

How Cultural Identity Affects Teaching Religious Education: An Irish-American Perspective

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In 1997 I traveled to Ireland with my wife and two friends to commemorate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Black '47, the worst year of the Potato Famine that ravaged Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth, cutting the population by more than half through death and emigration.ⁱ While there, I visited County Roscommon, the county my father's family hailed from, where I was told "things had been a little worse," that nearly two thirds of the population had died or emigrated. It was after returning from Ireland that I came across Tom Hayden'sⁱⁱ book *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections on the Legacy of the Famine*,ⁱⁱⁱ a collection of narratives addressing the repressed legacy of the Famine. Hayden's later book *Irish on the Inside*^{iv} extended the conversation by detailing the psychological and spiritual price paid by Irish-Americans who assimilated rapidly and uncritically to American society, while repressing the lingering trauma of the Famine and their own status as an oppressed minority. The book also addressed the issue of how the Irish, particularly Irish-Americans, might respond to this sad state of affairs.^v

The significance of Hayden's writing hit home when, in the last months of her life, my mother became preoccupied with her Irish heritage. "Do you think we made it?" she asked me repeatedly in her last days, forgetting in her growing dementia that she'd posed the question many times before. The "we" in question—it went unsaid—was the Irish. What surprised me most as I listened to my mother in those last days was that it appeared that she still carried images of the crudest of caricatures of the Irish, especially of the Irish as drunken, lazy, and violent. "You know what they say about the Irish," she'd say.

"What do they say, Ma?"

"I think you know."

My mother took a special interest in the period following the Famine,^{vi} and in the fate of the Irish after they arrived in the so-called "coffin ships." Wishing to help her, and increasingly caught up in the subject myself, I read to my mother from books that treated the subject of the Boston Irish,^{vii} Boston being the Hub of my mother's Irish universe. When I presented her with a copy of Thomas Cahill's best seller, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, she stared incredulously at the cover, finally saying, "Not bad, huh, Bri?" And when I told her that some Irish immigrants had managed to do quite well, after attending colleges like Harvard and Holy Cross, she seemed surprised and pleased.

My mother's reflections on the matter moved toward a goal. Near the end, she was ready to forgive "those Protestants that had treated us so badly." But my mother announced this deathbed intention in words that broke my heart and revealed an unnamed burden she'd carried for her entire life: "I've been thinking about it: Maybe those old Yankees didn't treat us as badly as I thought, you know, *before we were people*."

My mother's legacy question, "Did you think we made it?" was not merely economic and social, though it included those dimensions. It was also ontological; it posed a more fundamental and essential question my mother needed answered before she died. "Do you think we made it?" really meant, "Do you think maybe we're all right after all, that maybe the things they said about us aren't really true?"

It was with my mother's legacy question still echoing that I first came across the literature of the social construction of whiteness in the form of Thandeka's *Learning to Be*

White,^{viii} when my colleague Ted Brelsford suggested that we assign it in our introductory course in religious education.^{ix}

Class discussions of the text^x were animated, passionate, and punctuated by the inevitable resistance on the part of some students to Thandeka's main thesis: that ethnic groups like the Irish and Jews and others who had experienced ambiguous, or "non-white" status had, in their fervent attempts to assimilate, to become "people," inevitably advanced in American society at the expense of African Americans. "Achieving whiteness" meant reaping the benefits of white privilege, and learning to be white inevitably meant learning to be racist.

Among the texts I read as I delved more deeply into the subject matter and prepared for class lectures were Michael Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*^{xi} and David R. Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness*.^{xii} Though these authors enriched my understanding on one level, I also found myself distressed and angered, especially by Ignatiev's book. In other words, I found that I, as many of my students, resisted painful insights, did what I could to sidestep them, reframe them, make them go away.

Both texts focus in whole or in part on the Irish and their embrace of whiteness and the fierce and violent competition with freed slaves. Depictions of Irish violence against African Americans are both graphic and deeply disturbing. Worst of all both texts stress the watershed moment that marked the Irish transition away from the common experience of two oppressed peoples and toward the embrace of white privilege: the New York Draft Riots of 1863. During the riots, Irish mobs engaged in the most despicable fruit of American racism: lynching.

While reading Ignatiev's harrowing account of Irish racism and violence on the road to "success," I observed myself, looking for a way out—reflexively rehearsing various strategies of resistance to insights and emotions I wished to keep at bay. By stressing the severity of Irish oppression, for instance, or by reframing the Irish-American adoption of whiteness as a historical inevitability, or by playing up moments of Irish-African American cooperation,^{xiii} I considered whether I might be able to at least reduce my own shame and guilt.

I did my best to confront my evasions, even confessing them in class, doing so both as a way of keeping myself honest and of accompanying students who were experiencing similar emotions and thoughts. But even as I resisted my initial resistance, I uncovered an additional strategy of evasion, one that I did not at first recognize as a form of denial. And little wonder. I am now convinced that the resistance strategy I uncovered is not of my own coinage, but was already "in the air," so to speak, especially in places like the relatively progressive school of theology where I taught.

The strategy that I will call "preemptive agreement" counsels that teachers or students, usually white teachers or students, admit guilt quickly, unconditionally, and when possible with a show of strong emotion. Apologizing before anyone accuses you of anything, before insights have time to hit home, before they provoke shame and guilt or worse yet suggest changes in lifestyle, is key to this strategy. And there is an additional pedagogical bonus: deploying the strategy of preemptive agreement makes class discussions easier and less volatile, if also less fruitful and duller. Things are also easier on the ego when the strategy of preemptive agreement is deployed. How could I be challenged or shamed if I've already surrendered, already taken the right side, already expressed the right opinions, and if talented enough, punctuated all this with a tear or two?

I soon came to the realization that preemptive agreement is not agreement at all. It is evasion and an insidious and a self-congratulatory variety of evasion at that.

But There's Resistance and There's Resistance

Even after catching and challenging several of my avoidance patterns, I could not shake the sense that my resistance signified nothing other than denial. Resistance, after all, is an ambiguous notion, simultaneously embodying at least two connotations.^{xiv} In addition to resistance to insight, the more psychological connotation of the term, resistance also has a political connotation, a connotation associated with the experiencing of a sense of unfairness or injustice. Specifically, I remained suspicious of Ignatiev's text even as I bowed to many of its arguments, even as I worked at uncovering my strategies of denial.

Tom Hayden's response to *How the Irish Became White* is similar to my own: "Others like Noel Ignatiev, treat the subject as if it were ultimately a moral one. Instead of fighting racism, he writes, the Irish Americans opted for the privileges of whiteness ... I agree with neither the economic nor the moral explanation. My Irish ancestors who hid slaves were not an isolated fringe."^{xv}

Of course, it could be that Hayden's criticism of *How the Irish Became White* is indicative of his own unwillingness to face the implications of Ignatiev's arguments both for himself and for Irish-Americans in general. Still, all in all, Hayden's resistance to Ignatiev's analysis seems less an evasion than an honest dissatisfaction with the perceived narrowness of Ignatiev's interpretation of Irish racism and perhaps more significantly of what Hayden regards as his unduly moralistic tone.

Hayden's own reflections on the source of Irish-American racism take a different, more tragic tack. For Hayden, "toxic shame," among other factors, played a role in the Irish's readiness to adopt American racist attitudes: "The Irish were classified as subhuman simians at the moment they came to America," Hayden argues, quoting Charles Kingsley's widely circulated description of the Irish as "white chimpanzees" and referring to studies demonstrating the inferiority of Irish intelligence based on the measurement of skull size. The tragic denouement of such characterizations was that many Irish, "arriving in America traumatized and penniless, transferred their shame upon those below them. ... [T]he Irish-American transferred to black people the very racial stereotypes used against the Irish. Having been stigmatized as chimpanzees, wild animals and bog-creatures, the Irish chose whiteness when the chance came along."^{xvi}

Hayden criticizes other Irish authors who attempt to explain away or take the edge off the reality of Irish American racism. He also criticizes the Catholic Church in America for failing to criticize slavery strongly enough and confesses that the "legacy of racism weighed heavily on Irish America" and confesses "that it was largely because of Irish racism that activists like myself were alienated from our Irish roots."^{xvii}

But what argues most eloquently that Hayden's problems with Ignatiev's book are not a product of denial, is a brief but powerful account of a practice that goes beyond mere acknowledgement of Irish racism and represents an authentic counterpoint to the cloaked and toxic evasion of "preemptive agreement" all too common among progressive thinkers:

My library in Los Angeles is filled with artifacts celebrating Irishness, with one exception. There is a framed drawing from the *Illustrated London News* dated August 8, 1863, depicting an Irish mob lynching a black man on Clarkson Street in New York City. I can identify eighty-three distinct people in this lifelike sketch, half men and half women, and at least ten children. Six of the men are

holding sticks ... three are waving their hats, and one is holding back a black man seeking to reach the victim.^{xviii}

Hayden's painful ritual of remembrance and repentance is one born less of guilt and shame, in my opinion, than of grief—grief growing out of the simultaneous realization of suffering caused to freed slaves and of the essential emptiness of what had been “achieved” by Irish-Catholics in the process. “The prophet,” Walter Brueggemann reminds us, “does not scold or reprimand, but brings to public expression the dread of endings ... and the fearful practice of eating off the table of a hungry brother or sister.”^{xix} Brueggemann also says that “the proper idiom for the prophet ... is the *language of grief* [italics his], the rhetoric that engages the community in mourning for a funeral they did not want to admit.”^{xx} In this sense, Hayden's grief is both prophetic and proleptic.

How the Irish Became White: A Pedagogical Reading

Though Hayden suggests that his rejection of Ignatiev's text stems from his dissatisfaction with his explanation of Irish racism, my suspicion is that his problem lies elsewhere. Hayden, after all, affirms, in the course of his own analysis, many of Ignatiev's explicit arguments, especially his contention that the Irish—most Irish, in any case—jumped at the chance to procure the benefits of white privilege. My suspicion is that Hayden's problem with Ignatiev concerns something more evasive but no less important: the “spirit” of the text.

It seems to me that even brief reflection on the implicit and null curricula^{xxi} embedded in *How the Irish Became White* suggests that Ignatiev's tacit pedagogy is that of an extended scolding or reprimand and, for this reason, is finally less prophetic than it is punitive. Consider the following odd passage in which Ignatiev speaks of his attitude toward “the subjects” of his study, that is to say, the Irish:

On one occasion many years ago, I was sitting on my front step when my neighbor came out of the house next door carrying her small child, whom she placed in her automobile. She turned away from him for a moment, and as she started to close the car door, I saw that the child had put his hand where it would be crushed when the door closed. I shouted to the woman to stop. *She halted in mid-motion, and when she realized what she had almost done, an amazing thing happened: she began laughing, then broke into tears and began hitting the child. It was the most intense and dramatic display of conflicting emotions I have ever beheld. My attitude toward the subjects of this study accommodates stresses similar to those I witnessed in that mother.*^{xxii} [italics mine]

To call Ignatiev's own description of his attitude toward his “subject” people patronizing (or is it matronizing?) is an exercise in understatement. But if consistency is in fact a virtue, Ignatiev must be complimented on his skill in actualizing his vision and his unflinching capacity for maintaining a punitive posture vis-à-vis his Irish subjects from cover to cover.

Ignatiev's null curriculum is the perfect complement to his implicit curriculum of moral accusation. Ignatiev's glossing over of Irish oppression, his cursory treatment of the Famine, is disheartening. And while depictions of the bigotry that faced the Irish in America are presented in greater detail, these are never presented as something in and of themselves but as a prelude to, a backdrop for, presenting his thesis: that the Irish betrayed the abolitionist cause.

Near the conclusion of *How the Irish Became White*, Ignatiev breaks discipline momentarily, just long enough to entertain a moment of empathy for his subject people: “In the course of my research I learned that no one gave a damn for the poor Irish. Even the downtrodden black people had Quakers and abolitionists to bring their plight to public attention.”^{xxiii}

Coming back to his senses, however, Ignatiev soon rights things by adopting the all too familiar mechanism of blaming the victim. The Irish are to blame after all for the fact that “no one gave a damn” about them because unlike the freed slaves, unlike Frederick Douglass, the Irish lacked “the ability to tell their own stories effectively.”^{xxiv}

This final, exceptionally penetrating insult in *How the Irish Became White* is particularly hard to take, given that the Irish are rarely accused of not being able to tell a story and more importantly because Ignatiev does not waste a moment’s time reflecting on what Irish silence on the matter might signify other than incompetence and ignorance. Fortunately others have:

“Where is the Famine in the literature of the Revival?” Marxian literary critic Terry Eagleton asks. “Where is it in Joyce? ... If the Famine stirred some to angry rhetoric, it would seem to have traumatized others into muteness. The event strains at the limits of the articulable, and is truly in this sense the Irish Auschwitz. In both cases, there would seem something trivializing, or dangerously familiarizing about the very act of representation itself.”^{xxv} Tom Hayden makes a similar point about Irish music: “The popular culture of song in the Irish countryside, as described in books like George Petrie’s nineteenth century collection of the ancient music of Ireland, was terminated by the Famine...the Famine silenced the popular imagination for decades.”^{xxvi}

The most painful accusation of all, for the Irish, or for any colonized or formerly colonized people—something worse even than genocidal musings of the likes of George Sigerson, who recommended a “policy of extermination in which men and women will give way to cattle”—is the accusation that Irish starvation during the Famine was their own fault, the inevitable punishment for their own moral failure and inveterate laziness:

The astounding apathy of the Irish themselves to the most horrible scenes under their eyes and capable of relief by the smallest exertion is something absolutely without parallel in the history of civilized nations...the brutality of piratical tribes sinks to nothing compared with the absolute inertia of the Irish in the midst of the most horrifying scenes.^{xxvii}

What, finally, is the lesson learned from Ignatiev’s book, attending to its implicit and null curricula, as well as to its explicit arguments? Well, I suppose it depends on the reader and perhaps on other contextual elements as well. But let me put it this way: If my mother’s legacy question, “Do you think we made it?” is truly what I think it is—“Do you think maybe we’re all right after all, that maybe the things they say about us aren’t really true?” then Ignatiev’s answer would have to be something like this: “No, I’m sorry to tell you, this, but I’m afraid they were right about you all along.”

Frederick Douglass and the Pedagogy of Compassionate Confrontation

There is a curious sentence in *Irish Hunger*, following directly upon Hayden’s contention that Irish-American racism is in part explained by the projection of toxic shame, the ridding oneself of onerous stereotypes and the shunting of simian imagery on the freed slaves with

whom the Irish competed. Speaking of the Irish, of his own tribe, Hayden says this: “They wounded the heart of Frederick Douglass.”^{xxviii}

Why the concern for the “wounded heart” of Frederick Douglass? What was behind Hayden’s cryptic statement? Wishing to answer this question, I decided I’d read Douglass’s autobiography and some of his other writings as well. I was especially interested in what he might have to say about the Irish.

I was surprised, relieved, and profoundly grateful for what I found.

Make no mistake: Douglass speaks forthrightly and powerfully about Irish racism, saying that the Irish “elbowed out” former slaves from “the most menial jobs” America had to offer, and then musing as to whether the Irish would also “come to share in our degradation.” Douglass also criticizes the Irish for turning their backs on their natural allies in what could have been a powerful coalition for justice: “The Irish will some day come to regret their decision.”

But Douglass also allows that Irish and Irish Americans exercised a profound influence on his life at the crucial time he first began to consider escaping and heading north to join the abolitionist cause. Two passages in particular, appearing within a page of one another, are particularly telling.

The first grows out of an encounter with two Irish workers he had befriended:

From this time I understood the words *abolition* and *abolitionist*, and always drew near when that word was spoken, expecting to hear something of importance to myself and fellow-slaves. The light broke in upon me by degrees. I went one day down on the wharf of Mr. Waters; and seeing two Irishmen unloading a scow of stone, I went, unasked and helped them. When we had finished, one of them came to me and asked me if I were a slave. I told him I was. He asked, “Are ye a slave for life.” The good Irishman seemed to be deeply affected by the statement. He said to the other that it was a pity so fine a little fellow as myself should be a slave for life. He said it was a shame to hold me. They both advised me to run away to the north; that I should find friends there, and that I should be free.^{xxix}

A page earlier in the text Douglass describes the transformative significance of an essay by Irish playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan on his own thinking:

In this same book [*The Columbian Orator*] I met with one of Sheridan’s mighty speeches on Catholic emancipation [in Ireland] ... What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The reading of these documents^{xxx} enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery.^{xxxi}

More tellingly, Douglass broke rank with white abolitionists over the Irish. As William F. McFeely notes, Douglas “saw what his anti-slavery hosts seemed blind to... The anti-slavery people stepped around these Irish poor as they made their way into Douglass’s lectures about mistreated Africans in America.”^{xxxii}

But I think the most remarkable passage, and the most moving, takes the form of an accusation against the Irish. Here Douglass expresses outrage with Irish racism while simultaneously displaying an intensity of compassion for the Irish: “Perhaps no class of our fellow-citizens has carried this prejudice against color to a point more extreme and dangerous

than have our Catholic Irish fellow-citizens,” Douglass asserts, adding immediately, “and yet no people on the face of the earth have been more relentlessly persecuted and oppressed on account of race and religion than have these same Irish people.”^{xxxiii}

Conclusion

The theological analysis understands that when the Other in the self, the Holy Spirit ... requires the self to judge itself to be transgressor, the Holy Spirit can yet be friendly to the self. Instead of excluding the self from companionship with the divine Other the latter remains within the self a source of consolation and of inspiration toward the principles which have been transgressed.

These words were written seventy years ago by H. Richard Niebuhr in *The Christian Century*. I used to distribute copies of this passage in class each semester and have often reflected on its meaning, especially for my own teaching. It is also the passage that came to mind as I contemplated Douglass’s prophetic yet compassionate words. I believe that Frederick Douglass’s spiritual genius consists at least in part in having managed to both reflect and embody on a human scale what H. R. Niebuhr suggests takes place in divine-human interaction: Douglass does not exclude the other—in this case the Irish—from his company, even as he accuses, even as he mourns a broken alliance and a betrayal of trust. More than that, he comforts as he accuses, assuring those under accusation that, yes, he knows the history of Irish suffering and degradation and will not attempt to diminish its significance.

I hope to learn from Douglass, hope to embody something of his spirit as I go about my teaching and writing. Unfortunately, the Spirit that Niebuhr invokes and Douglass embodies cannot be coerced into action. It moves where it will; we can only do our best to remain open so we might better discern.

I had hoped to end this pedagogical reflection by taking my inspiration from Douglass and softening my criticism of Ignatiev and of his book. I even considered admitting that I’d learned from Ignatiev in spite of his pedagogical obtuseness. But I’m not quite ready for that. I’m not even sure it’s true.

But I did read something in *How the Irish Became White* that gave me pause. In the introduction, Ignatiev says he is saddened that neither of his parents lived to see the book he had written. He hints at the pride his father would have that his son is teaching at Harvard, especially in light of his father’s comments on the anti-Semitism at the Harvard of an earlier age. But what really hit home was Ignatiev’s account of how his mother used to send him clippings she cut from newspapers and magazines to help him along with his research. My mother did the same thing, sometimes dispatching three or four thick envelopes a week crammed full with articles and reviews covering the full spectrum of world events and human learning.

As I thought about the implications of that shared experience, Ignatiev’s and mine, I got caught up in a reverie. I saw myself as a small boy seated beside little Noel Ignatiev and Frederick Douglass, too. We sat silently, motionlessly, awaiting further instructions from our mothers. There they sat, arranged around a large oak table, as formidable a conclave as had ever been assembled, speaking familiarly, tenderly, conspiratorially as we listened in silence.

But my reverie was interrupted, invaded, really. Men with guns came and took Frederick Douglass’s mother away. They told him that now his mother would die alone because of her treacherous son.

But then Frederick Douglass, his hair like a lion's mane, turned and spoke to Noel Ignatiev and me. He was kind. He knew the histories of both our tribes. But, coerced by grief, he told us that we too had wounded his heart, "though in different ways."

Notes

ⁱ The population of Ireland before the Famine is estimated to have been approximately eight million. Ireland, even today, has a population of fewer than five million. The best recent study on the Famine is Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-52* (Boulder, Colo.: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1995).

ⁱⁱ Tom Hayden, you may recall, was a founder and president of the radical activist group, Students for a Democratic Society. He also authored the group manifesto, The Port Huron Statement. I became aware of his work on the Irish when he visited the Emory campus with Cornel West and others to speak about radical politics and race relations. More recently, Hayden has held elected office, worked for civil liberties in Northern Ireland, and been instrumental in introducing teaching material on the Famine into state mandated curricula treating genocide. California, New York, and New Jersey are among the states to have adopted such curricula.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tom Hayden, ed., *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections on the Legacy of the Famine* (Boulder, Colo.: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997).

^{iv} Tom Hayden, *Irish on the Inside: In Search of the Soul of Irish America* (New York: Verso, 2001).

^v Hayden's project of the critical retrieval of Irish identity and history is complicated, rather than enhanced by the recent fascination with Irish Catholic identity. See Diane Negra, ed., *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008). Indeed, the case can be made that under certain circumstances, the affirmation of ethnicity can be represent a denial of white privilege. This argument is persuasively made by Matthew Jacobson in Matthew Jacobson and Matthew Frye, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). Jacobson, however, expresses sympathy for Hayden's project of re-radicalizing Irish identity. Though up to 45 million Americans claim Irish identity, there are only approximately 15 million Irish-Catholics in the United States (Andrew Greeley, in conversation).

^{vi} My mother was particularly taken by a controversial BBC special on the Famine which, countering recent British (and Irish) revisionist history had placed the blame for the devastation of the Irish Potato Famine squarely on the British government, though stopping short of accusations of genocide. She said the documentary made her so sad, "I almost cried." I said, "Ma, it would have been all right to cry, you know." "Well, boo hoo," she said. "How's that, professor?"—more or less a perfect specimen of Hayden's notion of repressed trauma.

^{vii} Thomas H. O'Connor's *The Boston Irish* and Jack Beatty's *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1874-1958)* were special favorites.

^{viii} Thandeka, *Learning to Be White: Money, Race and God in America* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

^{ix} "Formation and Transformation in Religious Education" was for a little over a decade the introductory course in religious education at Candler School of Theology.

^x I profited greatly from conversations with Veronice Miles not only on Thandeka's book, but also on how to teach it and how to both invite and defuse the inevitable strategies of resistance it

engendered. Our conversations, like those in class, were volatile, productive, and finally, for me, profoundly insightful.

^{xi} Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995).

^{xii} David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, revised edition (New York: Verso, 1999).

^{xiii} Of course, stressing common history does not always betoken evasion. A particularly interesting addition to the research on Irish-American, African American common culture is *Tangled Roots* a research project about the shared history of African Americans and Irish-Americans, sponsored by the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Abolition, Resistance and Slavery at Yale University, headed up by James McGowan, a leading scholar on Harriet Tubman. Among the elements of common history documented by the center is a series of joint slave revolts of Irish and African slaves in Barbados in the middle of the seventeenth century. Somewhere between 20,000 and 60,000 Irish had been sold into slavery or indentured servanthood by Cromwell following the invasion and decimation of Ireland. See also Tucker Todd, *Notre Dame vs. The Klan: How the Fighting Irish Defeated the Ku Klux Klan* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 2004).

A fascinating recent book on Irish-American and African American shared heritage is James W. O'Toole's *Passing for White: Race, Religion and the Healy Family, 1820-1920*, which follows the fortunes of several children of Irish immigrant Michael Morris Healy and his African American slave wife, Eliza Clark Healy, one of whom became president of Georgetown University and another a Roman Catholic bishop in Maine.

^{xiv} I am drawing on a distinction I made some time ago in "Practice Talks Back to Theory: A Critical Reflection on Teaching," in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, Volume 5, Number 4, October 2002, pp. 201–210.

^{xv} Hayden, 35. In looking into the history of his own family in America, Hayden discovered both Irish rebels and an abolitionist. He is suggesting that Ignatiev's analysis tends to see the Irish embrace of whiteness as an all or nothing affair, when there is evidence of significant resistance. Hayden cites a number of historic and contemporary Irish agitators, union organizers, scholars, and progressive politicians to make his case. He also calls attention to the explicit connection drawn by Robert Kennedy between his own Famine heritage and his commitment to the poor in America that influenced his own thinking on the matter. I concur with Hayden's judgment. See Hayden, *Irish on the Inside*, especially pp. 68–88.

^{xvi} Hayden, *Irish on the Inside*, 36.

^{xvii} Hayden, *Irish on the Inside*, 35.

^{xviii} Hayden, *Irish on the Inside*, 34.

^{xix} Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress Press, 1978), 50.

^{xx} Brueggemann, 51.

^{xxi} Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, third edition (New York: Prentice-Hall, 2001). I am extrapolating from Eisner's notions of implicit and null curriculum, applying them to texts rather than to teaching and the teaching situation, per se. The notion of implicit curricula for Eisner, among other things, regards how "schools socialize children to a set of expectations that some argue are profoundly more powerful and longer lasting than what is intentionally taught or what the explicit curriculum of the school publicly provides" (88). Eisner's treatment of the "null curriculum" is more original: "It is my thesis that what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach. . . ."

The absence of a set of considerations or perspectives or the inability to use certain processes for appraising a context biases the evidence one is able to take into account. A parochial perspective or simplistic analysis is the inevitable progeny of ignorance” (97). I need to add, however, that I do not see judgments of implicit and especially null curricula as self-justifying. For instance, when I speak about what is absent in Ignatiev’s text I will need to observe not only that it is absent but also that its absence distorts what the text purports to teach the reader about the situation at hand. Eisner’s own treatment of null curricula does not, in my opinion, adequately address this methodological issue.

^{xxii} Ignatiev, 3.

^{xxiii} Ignatiev, 178.

^{xxiv} Ignatiev, 178.

^{xxv} Eagleton, 13.

^{xxvi} Hayden, *Irish on the Inside*, 38–39. In 1995, I believe it was, the famed Irish-American folklorist and performer Mick Maloney came to Emory to perform and lecture. He’d told us something both disturbing and curious: that the Irish who wrote music and poetry and novels about all kinds of things wrote very little, next to nothing really, about the Famine. In retrospect, I believe it was Mick Maloney’s visit and that curious observation of his that inspired me to visit Ireland on the anniversary of Black ’47.

^{xxvii} Kinealy, 105.

^{xxviii} Hayden, *Irish Hunger*, 285

^{xxix} Douglass (Cambridge, Mass.: Belnap Press, 1969), 69. Sadly, Douglass felt he had to feign indifference to their advice because white men had been known to encourage slaves to run away so they could collect the reward at their capture. Douglass adds, however, that “[I] nevertheless remembered their advice, and from that time I resolved to run away.”

^{xxx} Douglass uses the plural, “documents,” here because he is also speaking of the influence of a dialogue between slave and slave master from the Columbian Orator.

^{xxxi} Douglass, 67. It appears that Douglass conflates or perhaps combines in his memory two distinct essays. Though Sheridan was indeed a champion of Catholic Emancipation in Ireland, his essay in that collection, “Mr. Sheridan’s Speech Against Mr. Taylor,” does not treat the subject. “Douglass is probably referring to another selection in the anthology entitled, ‘Part of Mr. O’Connor’s Speech in the Irish House of Commons, in Favor of the Bill For Emancipating the Roman Catholics, 1795.’” I’m quoting here from John W. Blassingame, John V. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series Two, Volume 1 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 132. For an excellent recent biography of Sheridan, see Fintan O’Toole, *The Traitor’s Kiss: The Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997).

^{xxxii} Quoted in Hayden, *Irish Hunger*, 293, note 33.

^{xxxiii} From *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, excerpted in *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 333.