

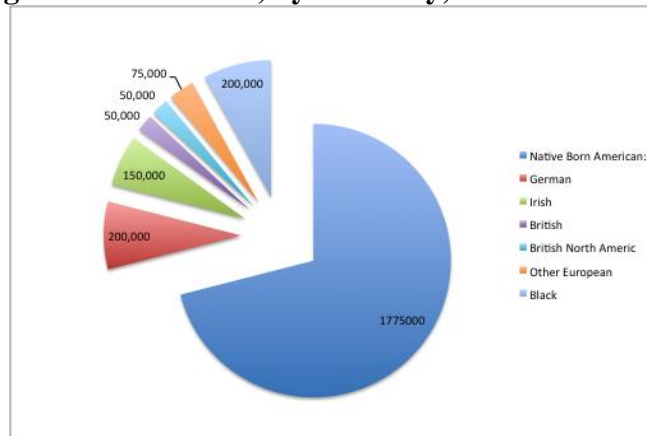
ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Immigrants in the Union Army

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Immigrant soldiers formed a striking presence in the Union armies. Over 200,000 German and 150,000 Irish-born men volunteered to serve in the federal army between 1861 and 1865 and while a majority of these men enlisted in ethnically mixed regiments, units in the Army of the Potomac such as the Irish Brigade and the mostly German Eleventh Corps became synonymous with the ethnic experience during the war. Immigrant service is especially interesting when viewed from the perspective of the nation-building process that occurred during the war as ethnic sacrifice on the field of battle proved the worthiness of these adopted citizens to the American republic. Ethnic service was not, however, spontaneous and must be understood within the broader context of the mid-nineteenth century immigrant experience. While federal armies were incredibly diverse and contained a large number of foreign-born men, Irish and German volunteers were, by far, the most numerous. This essay explores the origins of nineteenth century European immigration, the experience of these men and women in the United States, the reaction of ethnic-Americans to the outbreak of sectional conflict, the motivations behind motivations, ethnic service, and post-war implications of immigrant sacrifice in defense of the Union.

Figure 1: Volunteers, by Ethnicity, in Union Armies¹



Immigrants played a vibrant role in the early republic. This only continued through the mid-19th century when events in Europe, and especially Ireland and

¹ These numbers are an approximate. There is no consensus on exact numbers for ethnic soldiers in the war. Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 577-580.

Germany, encouraged a massive exodus for foreign shores. Irish Catholics (in Ireland) faced widespread persecution and by law these men and women were restricted from property ownership and basic religious and political freedoms. By 1750 Irish Catholic land ownership stood at five percent, and that number continued to shrink over the subsequent one hundred years. In 1801 English control over Ireland was formalized under the Act of Union, which politically incorporated Ireland and the Irish parliament into Great Britain. The political equality implicit in the Act of Union belied the reality of life in Ireland for most Irish Catholics, for they were not treated as equal citizens of Great Britain. The end of the Napoleonic Wars and the passage of an 1825 law that removed customs barriers between Ireland and England led to the rapid decline of the Irish economy. At the same time, however, massive population growth led to an increased reliance on the potato and subdivisions of already scarce land holdings. By the middle of the 1830s nearly thirty percent of Ireland's population, approximately 2,385,000 people, were in some need of public assistance thirty weeks of every year. By 1845, the population of Ireland stood at nearly 8 million and serious tensions existed between the Catholic majority and Protestant minority (backed by the English crown).²

The harvest of 1845 marked the beginning of five years of famine and served to perpetuate an economic crisis in Ireland that lasted well into the twentieth century. The potato was the staple of the Irish diet, the average Irishman ate 12-15 pounds of potatoes per day and also used this crop as fodder for livestock. That fall the crop, to all observers, appeared plentiful and healthy when dug from the ground. Word soon began to spread, however, of a concerning trend. Almost overnight, it seemed, the healthy potatoes turned black and rotted. The blight, brought to Ireland, ironically, in the holds of ships from North America and left to flourish in the damp clime of that island nation, wreaked havoc on Ireland's already shaky economy. Subsequent crop failures in 1846, 1847, and 1848 left the Irish people reeling. Over a million men, women, and children died and another two million fled their homeland for destinations abroad. Ireland's population, which stood at nearly 8 million before the outbreak of the blight, had been reduced by nearly half by mid-century. A majority of those who left Ireland during that period set sail for North America where they would create a diasporic community bound together by the shared horrors of the famine.³

Political upheaval, arriving on the heels of intense economic crisis, spurred on immigration from the German states (Germany would not exist as a nation for another forty years. Interestingly, though, in many Civil War muster and descriptive rolls clerks recorded "nation of birth" as Germany). Nearly 1.4 million men and women immigrated to the United States during the twenty years before the war, fleeing famine, depression,

² Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-52* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1994), 18.

³ Mary Daly, *The Famine in Ireland* (Dublin, Dundalgan Press, 1986); Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-52* (Boulder CO: Roberts Rhinehart, 1995).

and the social unrest that accompanied the European Revolutions of 1848.⁴ Among these men and women came between 5,000 and 6,000 revolutionaries, known as “Forty-Eighters” who had led the fight against authoritarian monarchs in Europe. Although they ultimately lost the struggle, their revolutionary ideals and republican principles drew them to the United States, a nation with “the kind of republic many had hoped to establish in Germany.”⁵ These men would become leaders within German immigrant communities in America and many were outspoken supporters of the Union.

Ethnic citizens faced tremendous pressure in the antebellum period. Their arrival coincided with the Second Great Awakening—a religious revival that was, in part, a reaction to the changing nature of American society and, particularly, the social instability that accompanied industrialization.⁶ This religious upheaval stressed “the moral content of education, liquor licensing and prohibition, Sabbath closing and the suppression of popular ‘lewd and tumultuous’ conduct . . . was . . . urgently needed by the new industrialists, to be sure, for it promised them a disciplined labor force, pacing its toil and its very life cycle to the requirements of the machine and the clock, respectful of property and orderly in its demeanor.”⁷ The search for “stability” was directly challenged by the influx of European immigrants, “strange invaders who seemed so grave a threat to their class, their region, their country, and their race.”⁸

The arrival of poor (Irish) and non-English speaking (German) masses on American shores for some reinforced the idea that American society was changing, and not for the better. The Irish were a more visible threat. Poor and unskilled men and women crowded by the thousands into dirty tenements eking out a living in unimaginable squalor. The numbers, at least for New York, the largest ethnic enclave, speak for themselves. Making up nearly one quarter of the population in that city in 1860, nearly

⁴ Martin W. Öfele, *True Sons of the Republic: European Immigrants in the Union Army* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 10.

⁵ Stephen D. Engle, “Yankee Dutchmen,” in Susannah J. Ural, *Civil War Citizens: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in America’s Bloodiest Conflict* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 17.

⁶ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium* provides an excellent discussion of the growing rifts in American society as a consequence of the growth of the market economy and the subsequent xenophobia that emerged as Americans witnessed the growth of immigrant populations in urban centers. Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Robert Peirce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁷ David Montgomery, “The Shuttle and the Cross: Weavers and Artisans in the Kensington Riots of 1844,” *The Journal of Social History*, 5, no 4 (1972), 411-446.

⁸ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 102. Higham’s discussion focuses on the 1880s, but appropriately speaks to the attitudes regarding immigrants that were present in antebellum America. Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (London: Longman, 2000).

70% of Irish men were employed as unskilled laborers. Although these men and women were key ingredients for the growth of American industry—serving as a cheap and easily replaceable labor source—their presence, and especially a perceived ethnic propensity for violence, alcoholism, and disorder, led to the development of class-consciousness among the middle and upper classes who saw themselves embattled against a growing immigrant population who seemed the antithesis of protestant perception of American society.

German immigrants were, for the most part, more financially secure than their Irish counterparts. Furthermore, unlike the Irish who so often clustered in large urban areas, German immigrants were “generally distributed over the United States” and, by the outbreak of war “had made a distinct impression on certain regions of the Northern landscape, adding significantly to the color and character of American society.”⁹ German neighborhoods did emerge in many of America’s larger cities, and by the outbreak of war, “New York’s *Kleindeutschland* was the third-largest German-speaking community in the world behind Berlin and Vienna.”¹⁰ Large German neighborhoods also emerged in Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee and, like the Irish, these immigrants played an important part in the social and economic spheres of their adopted homeland. Nevertheless, their language, the presence of radicals and Catholics, as well as a cultural affection for alcohol—shared by Germans and Irish alike—served to alienate these men and women from boarder American society in the years before the war.¹¹

Nativism emerged to counter foreign power and influence in America. As the political wing of mid-century xenophobia, the American, or “Know-Nothing” Party saw gains in local and state elections during the mid-1850s, illustrating the appeal of this message contextualized against the backdrop of the massive immigration of that decade. “THE CHILDREN OF BIGGOTTED, CATHOLIC IRELAND, like the FROGS which were sent out as a plague against the Pharaoh have come into our houses, bed-chambers, and ovens and kneading-troughs,” the *Ohio Statesmen* lamented in 1843, echoing the complaints of party-members ten years later. The “IRISH, when they arrive among us, TOO IDLE AND VICIOUS to clear and cultivate the land and earn a comfortable home, DUMP THEMSELVES DOWN in our large villages and town, crowding the meaner sort of tenements and filling them with WRETCHEDNESS, FILTH and DISEASE. In a political point of view, WHAT ARE THEY BUT MERE MARKEATABLE CATTLE!”¹² Such rhetoric continued during the decade before the Civil War, and controlled legislators, if only briefly, in a number of northern states during the middle of the decade. In Connecticut and Massachusetts legislators succeeded in disbanding foreign militia units whose loyalty they questioned¹³ As a political party, Know Nothings sought the

⁹ Engle, “Yankee Dutchmen,” 12.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Christian Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 11-12.

¹² “Opinions of the Whig Press,” in *Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH), December 12, 1843.

¹³ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

political disenfranchisement of immigrants and to combat the “strange religion, strange tongue, and their ‘immoral’ poverty and drinking habits” these men and women often exhibited. The height of Know Nothing power came in the 1856 election, where they won more than 20% of the popular vote.¹⁴

Nativist fears often focused upon questions of loyalty and, particularly, the fear that Catholics could never be truly loyal to the United States because of their allegiance to the Rome. The desertion of a group of immigrants known as the San Patricios during the Mexican-American war and their loyal service for Catholic Mexico seemed to confirm these allegations.¹⁵ In 1860, Michael Corcoran, a veteran of the 1848 Revolution in Ireland and an outspoken nationalist, refused an order to present his militia unit, the 69th New York, for a parade in honor of Edward Albert, the Prince of Wales. Publically ignoring the orders of the adjutant general of New York in the volatile months leading up to the election of 1860 caused many to question whether this ethnic group could be relied upon to support the Federal government. As suspicious as many native born Americans were of these immigrants, Irish and Germans were equally guarded, especially as the nation descended towards war in the winter and spring of 1860-1861. Although Irish and Germans were traditionally on different sides of the political playing field (the Irish were staunch democrats and the Germans typically voted for Wigs and then Republican candidates) the absorption of Know Nothings into the Republican Party after 1856 was cause for concern.¹⁶ Furthermore the Abolitionist rhetoric espoused by many of the more radical members of that party alienated the poor Irish, who saw the freed slaves as potential competition for unskilled jobs in northern cities.¹⁷

The secession of southern states in the winter of 1860-61 caused uproar throughout the North. Prior to the attack on Fort Sumter though, there was no clear consensus in regards to the proper Federal response to this unprecedented event. However, many wondered if the adopted citizens of the North would willingly join in a Republican war against the South. After all, Lincoln had won less than fifty percent of the popular vote and any resistance by Democrats and their immigrant support networks could hamper the new president’s ability to force the southern states back into the Union. Any concerns surrounding ethnic disloyalty were quickly put to rest as the northerners, Republican and Democrat alike, rushed to the defense of the flag in the wake of the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter. By mid-April “the ambivalence of many Irish Americans in the North melted, and sympathy for the South crumbled.” Germans and especially the veterans of the 1848 revolutions “stressed how important it was . . . to

¹⁴ Keller, 12.

¹⁵ Robert Miller, *Shamrock and Sword: The Saint Patrick’s Battalion in the U.S.-Mexican War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); James Callaghan, “The San Patricios,” *The American Heritage*, 46, no. 7 (1995).

¹⁶ Keller, *Chancellorsville*, 13.

¹⁷ Christian Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship during the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 127; Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 121, 137.

defend a united nation, because they had fought against ‘the provinciality of petty states’ before.”¹⁸

The visible patriotism exhibited by ethnic citizens in the spring and summer of 1861 momentarily quelled fears surrounding immigrant disloyalty and worked to unify the north under a common cause. For immigrant soldiers, and especially the Irish, this common cause was the preservation of the Union, not the emancipation of slaves. Although the majority of volunteers enlisted to serve in ethnically mixed regiments, public attention was drawn to the very visible expressions of immigrant loyalty; the formation of ethnic regiments led by prominent community leaders. The first to come together, and perhaps the most historically memorable of these units, was the 69th New York, which rapidly organized in April 1861 under the leadership of Michael Corcoran.

As the rearguard defending the federal retreat at First Bull Run, the regiment surrendered and Corcoran was taken back to Richmond as a prisoner of war. Reorganized in New York under one of the most famous Irishmen of his generation, Thomas Francis Meagher, the regiment served as the core of the Irish Brigade and fought in every major battle in the eastern theater during the war. German regiments also organized in all seventeen northern states. As Stephen Engle notes, “Germans who wanted to distinguish themselves from Americans did so in part, and understandably, because they feared nativist hostility in the ranks, and in part because with their military skill and education they considered themselves better suited to command.”¹⁹ German units sought to serve under Franz Sigel in the XI Corps in the Army of the Potomac, where fifteen of the twenty-eight regiments identified as ethnically German.²⁰ Ultimately twelve Irish-born and twelve German-born ascended to the rank of general in the Union army during the war.²¹

In light of their mistreatment at the hands of the nativists during the antebellum period, the patriotic response of these men and their communities is important and understanding ethnic motivation has become one of the key historiographical questions surrounding the immigrant soldier in the Civil War. Early war rhetoric focused on the Union, questions of manhood, the sanctity of the republican tradition, and sacrifice in defense of a nation that had provided shelter to immigrant masses. But individual motivations were complex.

For Irish Fenians, who hoped to liberate Ireland from English rule, the United States offered a number of opportunities. First, the freedoms inherent in the Constitution gave Irish revolutionaries the protection to openly organize diasporic soldiers to fight for Ireland’s independence. Second, the Civil War appeared (at first) to offer the perfect training ground for these units who, at war’s end, would continue the fight across the

¹⁸ Ölefe, *True Sons of the Republic*, 45.

¹⁹ Engle, “*Yankee Dutchmen*”, 20-21

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ölefe, *True Sons of the Republic*, 65.

Atlantic. Although many factors prevented this movement from achieving the ambitious goals of its leaders, some men were certainly motivated to enlist with the hopes of eventually securing the independence of their homeland.

For Germans, who had sacrificed dearly for the possibility of bringing republicanism to Europe, the sanctity of the Union was paramount. The dissolution of the Union would strike a serious blow to the future of republicanism abroad. From another perspective, sacrifice in defense of the Union offered another important opportunity for these men. So long alienated from their adopted nation, the Civil War offered the public forum through which Catholic immigrants could prove their loyalty to their nation and quell nativist fears once and for all.²² However, ethnic motivation, broadly, is rather difficult to ascertain. Most foreign-born soldiers left no evidence of why they joined the war effort and one must be wary of broadly proscribing ethnic motivations.

Time and again over the course of the war Irish soldiers proved themselves on the field of battle and even in defeat northerners applauded the sacrifice of these men from the Emerald Isle. The rear guard action of the 69th New York at First Bull Run and then, two months later, the gallant defense of Lexington by James A. Mulligan and his Irish Brigade from Chicago made headlines across the country and served as motivation for the organization of other Irish regiments. In the words of the nationalist paper the *Irish People*, the Irish brigade “has given us back our military reputation in its pristine luster. . . . The valour [*sic*] and the self sacrifice of the Irishmen who strove and fell so heroically before the batteries of Fredericksburg, and in a hundred other fights of the war, have scattered to the winds the malignant calumnies of traitors and open foes, and made manifest to the world the might of Irish prowess.”²³ German units also stood out for their steadiness under fire early in the war. Learning of the federal route at Bull Run, one officer, Ludwig Blenker, moved his brigade from Centerville *towards* Bull Run and took position along the road where they repulsed several assaults from Confederate cavalry and stood prepared to defend against a stronger Confederate counter-attack that never came. In the wake of the battle “together with the 69th New York Infantry, Blenker’s men were among the few Union regiments marching into the capital intact and in good order.”²⁴ According to Martin Öfele, “this achievement naturally served to increase ethnic visibility and strengthen the immigrants’ self-consciousness.”²⁵

Despite the successes on the battlefield, not all was well in northern communities. As casualties decimated the ranks of the Irish Brigade, those at home in New York and other eastern communities became increasingly disillusioned with the war effort. As one

²² Randall M. Miller, “Catholic Religion, Irish Ethnicity, and the Civil War,” in Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 263.

²³ “The Fruits of the American War,” *The Irish People* Saturday December 26, 1863. Available in hard copy at Dublin City Library.

²⁴ Öfele, *True Sons of the Republic*, 89.

²⁵ Ibid.

officer noted in the wake of the disaster at Fredericksburg, the Irish were “slaughtered like sheep with no result but defeat.” German regiments achieved a degree of success on the battlefield and were capable fighters, but by no means were they able to captivate the public’s attention the way Irish regiments were able to. If anything, the Germans were victims of a revival of nativism as a consequence of perceptions of their performance on the battlefield. At no point was this disconnect more apparent than after the disaster at Chancellorsville. As Thomas Stonewall Jackson’s corps crashed into the right wing of the Army of the Potomac in the late afternoon of May 2, 1862 they collided with the Germans of the Eleventh Corps. Why these men were seemingly unprepared to meet a Confederate assault is unclear but when Jackson’s 26,000 men launched themselves at the Union flank, they found many Union soldiers in the midst of preparing their dinners. Ultimately, two narratives emerged in the north surrounding the actions of ethnic soldiers at Chancellorsville. While German soldiers and German-language outlets sought to preserve some honor in roll the Eleventh Corps played in stymieing the Confederate assault, to salvage some honor from defeat they were lambasted by the northern press mocked as the “flying Dutchmen” who were fully to blame for the federal defeat.²⁶

At the same time, a number of events on the home front transpired that reinforced, for a national audience, the notion of ethnic disloyalty. Irish and German soldiers were often chastised for their disorderly behavior in the ranks and their predisposition towards alcohol consumption. This became increasingly problematic as the war progressed the armies were flooded with poor reluctant volunteers. By 1864 many officers drew linked between ethnic traits and poor soldiering.²⁷ But, publically, relationships became strained when the collision of military and civilian behavior suggested growing disloyalty among the North’s adopted citizens. The public nature of certain events made ethnic disloyalty appear to be endemic amongst the immigrant population. German “dissent” (used loosely because, if asked few of these demonstrators would have considered their acts to be inherently disloyal, and dissent suggests a degree of disloyalty) debuted early in the war in the form of draft riots. Violent reaction to the implementation of this perceived undemocratic policy (which reminded some men of the impressment they had battled against in Germany) was especially widespread in Wisconsin where in the late fall and early winter of 1862 mobs successfully shut down drafting boards throughout the state and forced the governor to call in federal troops to quell the protestors. Riots also broke out in Cincinnati, Toledo, Brooklyn, Chicago, and Buffalo as laborers in these cities protested the influx of African American laborers and the impact of competition on the salaries of unskilled laborers. In parts of the Pennsylvania Appalachian region dissent was endemic though, according to historian Robert Sandow, this was less protest against federal policy than it was the reflection of the very real socio-economic hardship that

²⁶ Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 80-86.

²⁷ See, for example: William, *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union’s Ethnic Regiments* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988); Lorien Foote, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs; Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Susannah Ural, *The Harp and the Eagle*; Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire*; Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*.

poor rural families faced with the enlistment of men from their communities.²⁸ The ethnic background of men and women in these all these areas, however, furthered public fears of immigrant loyalties.²⁹

Perhaps no event was more important to swaying public attitude than the Draft Riots that erupted in New York City in July 1863. That month, Manhattan erupted in flames as men and women poured into the streets protesting (allegedly) the implementation of the draft and the fact that the war had seemingly become a “rich man’s war but a poor man’s fight” commentary that alluded to the 300 dollar commutation fee and the use of substitutes—both beyond reach of the working class population of the north. The Irish of that city, already reeling from the losses sustained by their regiments in late 1862 and early 1863 and upset over Lincoln’s political decisions, and emancipation in particular, reacted violently to a draft that seemingly drew a disproportionate number of poor New Yorkers into the ranks. Ransacking the houses of wealthier citizens, killing at least eleven African Americans in the streets, and burning the Colored Orphan Asylum, it took the arrival of federal troops to finally quell the fiercest resistance.³⁰ Following the Draft Riots and “outspoken [Irish-American] criticism of a victorious administration, and unfailing support of the opposition party . . . A shadow of disloyalty would darken the Irish for years to come, and the history of Irish bravery, loyalty, and devotion to the Union would remain buried for decades.”³¹ In the wake of the riots, the “Irish again were [viewed as] violent hoodlums unfit for civilization.”³²

Despite the very public nature of these events, they did not represent the majority opinion of ethnic citizens in the North during the war. Most Democrats and their Irish constituents rejected the means of the rioters in New York City and sought to challenge Lincoln’s policies through legal means, at the voting booth rather than in the streets. Since the war began, the *Chicago Times* noted, “the Roman Catholics have been among the most steady and faithful adherents and supporters of the Union cause . . . None of our people have volunteered more freely or fought more bravely than Catholics.” The editors of the *Wisconsin Patriot* agreed. “We can speak for this section,” they wrote in response to the editorial in the *Times* “that the Catholics have shown their loyalty to our Government without flinching. They are ready to fight for the Government and its institutions and laws . . . a more chivalrous, patriotic class cannot be found on this or any other continent.”³³ Although some Germans also rioted against the draft again, the majority of these immigrants also remained at least passively supportive of the war. The fact is that if widespread dissent had existed in the north during the war it would have

²⁸ Robert Sandow, *Deserter Country: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

²⁹ Miller, “Catholic Religion, Irish Ethnicity, and the Civil War,” 282-283.

³⁰ Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 289, 27.

³¹ Ural, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 232.

³² Öfele, *True Sons of the Republic*, 135.

³³ “Untitled,” *Weekly Wisconsin Patriot*, August 23, 1863.

seriously affected the Lincoln administration's ability to carry out the war effort. Furthermore, and there is little evidence to suggest that these isolated events on the home front reflected widespread discord among soldiers and civilians alike, Irishmen professed their loyalty in spite of their political differences with the Lincoln administration. "Loyalty," noted one Democrat newspaper October 1864, "means, in its true sense, a firm and faithful adherence to the law and the Constitution of the community of which we are members . . . [this] will accurately characterize the party that is rallying for the UNION, the CONSTITUTION, and the LAWS."³⁴ Nevertheless, events at Chancellorsville, in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and New York, remained a prominent part of the historical memory of immigrant service in the Civil War, and continued to define the relationship between ethnic Americans and their adopted home land for years to come.

Ethnic Americans who hoped to achieve acceptance through blood sacrifice in defense of the Union, faced an uphill battle in the years after the war as the inclusive nature of military service was offset by the actions of a few individuals at home. Christian Keller suggests that the national response to the German defense of the union flank at Chancellorsville caused German communities to become increasingly more exclusive as a means of combatting nativist rhetoric of the post-war era.³⁵ The Irish experienced an equally complicated relationship, for they had sacrificed themselves time and again on the field. Few regiments fought with such tenacity or experienced as high casualty rates as the regiments of the Irish Brigade. Yet the visibility of the Draft Riots remained an important deterrent to true acceptance of these men and women nationally and the revival of nativism in the latter half of the 19th century illustrates how fleeting the memory of Irish sacrifice was to the public narrative of the Civil War (at least during that time).³⁶

Immigrant service, and especially the enthusiasm with which foreign-born volunteers came out in defense of the Union, was an important indicator of how these men and their communities understood the truly unique nature of the American republican experience and their relationships with their adopted nation. Within the history of the Civil War, these units stand out as unique expressions of ethnic identity but we must keep in mind that they were evidence of the dual loyalties that simultaneously bound recent immigrants to their common heritage and their adopted home. Existing studies of Civil War immigrants have tended to generalize, gathering together diverse motivations and experiences in an effort to produce one unified interpretation for each ethnic group, or even one interpretation for all immigrants. We must recognize that not all immigrants contributed to or viewed the Civil War in the same way. We must seek to better understand how individual experiences differed. Only by broadening our

³⁴ "Loyalty Means," *Republican Farmer*, October 18, 1864.

³⁵ Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans*, 146-168.

³⁶ Ural, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 232; Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 324; Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire*, 132.

knowledge of the immigrant experience at the most intimate level can we truly understand the motivations that drove these men to fight and die for the Union.³⁷

³⁷ See Christian Keller, “New Perspectives in Civil War Ethnic History and Their Implications for Twenty-First Century Scholarship,” in Andrew L. Slap and Michael Thomas Smith, eds., *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions About the Civil War-Era North* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) for an extended analysis of the future of ethnic studies and the challenges that scholars face in writing about the experiences of ethnic soldiers in the Civil War.