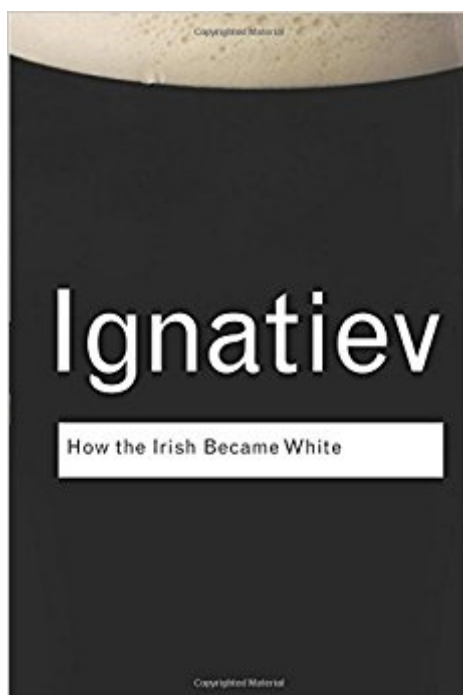


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# How The Irish Became White (Routledge Classics)



## Synopsis

'[f]rom time to time a study comes along that truly can be called *path breaking*, *seminal*, *essential*, a *must read*. *How the Irish Became White* is such a study.' John Bracey, W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst The Irish came to America in the eighteenth century, fleeing a homeland under foreign occupation and a caste system that regarded them as the lowest form of humanity. In the new country *— a land of opportunity —* they found a very different form of social hierarchy, one that was based on the color of a person's skin. Noel Ignatiev's 1995 book *— the first published work of one of America's leading and most controversial historians —* tells the story of how the oppressed became the oppressors; how the new Irish immigrants achieved acceptance among an initially hostile population only by proving that they could be more brutal in their oppression of African Americans than the nativists. This is the story of *How the Irish Became White*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the first half of the 19th century, some three million Irish emigrated to America, trading a ruling elite of Anglo-Irish Anglicans for one of WASPs. The Irish immigrants were (self-evidently) not Anglo-Saxon; most were not Protestant; and, as far as many of the nativists were concerned, they weren't white, either. Just how, in the years surrounding the Civil War, the Irish evolved from an

oppressed, unwelcome social class to become part of a white racial class is the focus of Harvard lecturer Ignatiev's well-researched, intriguing although haphazardly structured book. By mid-century, Irish voting solidarity gave them political power, a power augmented by the brute force of groups descended from the Molly Maguires. With help, the Irish pushed blacks out of the lower-class jobs and neighborhoods they had originally shared. And though many Irish had been oppressed by the Penal Laws, they opposed abolition?even when Daniel O'Connell, "the Liberator," threatened that Irish-Americans who countenanced slavery would be recognized "as Irishmen no longer." The book's structure lacks cohesion: chapters zigzag chronologically and geographically, and Ignatiev's writing is thick with redundancies and overlong digressions. But for the careful reader, he offers much to think about and an important perspective on the American history of race and class. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

In a book he admits raises more questions than it answers, Ignatiev, a radical activist and editor of the journal *Race Traitor*, asserts that the Irish were initially discriminated against in the United States and "became white" by embracing racism, a concept Ignatiev (citing Daniel O'Connell) says they learned in the United States. Ignatiev targets the Irish because they were the largest immigrant group to compete with blacks for manual labor jobs. Does American labor history dismiss racism as an element in the workers' struggles? Did oppression in Ireland under the Penal Laws help to make the Irish oppressors in America, or did they learn racism only after reaching America? While many of the primary sources support Irish racism, fewer support Ignatiev's opinion on where it began. This book is more a springboard for discussion than a source of answers but is strongly recommended for that purpose.?Robert C. Moore, DuPont Merck Pharmaceutical Co. Information Svcs., N. Billerica, Mass.Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Scholarly and academic. Not a casual read. Very useful for understanding racism and its dynamics in the United States.

great

I am truly enjoying reading about my Irish heritage and learning more about the Irish in America. The company that sold it to me, Simonbooks, went out of their way to make sure I was satisfied with the book and their support for my purchase. I appreciate everything that they did to follow up for me.

Eye opening; highly recommended to US History majors.

I have been recommending that students who do research papers on James Joyce read this to get insight into the oppression that the Irish have endured. It often comes as a surprise to many of them that Celtic people were not always considered "white" even though they may be aware they are not WASP. So this book teaches history to help put literature in its context.

Everyone should read this book

Regarding the "racist" claims, this book was recommended to me by a Park Ranger working on the Black Heritage Trail in Boston, a National Landmark. It is also carried in the book store at the Museum Of African American History in Boston. The most powerful line in the book is how slaves were not allowed to work on building Railroad bridges because they had monetary value. Irish, on the other hand, would not be missed if they fell to their deaths during the dangerous construction. Irish therefore had lower status than slaves in the mid 1800's.

Very beautifully and intelligently written with very interesting historical references and sociological perspectives. Quite a revealing insight on Irish immigrant experiences in the USA during the 1800's.

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