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So Far So Close: Irish and Mexican Migrant Experience in the United States

Resumen

Irlandeses y mejicanos conforman dos grupos migratorios especialmente singulares en Estados Unidos. Las actuales diferencias entre unos y otros inducen a pensar que en ambos casos la experiencia migratoria respondió a patrones diferentes. Sin embargo, conforme profundizamos en las raíces históricas, sociológicas y políticas de la llegada y asentamiento de irlandeses y mejicanos a Estados Unidos es posible comprobar que ambos modelos no son tan distintos. En uno y otro caso se reproducen comportamientos similares en aspectos relativos a por qué emigraron, a los patrones de asentamiento, las complejas relaciones con el grupo hegemónico, o los sistemas de autoprotección.

Palabras clave:
emigración; irlandeses; mejicanos; Estados Unidos; asimilación

Abstract

Irish and Mexicans conform two singular migratory groups in the United States. Nowadays it is possible to find important differences between both groups that could lead to think that in both cases the migratory experience responded to different patterns. However, as we empirically analyze the historical, sociological, and political roots of the arrival and settlement of Irish and Mexicans in the United States, it is possible to verify that the two models are not so different. In both cases similar reasons and behaviors are reproduced in aspects related to why they migrated, to settlement patterns, the complex relations with the hegemonic group, or self-protection systems.

Keywords:
migration; Irish; Mexicans; United States; assimilation

Migratory movements are as old as humanity itself. In some cases, in a peaceful and legal way, and in others using violence through wars and conquests. Since the end of the twentieth century and especially at the beginning of this twenty-first century, a new migratory model has been produced halfway between the two aforementioned: migrants enter the host country in an illegal way, but not violently. The reasons why people emigrate are usually political and economic, but they can also be of a purely social nature.

This essay is not intended to study the issue of migration from a humanitarian point of view, but rather to analyze and compare, from empirical premises, Irish and Mexican emigration to the United States; a phenomenon that begins in both cases at the same time: 1845 in Ireland, as a consequence of the Great Famine caused by the pests that ended potato crops and devastated the country; and 1848 in Mexico after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo whereby the United States incorporated an area of almost one million square kilometers into its territory. In the preparation of this work, as far as it has been possible to investigate, no previous reference of academic study has been found where these two migratory flows are comparatively analyzed, so it must be understood within the limitations of an introductory study. The history of the United States would not have been the same without emigration from these two countries regardless of the approach: economic, social, or cultural. It would be possible to add, though it is not the goal of this essay, that in both cases, emigration to the United States was – and still is – a key issue in the history of the two countries, and their implications affected areas of political, social, and economic nature.

At first glance it may seem that the Irish and Mexican migratory reality and experience responded to different patterns and were developed according to different conditions; however, as we deepen the historical and sociological analysis, we observe that the similarities of one and the other are more numerous and significant than expected. When studying who migrated, why they migrated, where they migrated, how they acted, their social behaviors, or the assimilation/adaptation processes, similar patterns are repeated in both cases. We do find substantial differences during the second half of the twentieth century. Kevin Kenny (2006) affirms that the Irish have already been assimilated thanks to the acceptance or adaptation of the WASP culture, while this issue is believed to be pending for Mexicans – and Latinos in general – since the process of emigration is still going on.

The historical background of both communities was similar in that Ireland and Mexico were colonies of two European powers and both were living under two monarchical systems. Another interesting fact that should not be overlooked is religion, as the citizens of both countries fervently embraced Catholicism. Nor should the language be ignored. Obviously, the Mexicans did not speak English; and as for the Irish, a high percentage of those who immigrated to the United States between 1845 and 1855 spoke only Gaelic, and this was also the first language for more than half of the rest (Stenson 1998, 121). Therefore, the cultural references of the Irish and the Mexican around two aspects as important as language and religion were different from the patterns established in their host country. Both groups suffered similar social rejection and they went through similar stereotyping by the dominant culture. The Irish were stigmatized and reflected in comic strips as

the “d’s”: dirty, dumb, drunk; in the case of the Mexicans, their “d’s” responded to “domestics, delinquents, drug dealers” (Navarrete 2014). Furthermore, the economic models in their two countries were similar and responded to patterns substantially different from those already established in the United States. This will be fundamental to answer the question, “Who emigrated?”

The main coincidence between both nations of origin that motivated the migratory processes will be found in the scarce – inexistent – industrialization which resulted in an almost exclusive dependence on rural production; a rural production that neither generated nor evolved into an agrarian industrialization. Continuing with the coincidences, we observed that the distribution of land – as just mentioned, the only generator of wealth – was uneven as it was accumulated in few hands. In the case of Ireland, the owners of large farms were mostly English Protestants who did not even live on the island; the percentage of distribution of land in the hands of Mexican landowners was similar to the Irish, and the owners were mostly of Spanish or Creole origin. The small farms in the two countries were atomized in every new generation until they became mere reductions of family subsistence that did not require additional labor outside the family itself. That is to say, the social conditions in Ireland and Mexico before the historical events in which the great migratory movements began, were of extreme poverty for large segments of the population. The conditions that they would find in the United States would not be much better than those they had left behind.

This will lead us to the understanding of “Why” they emigrated. It can be stated, in general, that Irish emigrants – mostly Catholic – and Mexicans belonged to the lower social classes, were peasants without any other qualification who were employed as hand labor, usually badly paid, and were hired in the worst jobs for which no special skills were required. The Mexicans have been traditionally related to agricultural work; however, it is ignored that they were the workforce in the industrial development of states like California. On them fell the production of bricks and building material for the urban development of large cities such as Los Angeles or San Francisco. The Irish also occupied dangerous and poorly paid jobs fundamental to the economic development of the country: they built much of the rail network in the Midwest and East Coast, and they were employed in the construction of canals and in the mines in the coal basins. Women, in both cases, worked primarily as maids or in domestic jobs.

The jobs they occupied were those rejected by domestic workers. The salary was so low that at the end of the 1840s the term “Slavery of wages” and “White slavery” (Roediger 1991, 71) were coined to define the working conditions of these people. Noel Ignatiev (1995, 97) quotes John Finch, who wrote in 1843 that “the poorer class of Irish immigrants in America, are the greater enemies to the Negro population”.

Paradoxically, their presence in the labor market had a double benefit for employers: on the one hand they got cheap labor; on the other hand the salary of those already employed could be reduced. According to Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffery G. Williamson (1998) at the end of the nineteenth century, the average salary of the workers would have been around 10–15 percent higher if the labor market had not had this cheap and abundant workforce. As Kerby Miller notes, “The 1.8 million [Irish] immigrants who came in the decade 1845–1855 were as a rule poorer than those who

had come earlier, and the majority of males among them probably worked at least temporarily as canal, railroad, building-construction, or dock laborers” (1988, 318).

In 1942 the governments of Mexico and the United States signed a migration agreement facilitating the arrival of millions of Mexican nationals, desperate for work, [who] were willing to take arduous jobs at wages scorned by most Americans. The name given to such agreement was extremely significant and leaves no doubt about its intention: “Bracero Program”. Throughout this program’s duration, there were numerous strikes that protested the differences in wages between Anglo and Mexican workers, or because Mexicans were paid according to their production (per box collected), instead of the time worked (hourly wage) as the Anglos. The situation in the case of Mexican immigrants today remains similar. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the economic performance of these native-born workers lags behind that of native workers who are not of Mexican ancestry.

As a result, social pressure against low-skilled immigrants who accepted any job for miserable wages had important social consequences. The massive arrival of Irish Catholic emigrants motivated that some radical groups such as the “American Protective Association” (APA) of anti-Catholic ideology, also the “Ku Klux Klan”, of racist principles, questioned the Irish presence; and the “American Party”, as xenophobic as anti-Catholic, began to lash out at workers who were not white and Protestant. The pressure and popularity of these groups motivated the North American government to begin to legislate restrictively on emigration. It was argued that the costs of social benefits in health or education generated by those immigrant groups were excessively disproportionate and burdensome for society. The Migration Policy Institute states that such assessment was incorrect, at least when referred to the rates of schooling, since the resources demanded by immigrants were significantly lower than those required by the already settled population. This situation seems to have resulted in a similar instrumentalization in relation to its political ideology. The Irish as well as the Mexicans reacted in a similar way to their historical employment situation in relation to their political ideology opting for the Democratic Party. According to Ignatiev, “The special relationship between the Irish and the Democratic Party was not an automatic attachment, nor a simple legacy of the “civil revolution” of 1800, but a bond renewed in the Jacksonian upsurge, and continuously thereafter (1995, 75).

Important cities like New York, Chicago, and Boston had mayors of Irish origin; also senators and governors. The great leap from local to state politics came with the election for the presidency of the United States in 1960, by John F. Kennedy, who was Catholic of Irish origin. This marked the highest point of Irish influence in political affairs. Kennedy surrounded himself with an important group of counselors of Irish origin.


A similar process is observed in relation to the Mexican population, although its direct involvement in politics was not especially relevant until the second half of the last century. The persecution of the Mexicans was systematic throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb (2003) have listed the number of lynched Mexicans between 1848 and 1928 at 597. Like the Irish Gangs the nineteenth century, which will be mentioned later, Mexicans began to organize in order to answer to the social violence against them and claimed better

working conditions. In New Mexico, the secret organization *Boinas Blancas* (“White Berets”) emerged in the nineteenth century to oppose the occupation of land by white settlers, the fencing of large ranches that prevented the free movement of cattle from the small ranchers, and the refusal of the railway owners to pay to cross their lands. The nickname *Boinas Blancas* originated from the color of the berets that were used. At night, they burned houses, destroyed fences, and boycotted the railroad jobs. On March 12, 1890 they signed a manifesto in which, among other things, one could read, “If the fact that we are law abiding citizens is questioned, come out to our homes and see the hunger and desolation we are suffering; and ‘this’ is the result of the deceitful and corrupt methods of ‘bossism’”. In 1915 Mexican rebel groups published “The Plan de San Diego” (in San Diego, Texas) with the purpose of overthrowing Anglo government in southern states; as a result, “The Liberating Army of Races and Peoples” was created. The fighting, which was referred as “The Bandits War” resulted in the death of twenty-one white Americans.

In the mid-twentieth century there were different actions and confrontations of social and labor claims. In 1943, young Mexican-Americans rioted in social confrontations known as the Zoot Suit Riots; in 1960 David Sánchez founded *The Brown Berets* following the aesthetics of the African-American *Black Panthers*; in 1962 Cesar Chávez, Dolores Huerta and Gilbert Padilla created “United Farm Workers”; in those same years the Chicano Movement began its journey; in 1966 the activist Reies Tijerina began his march from Albuquerque to Santa Fe claiming for the dignity and rights of Mexican Americans; on March, 5 1968 young students of Mexican origin at Garfield High School in Los Angeles decided to leave the classrooms in protest for the unequal conditions concerning the quality of education; it was the origin of the “Walkouts,” extended the next day in the rest of high schools in East Los Angeles and California.

As in the case of the Irish, their political activity began in local governments. In this area, the most prominent name is Antonio Villaraigosa, the mayor of Los Angeles in 2005. Bill Richardson served as governor of New Mexico in 2003, and even presented himself to the Democratic presidential primaries in 2008. The vast majority of these politicians belonged to the Democratic party, and the political support of the Mexican-Americans in particular and Latinos in general has been mostly democratic: in 2008, 67% (with Barack Obama as the democratic candidate – he won to John McCain, 31%); in 2012, 71% (Barack Obama was again the democratic candidate – he won to Mitt Romney, 27%); in 2016; 66% (with Hillary Clinton as democratic candidate – she lost to Donald Trump, 28%). Without having the weight of the Irish with Kennedy, the Mexican-Americans achieved, with the Obama administration, important levels of power. In the Republican party the most outstanding names are Ted Cruz, Texas senator who even competed with Donald Trump for the Republican nomination for the presidency; and Marco Rubio, of Cuban origin, Florida senator, probably a presidential candidate in the near future.

Another important point to understand the socio-historical coincidences of both groups has to do with the similarity in behavior with respect to their places of settlement. That is, “Where” they emigrated. As Chiswick and Miller mention, emigrants choose their places of settlement according to three motivations:



The first is “ports” of entry, near seaports in the past, near airports in the current era. The second is where family and friends (co-ethnics) from earlier migrations have settled. Even if the location choice of the first settler from the ethnic group is purely random among a set of equally attractive locations in a destination country, once that first settler is established, future settlers are no longer indifferent among destination sites. The third is where the jobs are, that is, where the immigrants are most able to gain employment that makes best use of their skills, or lack thereof. (2002, 2)

The areas where Irish and Mexicans are mostly concentrated, respectively, are in the northeast and southwest. In the two groups under study, the location meets the three criteria mentioned above by Chiswick and Miller. The Irish settled mostly in the New England area that was their entry point into the United States, and the Mexicans settled in the Border States that are closest to their place of origin. They usually looked for enclaves in the new nation where people with whom they have a family bond were already settled; and finally in the two areas mentioned it was relatively easy to find jobs. The gathering of people of the same national origin was coined by Chiswick and Miller as “clannishness” (3).


The economic and social implications of this “clannishness” are highly significant. Lawrence McCaffrey (1996) as well as John R. McKivigan and Thomas J. Robertson (1996) have described the benefits for the Irish living in areas with high concentration of Irish immigrants. As stated by Chiswick and Miller, “Enclaves matter for immigrant adjustment. Immigrant linguistic concentrations are associated with a lower level of proficiency in the destination language (English). Poorer English language skills result in lower nominal earnings” (2002, 28).

In addition to the generalist vision, it is possible to descend one more step by noting that they not only concentrated on specific states, but in specific areas within those states, thus creating large migrant communities in metropolitan areas that in some cases could be termed as “ghettos” of Irish and Mexicans. The word “ghetto” undoubtedly has negative connotations; however, there is wide debate about whether the phenomenon of “clustering” is negative or beneficial. If individuals avoid communication in the dominant language of the new nation, they will delay the acquisition of such language, resulting in the mentioned “lower nominal earning” and getting worse jobs. This is what historically happened to Irish and Mexican-Americans. Clustering had also a negative impact in the degree of assimilation and lower occupational outcomes in less skilled workers because they did not have access to higher occupational categories. On the other hand, “those who leave a high concentration enclave for a low or zero concentration area will tend to be those who receive a high wage offer in the latter location” (Chiswick 2008, 526, f.n. 8). For George J. Borjas (1999) as well as for Ivan Light and Richard E. Isralowitz (1996), this implies a delay in immigrant assimilation. Peter Cirenza (2015) states some of the negative aspects of geographical clustering: “clustering was quite pronounced for Irish immigrants in late nineteenth century America” and “those Irish who lived in more heavily concentrated Irish counties were less likely to be in the highest occupational category in 1900” (23). Finally, he concludes that “Geographic clustering also did not

appear to assist Irish immigrants in gaining preferential access to jobs in city government, the Roman Catholic Church, or where trade union ties were important” (33).

But geographical clustering is beneficial to implement the sense of identity and for the prevailing of the language. Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut have argued that clustering has some advantages as it was a source of originating some business and also facilitated political implication (1996, 985). As I understand the most important benefit of clustering has to do with the sense of belonging; it is an easy way to establish friendships and networks, and a chance to prosper. When someone has problems, the easiest way to solve them is to turn to the people he knows, those who share the same values and probably the same problems. Ewa Morawska even coined the term “ghetto of hope” to describe the benefits of people congregating with those of their same social values (2007, 44). The geographic clustering also implemented family interaction assuring economic support by being in a more supportive family environment in case of not finding work; that same social interaction environment also provided them with a certain personal security when they developed in a field ruled by already known social codes. Demographic concentration also served to preserve their culture and religion. These two aspects define the people and are the cornerstone to understand the degree of assimilation and acceptance of the new culture, and also their level of integration and acceptance by members of the other culture. As a result, both Irish and Mexicans delayed their levels of assimilation to the dominant culture, and finding a place in the new culture was harder than expected. As stated by Portes and Rumbaut, “First generation immigrants have always been a restless bunch, here one day and gone the next: in the society, but not yet of it” (1996, 103).

Beyond having another religion, their culinary tastes, way of dress, social celebrations, models of social organization, or the means that provided them with information were different from those of the dominant culture. This created a certain tension when trying to preserve the customs of their “old country” as opposed to the values and modes of the “new country”. It has been historically assumed that all these cultures became diluted into a new and unique cultural model as the United States became a melting pot. This is how Israel Zangwill defined this socio-cultural phenomenon in 1909, “America is God's crucible, the great Melting Pot where all races of Europe are melting and re-forming!” (38).

The “Melting Pot” theory implies a high degree of cultural assimilation by which immigrants lost their identities – mainly cultural and sometimes religious – with the result that their links to their own original culture were broken in favor of the new dominant social model. The WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant) theory is closely linked to the “Melting Pot” theory and most European immigrants with racial and/or cultural similarities reached high degrees of assimilation. But two European groups did not conform to the generality: the Jews and the Irish. In the case of the Mexicans, the divergence was obvious, since they were not white, nor European, nor Protestant. The theory that understands the United States as a great Melting Pot has been questioned in recent decades in favor of that other known as the “Salad Bowl” in which the resulting culture would be a conjunction of different cultures without depriving any of them of their innate characteristics. This new social perception has motivated a clear social reaction from the dominant culture. Samuel 

~ Huntington, in his polemic book *Who Are We?* defends that immigration, especially from Mexico, is destroying the “traditional Anglo-Protestant creed” which is at the bottom of the “real” (2004, 221) American culture: “The driving force behind the trend toward cultural bifurcation, however, has been immigration from Latin America and especially from Mexico” (221). These immigrants, argues Huntington, refuse to assimilate the said American culture and live in segregated societies ruled by anti-American values.

The Irish were also persecuted in the nineteenth century by the “anti-American values” that Catholicism represented. Groups began to appear, gangster gangs in some cases, with a clear anti-Irish and anti-Catholic ideology; some of these groups were the “Bowery Boys” in New York, the “Plug Uglies” in Maryland, and the “Rip Raps” in Virginia. As has been mentioned about the Mexicans, the Irish organized self-defense groups such as the “Schuylkill Rangers” led by James Haggerty in Philadelphia, or the “Shirt Tails” and “Dead Rabbits” in New York, the “Clana-Gael” following the model of the “Fenian Brotherhood”. In 1857 these groups confronted the anti-Irish, anti-Catholic gangs in the Five Point Riots on which Martin Scorsese based his famous film *Gangs of New York* (2002). The social conflicts and the rejection that caused by the great flow of Irish emigrants who came to the United States, mainly because of their Catholic beliefs, was a determining aspect for the creation of the aforementioned “American Party”, popularly known as “Know Nothing”, and its subsequent growth as a reaction to the massive arrival of Irish Catholics. It was created in the late 1840s in response to the aforementioned danger that loomed in American culture due to the massive arrival of Catholic immigrants. There were numerous attacks on Catholic churches in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. In Massachusetts, a member of the anti-Catholic party, Henry Gardner, came to serve as governor, as did Peter F. Causey in Delaware; likewise, Thomas Swann was elected mayor of Baltimore in 1856. Another prominent “Know Nothing” militant was Millard Fillmore, vice president in the Zachary Taylor legislature, who was appointed president after the death of the originally elected. He appeared for reelection in 1856 but was not elected. The stigma of Catholicism lasted over time. One of the fundamental problems that Kennedy had to face during his election campaign was that of professing the Catholic religion. As an anonymous attendee exposed in the meetings that the Kennedy team held with different groups of Irish, “There’s only one problem. He’s Catholic. That’s our goddamned problem”. The situation for the Irish has changed substantially over the past half century; as recorded by Liam Kennedy, director of the Clinton Institute for American Studies at University College Dublin, “Being Irish-American has become a benefit to the Irish. In the past being Irish-American was something you had to overcome”. Theodore W. Allen in *The Invention of the White Race* (2012) even goes further when defending that the same Catholic-Irish who were victims of racial oppression and labor injustices later on were fervent defenders of white supremacy.

Undoubtedly, already at the beginning of the 21st century the level of assimilation/adaptation of Irish and Mexicans is remarkably different. However, these two cultural models are the ones that most clearly differ from the rest, in the sense that their socio-cultural public manifestations have been clearly absorbed and recognized by the dominant culture. Undoubtedly,

folk or religious manifestations of other ethnic groups such as Asians or Arabs – Chinese New Year, Ramadan – are practiced by the members of the group, but their festivities have not been absorbed and incorporated into the dominant culture as celebrations such as St. Patrick’s Day or Columbus Day. In 1988, *National Hispanic Heritage Month* was established (September 15th-October 15th); as was *Irish American Heritage Month* in 1991 (March). No other community like the two under study had such a large number of leisure and dining venues similar to that of Irish pubs or Tex-Mex food restaurants. Likewise, no character belonging to other communities has the social impact of J. F. Kennedy or Cesar Chavez.

So far we have seen how these two groups share many coincidences as related to history, religion, labor conditions, culture, and politics. Other aspects in which for obvious spatial reasons we cannot go in depth are those of the clearly patriarchal family models in the two groups, aspects related to identity or the answer to the question “Who am I?”, the creation of brotherhoods as a vehicle of self-support and self-protection: the “Spartan Association”, “The Ancient Order of Hibernias” – members should be Irish or Irish descendants and Catholics, similar to the Mexicans “Catholics for the Race” – or the Mexican “Mutualistas” and “Los hermanos penitentes”; the similarities between family migration models and family sizes; or the relation between race and class and the desire of “whiteness” as a way of surpassing marginalization. Whitening was a way of reaching the privileges of “American whites”: “Strong tendencies existed in antebellum America to consign the Irish, if not to the black race, then to an intermediate race located socially between black and white” assumes Ignatiev (1995, 76). In the Introduction he had advanced “To Irish laborers, to become white meant at first that they could sell themselves piecemeal instead of being sold for life, and later that they could compete for jobs in all spheres” (3). David R. Roediger goes farther when he states that “Irish-Americans instead treasured their whiteness, as entitling them to both political rights and to jobs” (1991, 136).

But this introductory essay could not be finished without a brief reference to the delicate issue of assimilation versus adaptation, directly related to the “geographic clustering” or “clannishness” already mentioned. Tomás R. Jiménez and David Fitzgerald (2007) in “Mexican Assimilation: A Temporal and Spatial Reorientation” mention three different kinds of assimilation: “classical assimilation”, “intergenerational assimilation”, and “segmented assimilation” (340). John Macintosh Callaway, Jr. in “Adaptation to Climate Change: Definitions, Concepts and Relevant Economic Metrics” (2016) describes five different models of adaptation: “autonomous adaptation”, “private adaptation”, “anticipatory adaptation”, “no-regrets adaptation”, and “short-run adaptation” (9-10). Chiswick and Houseworth (2008) view assimilation as “the process by which the foreign born acquire the human capital specific to the host country” (3). However a group is assimilated or adapted, the key factor is on whether the immigrant population and their descendants reach the point of living in the new society with the same rights and with no restrictions due to ethnicity as the citizens of the given nationality. One of the first American novels is *Modern Chivalry* (1792) by Hugh Henry Brackenridge in which the protagonist, Captain John Farrago, has a “servant”, Teague O’Regan, recognized as an “aboriginal Irish” who will reach a high position in the administration. In the novel, the ~

~ singular O'Regan becomes a reputed politician from being a servant: he first adapted and then assimilated into the white American culture.

It would be naive and embarrassing to say that the Irish and Mexican-Americans have reached identical or similar levels of assimilation in the WASP culture. It is true that prominent figures from both communities have reached important levels of power in politics – as already mentioned – and in different socio-cultural areas (writers, athletes, singers, businessmen, actors...); but in other significant variables such as per capita income or university graduates there is still a considerable gap, not to mention social acceptance – take the example of President Trump's tweet regarding the four newly elected ethnic congressmen, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: "I don't believe the four Congresswomen are capable of loving our Country" (2019).

However, it is possible to find significant similarities regarding the levels of adaptation/assimilation in the two groups with respect to interracial marriages. For members of a geographically clustered ethnic group, marriage is not a question concerning only love or economic matters; the importance of cultural factors seems to be determinant. Endogamy or exogamy within these two groups is worth studying. In 2001 I was finishing a research on Chicano Literature at the University of New Mexico and was hosted in Albuquerque by two Mexican-American friends, professors at that university; they revealed to me how upset they were because their son was dating and planning to marry an Anglo girl. August B. Hollingshead demonstrated in "Cultural Factors in the Selection of Marriage Mates" that religion and ethnicity were determinate factors on marriage choices (1950, 627). Inter marriages had been studied as a measure of ethnic assimilation by sociologists and historians. They were prohibited in 1661 and legalized in all states by the Supreme Court in 1967. In the mid twentieth century only 8% of marriages were interracial; in the 2000s the percentages had risen to 15.1%. As for the social acceptance it was only 4% in the 1950s; in 1956 it was 1/3 of the population, and 80% with the turn of the century (Jayson 2011). Levels of acceptance may also vary depending on the ethnic group and gender of the spouses.

When studying the number concerning interracial marriages in Irish and Mexican-Americans, we observe some similarities. Regardless of gender, 82% of Mexicans-Americans are married to another Mexican-American; this data rises to 92% when people of Mexican origin are included. Irish-Americans followed similar patterns, as studied by Timothy W. Guinnane, Carolyn M. Moehling, and Cormac O'Grada: "Among those Irish-women who married in America, 70 percent married Irish-born men or the sons of Irish-born immigrants" (2002, 4). As a matter of fact, Irish-Americans maintained strong links to their Irish heritage and followed similar family patterns as in Ireland – though "fertility of the Irish in America was lower than that prevailing in Ireland" (7) – , as did the Mexicans. Geographical concentration has much to do with this trend: "The Irish were much less likely to have husbands in white-collar occupations; they lived in more Catholic counties, and were concentrated in the large cities of the Northeast" (19). The two important factors to explain this behavior in Irish and Mexican-Americans are geographical concentrations – homogeneous ethnic areas vs. heterogeneous ethnic areas – and religion – not only Christians/Others, but also Catholics/Protestants. This affirmation is

valid even nowadays. In 2008, 22% of new marriages were intermarriages in the West of the United States, while 13% were in the South and North East, and 11% in the Midwest.

Peter M. Blau, Terry C. Blum, and Joseph E. Schwartz have studied in "Heterogeneity and Inter-marriage" (1982) the factors taken into consideration for members of different groups when deciding to marry: religion is even more important than cultural or racial considerations. It is also interesting to observe how fertility in these two groups follows similar patterns: 1) when an Irish or Mexican marries someone from his/her same group in the United States, the number of children is consistently higher than that of the national average, and much higher than the average of the White Natives; 2) in cases where the marriage is interracial the number of children is lower, but continues to be higher than average. As stated by Guinnane et al., "Being raised in the U.S. seems to have led to different fertility choices. But these choices were still different from those made by the native-born of native parentage" (2002, 26).

In this brief essay some of the similarities between two of the most relevant communities in the United States, those of Irish and Mexican origin, have been outlined. The absence of previous solid comparative academic sources, nonexistent as far as it has been possible to investigate, has conditioned the content of this introductory work.

In any case, the fundamental conditions have been outlined. The experience of emigration and its subsequent settlement in the territory of the United States runs through similar patterns for Irish and Mexicans who, despite being two communities that are so far, share similarities that place them so close. Currently the number of Americans who declare themselves to be from Ireland and Mexico is similar, around 30–5 million. It is no coincidence that these two communities so strongly preserve their ethnic/cultural singularity: the reasons why both emigrated are similar when not identical; Irish and Mexican were extremely poor, in many cases they emigrated illegally, and in the new nation found the same conditions that they had left behind. As a result, they suffered the same contempt and social rejection of the White Native population and were exposed to similar working conditions. Both groups were quickly stereotyped as lazy, drunk, gang members, unadapted, "reds" or "greasers". Albeit all this being true, two factors will be decisive when establishing the coincidences between them: geographical clustering and the Catholic religion.

Geographical clustering had its good parts and its bad parts. On the one hand, they preserved their language and culture; it led to self-defense movements against the attacks of the dominant culture, gave them a sense of belonging, and in times of crisis it served as an economic and spiritual refuge. On the other hand, it delayed its integration into the dominant society and prevented access to economic improvements. The Catholic religion interests the very essence of the spirit, of the social values of the two communities. Religious beliefs are, as a percentage, the main reason for marriage, one of the highly considered criteria, that of religiously mixed marriages, in assimilation/adaptation studies.

The noticeable dissimilarities regarding these levels in both groups are not denied for obvious reasons. Some differences have to do – and this is a subject for another study – ~

with the fact that Irish mass migration ceased in the second quarter of the twentieth century and Mexican mass migration still continues. Irish immigration to America started as soon as the seventeenth century, so they could be considered as one of the oldest immigrants, while Mexicans are, at the same time, the oldest and the newest immigrant.

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Notes

1 David Fitzpatrick (1985) estimates that 40% of the Irish living outside Ireland in 1851 were in the United States (6). Kerby Miller (1988) raises the percentage to 75% of the total number of immigrants (570).

2 "The Bracero Program: A Historical Investigation" (not signed). <https://americanhistory.si.edu/sites/default/files/Bracero%20Historical%20Investigation.pdf>.

3 "The Evolution of the Mexican Workforce in the United States". The National Bureau of Economic Research, accessed November 29, 2019. <https://www.nber.org/digest/deco5/w11281.html>.

4 Related to whiteness he says: "The Democratic Party eased their assimilation as whites, and more than any other institution, it taught them the meaning of whiteness" (76).

5 The most prominent names in this inner circle were David Francis Powers (Special Assistant and assistant Appointments Secretary), Rick Donahue (Assistant to the President), Kenneth O'Donnell (special assistant and appointments secretary), and Lawrence O'Brien (Assistant to the President. He was the electoral strategist during Kennedy's presidential campaign and when reached presidency, he recruited the staff for the President).

6 "The White Caps", *Digital History*, ID582, http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook_print.cfm?smtid=3&psid=582.

7 Besides Mexicans, it also included Native Americans and African Americans (Coerver 2019).

8 "The Latino vote in presidential elections, 2008–2016". Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/29/hillary-clinton-wins-latino-vote-but-falls-below->

2012-support-for-obama/ft_16-11-09_latinovoteyears/. Accessed 29 March, 2019.

9 Ken Salazar (Secretary of the Interior), Hilda Solis (Secretary of Labor), Thomas Perez (Secretary of Labor), Julián Castro (Secretary of Housing and Urban Development), Sonia Sotomayor (Tribunal Supremo), and María Contreras-Swift (Administrator of the Small Business Administration).

10 Paradoxically the “Plug Uglies” joined the “Dead Rabbits” in the New York City Draft Riots (1863) that caused 120 deaths. See Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid “Political Violence and the Irish Diaspora” (459–77) (*The Cambridge History of Modern Ireland*, Eugenio F. Biagini & Mary E. Daly eds. 2017).

11 Ignatiev states that “a portion of the Irish diaspora became known as “the Irish”, [Catholics] a racial (but not ethnic) line invented in Ireland [which] was recreated as an ethnic (but not racial) line in America” (1995, 39).

12 Such name was due to the answer “I know nothing about it”, when members of the group were questioned about their activities. In *The Questions for Admittance to the American Party*, inductees are committed to “...elect to all offices of Honor, Profit, or Trust, no one but native born citizens of America, of this Country to the exclusion of all Foreigners, and to all Roman Catholics, whether they be of native or Foreign Birth, regardless of all party predilections whatever” (1854).

13 From *Irish Central*, the largest and most prominent Irish American website in the US. <https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/jfk-john-f-kennedy-white-house-irish-mafia>

14 Only the Boston metro area has more than 100 Irish pubs. Over 20% of Boston population claims to be of Irish ancestry (<https://www.boston-discovery-guide.com/boston-irish-pubs.html>).

15 Cesar Chavez's Day is a federal commemorative holiday proclaimed by Barack Obama in 2014. It is officially recognized in the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and Washington.

16 It is not the aim of this essay to study coincidences in social pathologies, but there would also be possible to find them when studying alcoholism or violence.

17 Ted Smith states that “The question is, what we can do to sustain Irish American identity in the twenty-first century? Two answers immediately suggest themselves. First, lobby for immigration reform and second, increase the investment in Irish cultural programs in America” (2017).

18 See Laura Gómez. 1992. “The Birth of the “Hispanic” Generation: Attitudes of Mexican-American Political Elites toward the Hispanic Label”. *Latin American Perspectives* 75 (45–58).

19 Later on he continues: “The making of the Irish worker into a white worker was thus a two-sided process. On the one hand, [...] Irish immigrants won acceptance as whites among the larger American population. On the other hand, [...] the Irish themselves came to insist on their own whiteness and on white supremacy” (137).

20 See Grossbard (1993).

21 John Rolfe married Pocahontas in 1614.

22 Figures and tables in this essay are very illustrative to the point here defended. Some other interesting works by Timothy W. Guinnane used for this section are: “The fertility of the Irish in the United States in 1910” (*Irish Economic and Social History* 26, 1999) and “Did Irish Marriage Patterns Survive the Emigrant Voyage? (Irish American Nuptiality 1880–1920” (*Irish Economic and Social History* 26, 1999).

23 Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/06/04/marrying-out/>

24 “In mixed marriages the attitude of the father appears to have been at least as important as that of the mother in deciding the size of the family” (Spengler 1931, 483).

Título:

Tan lejos, tan cerca: la experiencia migratoria irlandesa y mejicana en los Estados Unidos

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