study, German girls also ranked highly in terms of education, earning higher percentages than the Irish in both total percentage of girls enrolled in

school (43 percent) and girls between the ages of sixteen and eighteen still enrolled (16 percent).  

Their relatively high level of education, as well as their proficiency with the English language, may account for their noticeable involvement in the American teaching profession. According to the government report on *Occupations of the First and Second Generations of Immigrants in the United States*, teaching was mainly a female profession; stating that "The number of women reported by the census of 1900 as employed in teaching was 328,049." As a comparison the report claims "this is almost three times the number of men employed in this profession (118,748); and more than three times the number of women employed in all other professional service (103,125)." Somewhat surprisingly the number of female teachers also "greatly exceeds the number of women and girls employed in the textile mills (278,343)."

American women made up the vast majority of female teachers at 63.5 percent, with foreign born women only accounting for 5.3 percent, American born women of immigrant parents accounting for 27 percent, and African Americans and Indians accounting for 4.2 percent. Of the 5.3 percent of foreign born teachers, Irish women have the highest percentage of the women listed, at 1.1 percent. The

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Germans rank a close second at 1.0 percent, but all the other ethnicities have lower than .7 percent, with the majority earning a .2 percent or lower.\textsuperscript{216} The predominance of Irish women alongside the Germans may indicate that, at the very least, they had suitable prior education and did not possess the ignorance commonly associated with Irish women. Also, it speaks to the trust employers must have had in the morality and personal characteristics of Irish women to allow them to teach local children.

Chapter Three: Part Two:

"Their Households are as Much Wrought into the Fabric of the Nation as Those Which We are Pleased to Call 'Americans:'" Second Generation Irish Women and the Irish-American Family.

The majority of immigrant groups saw an increase in the number of women employed as teachers in the second generation born in America. The report argues that this increase was "most marked among the Irish and the three Scandinavian nationalities, viz, the Danes, the Norwegians, and the Swedes."\(^\text{217}\) While first generation Irish women made up 1.1 percent, second generation Irish women accounted for 9.6 percent, the highest percentage of the nationalities listed. Similar to the numbers in the first generation, German women held the second largest percentage amongst the second generation with 5.4 percent. The English and Welsh made up the third largest group at 3.5 percent, with the majority of the nationalities accounting for less than 1 percent each. The study did not specify whether these teaching positions were held in public or parochial schools.\(^\text{218}\)

The percentage of second generation Irish American women not only differed from the first generation in regards to their involvement in teaching; it also differed in nearly every type of employment. Second and third generation Irish women's involvement in the workforce tended to resemble more closely other native-born


women and not their Irish-born mothers and grandmothers. The most striking example of this can be seen in the great decline in the number of second generation Irish women involved in the service industry. According to *Occupation of the first and Second Generations of Immigrants in the United States*, in regards to the first generation of Irish women involved in the service industry "there is no class of immigrant working women that includes so large a proportion of servants as the Irish, 54 per cent of the total number being reported in this occupation."\(^{219}\) The same report however, shows a great decline in regards to the second generation, with the numbers "becoming only 16 per cent."\(^{220}\) The second generation of Irish women even has a lower percentage than native-born, white women; for whom the service industry makes up 18.2 percent of all employed women of that group.\(^{221}\)

Such a large decline in the number of second generation Irish women involved in domestic service did not go unnoticed by those commenting on service jobs. Mary Grove Smith, in her study *Immigration as a Source of Supply for Domestic Workers*, claimed that "The Irish are, as a rule, honest, among the most moral of all nationalities and agencies agree in pronouncing them excellent household workers."\(^{222}\) Smith argues that, despite being apparently well-suited for the service industry, a large percentage of second generation Irish women adopted the belief in a stigma attached to domestic work; a belief that native-born women had long since

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held. She laments the absence of the second generation in the industry, stating "It is unfortunate for the occupation that the second generation usually feels Domestic work beneath its dignity." 

Instances of second and third generation Irish women mirroring native-born attitudes towards jobs traditionally held by immigrants did not only occur in regards to domestic service. In her report *Mothers Who Must Earn*, Katharine Anthony discusses how Irish women started to move away from the practice of bringing piecework home from factories and mills. She argues "On the whole, Americanized German and Irish women are too independent to allow themselves to be exploited at home work." Anthony further argues "If they must work, they prefer outside wage-earning, as they know that they get a better return for their time."

Anthony's argument that second generation Irish women tended to search for higher-paying, wage-earning employment outside the home, coincides with the numbers presented in *Occupation of the first and Second Generations of Immigrants in the United States*. Similar to the increase in the percentage of teachers in the second generation, notable increases were also present in other types of employment traditionally held by native-born women, such as saleswomen, clerks, stenographers, bookkeepers, and telegraph and phone operators. The relatively high level of

education often held by many second generation Irish women would have made the increases in the above mentioned jobs possible.\textsuperscript{227}

Concerning the involvement of all first generation immigrant women in sales, the report claims "In the year 1900 the census reported 17,967 immigrant women and girls employed as saleswomen, representing 2 per cent of the total number of female immigrants employed in all occupations."\textsuperscript{228} Amongst all immigrant groups the number of women employed in sales increased to "68,445 and the percentage to 5.8."\textsuperscript{229} This increase meant that "The occupation has therefore almost three times the relative importance in the second generation that it has in the first."\textsuperscript{230} The report states that the increase present in second generation Irish women involved in sales was "perhaps most striking" in comparison to the other nationalities involved in the study. The comparison between the first and second generations of Irish women also shows a marked increase, with "the Irish immigrant women at work only 1.2 per cent were reported as saleswomen, but in the next generation the percentage advances to 6.1."\textsuperscript{231}

Amongst the other nationalities only the Italians had a similar level of increase between the two generations, rising from 1.6 to 6.8.\textsuperscript{232} In a report entitled \textit{Women and the Trades}, Elizabeth Beardsley Butler reiterates the high numbers of second

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\end{flushleft}
generation Irish women involved in sales, and also claims that native-born women with German parents also held a high number of sales jobs. Speaking mainly of the situation in New York City, Butler claims "the saleswomen are for the most part native born, of Irish or German parents." A similar increase from the first generation Irish to the second generation occurred in clerking, stenographers, and bookkeeping.

Elizabeth Beardsley Butler argued that "No other occupation seems so desirable as 'clerking' to the girl with some personal ambition, but without the training necessary for an office position." The report on Occupation of the first and Second Generations of Immigrants in the United States claimed, similar to employment as saleswomen, all of the nationalities studied saw an increase in clerking, stenography, and bookkeeping in the second generation. Once again the report saw a noticeable increase concerning the Irish, stating that "It is especially marked in the case of the Austrians, Hungarians, Irish and Swedes." The following table outlines the increase between the two generations of Irish women, according to numbers taken from the 1900 federal census.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nationality</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>633,900</td>
<td>37,134</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>245,792</td>
<td>3,010</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although not as dramatic an increase as with sales jobs and clerical work, employment as a telegraph or telephone operator did increase, from .1 percent in the first generation to 1.0 percent in the second generation.\textsuperscript{237}

While the percentage of skilled positions such as teaching and clerical work increased during the second generation, so to did the number of Irish women involved in manufacturing. Jobs falling under the larger category “Manufacturing and mechanical pursuits,” rose from 20.1 percent (or 49,317 women) of all gainfully employed Irish women in the first generation, to 45.4 percent (or 176,310 women) in the second generation.\textsuperscript{238} Although immigrants traditionally held a large percent of the unskilled manufacturing jobs, these positions did not seem to have the same social stigma that jobs in the service industry, especially domestic service, had. In her report \textit{Mothers Who Must Earn}, Katharine Anthony, in an interview with an Irish mother, recounts the woman’s dismay that her neighborhood was losing manufacturing jobs. Speaking of textile mills, the woman claimed:

They were nice places for girls to work... I made good money and we could go home to a hot dinner every day. The way it is now, if a girl don’t want to work in the laundries, she’s got to travel so far to get any other kind of work she can’t come home at noon... The laundries around here are no place for a


young girl to work. There was a different class of girls in the mills. Young girls like my Annie there used to go in the mills and stay there till they married. They weren't like the girls now, changing around all the time. Many of them could come back as widows and could make a living there.\footnote{Katharine Anthony. “Mothers Who Must Earn,” Quarterly Journal of Economics, New York (1914): 15.}

This quote not only highlights the dismay over losing textile mill jobs, but also outlines common work and familial practices in the Irish-American community. Textile manufacturing allowed young Irish girls to enter into the workforce into a form of employment seen as respectable. The woman quoted above, for instance, does not even mention domestic service as an option. The quote also highlights the common practice of young-working women remaining at home until marriage. The woman also insinuates that employment is only an option until marriage, but that work experience could help a woman in the future if something were to happen to her husband.\footnote{Katharine Anthony. “Mothers Who Must Earn,” Quarterly Journal of Economics, New York (1914): 15.}

Although the lower West side of Manhattan saw a decrease in the number of textile manufacturers other areas of the country continued to employ women in mills. Textile mills and other needle trades accounted for the majority of second generation Irish women involved in manufacturing jobs. Although, “in the case of the Irish... the percentage of textile mill operatives is greater in the second generation of female breadwinners than it is in the first,”\footnote{Joseph A. Hill. Occupations of the first and second generations of immigrants in the United States; Fecundity of immigrant Women. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. (1911): 98.} the increase did not occur evenly throughout all types of textile production. Employment in cotton mills for example, decreased while
employment in all other textile mills increased. “For some reason the second
generation of mill operatives seem disposed to discriminate against the cotton
mill…The Irish show the same tendency but to a more striking degree.”242 The same
report backed up this statement by supplying the following statistics:

The change in the relative importance of the two classes of mill operatives
here distinguished being as follows: In the first generation of Irish, 8,275
women and girls in cotton mills, as against 10,027 in other textile mills; in the
second generation, 9,873 in cotton, as against 30,639 in other textile mills.243

The report does not give a concrete reason for this occurrence, but perhaps the
movement of textile mills from Eastern cities, as described by the interviewee in
Katharine Anthony’s Mothers Who Must Earn, could help to explain why at least the
Irish decreased their involvement in cotton mills.244

The prominence of second generation Irish women in textile manufacturing
did not mean that they performed the same tasks as their mothers and grandmothers.
In the report The Economic Position of Women, the author describes the common
occurrence of second and third generation Irish women entering into textile
manufacturing at more skilled and higher-paying jobs than those in the first
generation. He claims “Irish women first entered the factories of New England, for
example, as waste pickers and scrub women. But their daughters became spinners and
weavers.”245

242 Joseph A. Hill. Occupations of the first and second generations of immigrants in the United States;
243 Joseph A. Hill. Occupations of the first and second generations of immigrants in the United States;
(1914): 15.
245 Anonymous. The Economic Position of Women, The Academy of Political Science, Colombia
Mabel Hurd Willett also spoke of second generation Irish women's involvement in the textile industry while discussing the creation of textile unions in her report *The Employment of Women in the Clothing Trade*. Willett claims that "successful unions have usually been found among fairly-well educated American girls of American, Irish, or German parentage."\(^{246}\) She states "such women are chiefly engaged in the more highly-skilled and highly-paid work on clothing."\(^{247}\) The common occurrence of educating female children in the Irish-American community once again would allow the second and third generation to enter into better-paying jobs than the first generation of women. Their involvement in unions, much like their choice often not to seek employment in domestic service, stands as an example of how the second generation of Irish women more closely followed the employment trends of native-born women and not their immigrant parents.

Despite the second generation's move away from types of employment traditionally held by immigrant women, the daughters of Irish immigrants still kept close ties within their families and communities. In her report *A Girl and Her Chance*, Harriet McDoual Daniels argues that these close ties were important for the identity of the second generation and the continued strength of an immigrant community. Daniels claims "enough can not be said for the study of old-country traditions with a view of interesting the girls in all that her forbearers knew and loved. It would indeed be a pity if the present generation grew into woman-hood with a

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sorne for the fine old traditions of the fatherland.\textsuperscript{248} Daniels also gives an example of some second generation Irish girls making an effort to maintain the traditions of Ireland when she states "One club of Irish-girls is becoming greatly interested in the Irish legends through a study of the Irish songs."\textsuperscript{249}

The role women played as mothers and daughters in the Irish-American family had perhaps just as big an impact on the perceived image of Irish women in America as did their role in the work-force and the larger Irish-American community. The description of Irish women as morally pure as a result of their religious beliefs and practices led some to believe that they could have a positive effect on less moral family members through their role as wife and mother. John Francis Maguire for example, argued that this adherence to morality and Catholic practices:

\begin{quote}
maintained over her that religious control which is her own best preservation against danger, and which, while forming and strengthening her character, enables her to bring salutary influence to bear upon her male relatives, and in case of her marriage—a contingency most probable—upon her husband and children.\textsuperscript{250}
\end{quote}

Several authors describe the traditions and structures of Irish-American households in comparison to American households and other immigrant groups; most notably Catholic immigrants from Southern Germany. In \textit{Women Who Must Earn}, Katharine Anthony discusses the Irish and German population of the lower West side of Manhattan, claiming that "each group preserves to some extent its native habits

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{248} Harriet McDoual Daniels. \textit{A Girl and Her Chance: a Study of Conditions Surrounding the Young Girl Between Fourteen and Eighteen Years of Age in New York City}. Fleming H. Revell Company, New York (1914): 25.
\item \textsuperscript{249} Harriet McDoual Daniels. \textit{A Girl and Her Chance: a Study of Conditions Surrounding the Young Girl Between Fourteen and Eighteen Years of Age in New York City}. Fleming H. Revell Company, New York (1914): 25.
\item \textsuperscript{250} John Francis Maguire M.P. \textit{The Irish in America}. Longmans, Green, and Co., London (1868): 338.
\end{itemize}
and morals."251 Despite this preservation of native traditions and beliefs Anthony also argues that "The German and Irish of this neighborhood are strongly Americanized."252 This argument commonly appeared in the literature of the time. Elizabeth Beardsley Butler for example, goes as far as to claim "Irish and Germans, in fact, we no longer think of as immigrants. Their households are as much wrought in the fabric of the nation as those which we are pleased to call Americans."253

The Americanization of the Irish family occasionally created a certain amount of tension between the first generation parents and their children born in America. In *A Girl and Her Chance*, Harriet McDoual Daniels places most of the blame on economic factors and extended exposure to poverty. Daniels reiterates Katharine Anthony's claim that "The Irish are fast becoming Americanized."254 Daniels insists, however, that any problems with childrearing in the community are not due to "the re-adjustment of the traditional point of view to modern American ideals,"255 but are the fault of the "poorer Irish," having a "certain lack of interest in their children,"256

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due to their "lazy careless happy-go-lucky attitude." Daniels statements about Irish Americans mirror the prejudices present in the common stereotypes of the Irish, despite her insistence that she was focusing on economic standing and not simply ethnicity.

Katharine Anthony similarly argues that economic status affected the structure and relations within Irish-American families. In regards to her comparison of German and Irish families, Anthony claims "Nowhere is the difference between German and Irishman more strikingly revealed than where the effects of long continued poverty and drink are to be observed." Coinciding with Daniels' views, Anthony upholds a common stereotype of Irish women as susceptible to drink when she states when exposed to poverty and drink "the Irish wife slides down into indifference and slovenliness, and sometimes takes to drink."

Such arguments seem to place more blame on the economic standing of these women and not their ethnic background alone. Despite the negative view some Americans had of Irish-American families exposed to poverty, some continued to describe Irish women and mothers in particular, in a positive light. Anthony, for example, argues that the Irish women of the lower West Side often acted admirably and did the best they could with their economic situation. She claims that, due to their

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efforts Irish women excelled beyond the expectations many had concerning the poor.

Anthony insists:

The fact that the women were working qualified them at once for respect. They had had the enterprise to find work and the industry to keep it. They had not “put their children away,” but were making every effort to keep up a home. Their determination to shoulder their obligations and meet the responsibilities was nothing short of heroic. To a large extent, they represented the best standards and best elements of West Side life. 261

A government report entitled *Bulletin of the Women’s Bureau Family Status of Breadwinning Women in Four Selected Cities*, gives evidence of positive economic achievements of Irish-American families, and Irish women in particular. The report states how Irish women in Butte Montana had the highest percentage of homeownership amongst women throughout the city. The numbers not only included other immigrant groups, but also included native-born women. The ability of Irish women to purchase or hold equity in their homes speaks well of their ability to gain well-paying jobs and help provide for their families; while also exceeding the low expectations put in place by the common stereotype of “Bridget.” 262

Following the pattern of native-born women, Irish women often exited the workforce after marriage. Katharine Anthony describes this occurrence when she insists “The wife of the West Side working-man does not earn because she wishes to be independent. The idea is foreign to her experience. She feels fully entitled to her husband’s wages, and it is one of her grievances that he does not hand over enough of

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his pay.” Anthony claims that this practice is an example of immigrant women adapting to American culture, stating:

The American atmosphere has created in the more ambitious of them a desire for respectability and the appearance of respectability. Not to work is a mark of the middle class married woman, and the ambitious West Side family covets that mark. Hence comes the attempt to conceal the mother’s employment, if she has one, which is one of the little snobberies of the poor.

The government report entitled *Employment of Women in Laundries*, gives multiple examples of Irish women following this pattern. The majority of the married Irish women interviewed, worked at the laundry out of economic necessity as their husband’s could not work most often due to an injury or an illness. The majority of the widowed women interviewed also had not worked while their husband’s lived, and only sought employment after their husband’s death. Woman number 313, for example, went to work in the laundry because her “Husband [was] sick all winter and could not earn anything.” Like many of the married women in the study who returned to work, she had “worked in laundry before marriage, but after marriage never worked from home when husband was well.”

While the husbands of these women could often not find work outside the home, several are said to have helped out with the running of the home while their wives worked at the laundry. Woman number 222 for example, went back to work when her husband “was taken sick with jaundice and has not been able to work.

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Although he could not find work outside the home, the report claims that he “is not bedridden and helps,” his wife maintain their home. Similarly, woman number 160 returned to work in a laundry “since [her] husband’s health failed,” and claimed that although he is not capable of work outside the home, her husband “does what work he can about the house.” Woman number 160 is not only the sole provider for the family, but she earns enough money to keep her three children enrolled in school and stands as yet another example of the importance the Irish in America placed on education.

Widowed and deserted women interviewed in the laundry study also commonly supported their children or other family members. Woman number 113 for example, “Did not work while husband was living, but had to go to work to support herself and children at his death,” and her wages allowed her to provide for her two children and keep them enrolled in school. Woman number 193 similarly, had to return to work after her husband’s death and “has four children, oldest boy earns $8 a month as errand boy. Others go to school.” Remarkably, woman number 208, a widow with two young children, not only earned enough to keep her family together, but also “carries $2,000 insurance on her life for her children.”

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Irish mothers who did not work outside the home, often still actively participated, or sometimes even ran the family’s finances. In their report *Young Working Girls*, A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy claim “Among the Jews, the Irish, and some other nationalities, it is quite customary for the father, the daughters, and the sons, all to hand over their pay envelopes unopened to the wife and mother.”

Concerning the contribution Irish daughters made to the family finances, Woods and Kennedy state that “the great majority of girls turn over their income without question to the family,” and argue that Irish daughters “are proud and happy to do so.”

Since the Irish placed so much importance on education, a daughter’s entrance into the workforce was often the result of economic necessity to the family. Daughters in Irish-American families often only entered the workforce after their father could no longer work, either from illness, injury, or death. The government report on *Women in Laundries* gives many examples of single, young Irish women entering the workforce to help support their family. Woman number 139 for example, “Had to leave school and go to work at 15. Family needed help. Father dead. Three children.” This young woman not only aided to the family’s finances, but provided the sole income for her mother and siblings following her father’s death. Similarly, woman number 430 went “to work at 11 because father was sick and unable to work,” as there were “five children in family and only one brother old enough to work.”

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Not all Irish daughters went to work out of strong economic necessity; some entered the workforce as an alternative to further education. Woman number 391 for example, after leaving school at the age of 15 found there was “nothing to do at home and mother said she could not lie around there, so [she] went into laundry.”\textsuperscript{280} Even without dire economic need this young woman gave her wages over to her mother. In comparison woman number 84 after attending school until the age of 16 “went to work because she wanted to earn her own clothes, and laundry work was best pay and cleanest work.” This young woman earned eight dollars a week, half of which she gave to her parents and half of which she used at her own discretion.\textsuperscript{281} The fact that some Irish women chose to work for their own spending money, as apposed to working out of necessity, shows that some Irish-American families were financially stable enough for such a choice to be a possibility.

Not all authors of the time viewed the relationship between working second generation daughters and their parents in a positive light. In her report \textit{Slavery of Prostitution: a Plea for Emancipation}, Maude E. Miner argues that the cultural gap between the first and second generation causes “children [to] feel superior to their parents, fail to have reverence or respect for them, and assert that spirit of independence which they consider an American right.”\textsuperscript{282} Miner also claims that immigrant parents rely only on force to discipline their daughters, and “know little


about the lives of their children and are easily deceived by them."  

Miner believes that immigrant parents often treat their children as contributors to the family income, stating that "They have no idea where the girls work, what kind of work they do, who their companions are, or where they go for amusement... They have been satisfied with receiving the pay envelope each week and have asked no questions."  

Despite this description of familial relations, several authors argued the opposite of Miner’s views, claiming that particularly in economically stable Irish-American household, Irish parents had more interest in their daughters than other immigrant groups. Harriet McDoual Daniels for example, when speaking of “the better homes,” claims that Irish mothers have a “real interest,” in the welfare and success of their daughters. Making a common comparison to other immigrant groups, Daniels argues that “The Irish mother is anxious, fearful for the girl and eager to help; and it may be safely said that the better Irish parent is more interested in his sons and daughters as individuals than either the Italian or the Jew.”  

In their report *Young Working Girls*, A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy, make a similar argument about Irish fathers, claiming “German and Irish fathers are the most interested in their daughters as individuals, and the Jews next.”  

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Woods and Kennedy further argue that Irish daughters often contributed to the "Americanization," of Irish families by their knowledge of American culture and customs. They insisted that this contribution, in comparison to other immigrant groups, was uncommon as "few girls assist personally in the detailed improvement of the order of the home. On the whole, the family does not take kindly to the leadership of daughters."288 The Irish however, represent a sharp contrast as an Irish daughter often "does much to bring the family into larger and better quarters and adds up-to-dateness in furniture."289

The involvement of first and second generations of Irish women in the American workforce outside of domestic service served as a jumping off point to further distance themselves from the negative stereotype of 'Bridget,' and towards a more Americanized view of the female Irish-American. The common positive descriptions of Irish domestic servants reappears in literature describing Irish women involved in the service industry outside of private homes as well as in manufacturing. Despite the corrupting influences present in the American workforce, several contemporary authors argued that Irish women's moral purity gave them a level of protection against those who would wish to do them harm. This resistance to corruption made Irish women desirable to hotel and restaurant owners as well as employers in the manufacturing industry; both seen as occasionally corrupting environments. In the manufacturing industry, Irish women's adherence to Roman

Catholic traditions and ritual was even seen in a positive light, as it prepared Irish women for the repetitive nature of industrial work.  

The move away from domestic service was often a conscious decision on the part of Irish women to distance themselves from the stigma inherent in domestic service jobs in America. This move helped to initiate the change in Irish women’s employment patterns to more closely resemble the pattern of native-born women. The shift becomes even more striking within the second generation. The dramatic decrease in the number of second generation Irish women employed in domestic service serves as an example of this shift in employment patterns. The commonly high level of education of Irish-American women allowed for the second generation not only to decrease their involvement in domestic service, but also increase their employment in higher skilled and higher paid “white-collar,” jobs traditionally associated with native-born American women. The involvement of Irish women, with a noticeable increase in the second generation, in the teaching profession acted perhaps as the most striking example of native-born acceptance of Irish women in America. Irish prominence in the teaching profession indicates that many American parents trusted them enough to teach their children.

The affect of Irish women on the Irish-American family, both as mothers and daughters, was often described positively. Several contemporary authors described the positive moral affect Irish mothers had on their children and husbands. Irish

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mothers and daughters also had an important economic impact on Irish-American families. Irish women increasingly followed the employment patterns of native-born mothers and daughters. Irish mothers, similarly to American mothers, tended to leave the workforce upon marriage, and only re-entered it if their husbands could not provide for the family. Similarly, Irish daughters did not enter the workforce unless their fathers could not provide for their families. These employment patterns followed the actions of most middle-class Americans, who several authors argued the Irish strove to be a part of. This strive to mirror middle-class employment patterns acts as another example of Irish women distancing themselves from the negative stereotype of 'Bridget,' and moving towards Americanized traditions and ideals.  

Chapter Four:  

Conclusion  

The experiences of Irish women in America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries stands in sharp contrast to the popular stereotypical image of 'Bridget,' that prevailed in the popular culture of the time. The prevalence of first

generation Irish women in American domestic service led to the emergence of the stereotypical maid being associated with the Irish. Starting within the first generation, Irish women strove to move away from the negative image of ‘Bridget,’ the ignorant, untrustworthy, clannish, theft prone, gossip driven, lazy, popish Irish maid and towards an adoption of the American way of life and more positive female Irish-American image. Despite the prevalence of the image of ‘Bridget,’ in popular culture, even within the first generation positive descriptions of Irish women appeared in contemporary literature. Such literature described Irish women as honest, trustworthy, morally pure, and willing and able to learn. Several authors even include positive descriptions of Irish women’s Catholic faith; arguing that Irish women’s faith was the cornerstone for the positive attributes.  

These positive characteristics often coincided with arguments that Irish women made desirable employees. The number of Irish women able to find employment in America can lead one to assume that American employers must have had a relatively positive view of these women to offer them jobs. Similarly, many middle and upper-class American households thought enough of Irish women to employ them in their private homes. The high number of Irish women employed in private American homes came, in part, as a result of the common positive description of Irish women as able and willing to learn American culture and household management. The willingness of first generation Irish women to take jobs in domestic

service allowed them to financially contribute to their families and the Irish-American community as a whole.\textsuperscript{294}

The ability of Irish women to adapt to the American way of life caused some to seek employment outside domestic service, as the female Irish-American community increasingly believed in the stigma attached to service work in American culture. The sharp decline in the second generation’s involvement in domestic service implies a conscious decision on their part to move away from the ‘Bridget,’ stereotype and adopt employment patterns more common to native-born American women.\textsuperscript{295}

Financially stable Irish women strove to emulate American middle-class traditions and ideals. Irish mothers, for instance, often left the workforce upon marriage and only returned to work if their husband could no longer provide for the family. Some contemporary authors argued that being able to leave work upon marriage acted as a status symbol within the Irish-American community as it mirrored the practice of middle-class American wives. Irish mothers also strove to provide education for their children. Similarly to their mothers Irish daughters did not work unless their male relatives were unable to provide for their families.\textsuperscript{296} Second generation Irish women as a result often received a high level of American education. The educational background of Irish women contrasted sharply to the common stereotype of ‘Bridget,’ as ignorant.

\textsuperscript{296} Mary Gove Smith. “Immigration as a Source of Supply for Domestic Workers,” Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, Boston (1906): 5.
The educational background of second generation Irish women, and their proficiency in the English language helped these women to move further away from the negative descriptions associated with 'Bridget,' by further adopting American female employment patterns. Education allowed many second generation Irish women to gain employment in "white-collar," jobs traditionally associated with native-born American women. The employment that second and third generation Irish women chose differed greatly from the jobs taken by their mothers and grandmothers. Second generation Irish women tended to avoid jobs seen predominantly as immigrant work, such as domestic service, and instead entered employment where native born women accounted for the majority, such as teaching, nursing, clerical work, and sales.297

High levels of education particularly impacted the relatively high percentages of Irish women involved in the teaching profession. The second generation of Irish women, who had received their own education in America, sought employment in American schools in higher numbers than the previous generation. The prevalence of Irish women in the teaching profession speaks to the trust employers must have had in the morality and personal characteristics and quality education of Irish women to allow them to teach local children. The presence of Irish women as teachers in public schools also goes against the common stereotype of Irish women as ignorant.298


The effect of Irish mothers on family relations in the Irish-American community is often seen as a positive one. Irish mothers, often presented in a more positive light than Irish fathers, placed an importance on education and controlled the family’s finances. Several authors argue that Irish mother’s morality and adherence to religious practices could have a positive effect on their male family members.299 Second and third generation Irish girls due in part to their high level of education moved towards less manual and better paying jobs, and prior to marriage often contributed to the family’s income. Several authors describe young Irish women of the second and third generations as American and attribute a certain level of the Americanization of their family members to their actions.300

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