

Introduction

Irishness can be defined as the “representations and practices” of Irish identity.¹ An identity that is “thoroughly contingent” and “shaped by a steadfast assemblage of race, class, and gender.”² In order to understand Irishness in the United States, one must understand its history. Within this complicated identity are various binary perspectives: insider vs. outsider, old vs. young, and prosperous vs. middle-class. This thesis demonstrates the evolving perspectives of Irishness as the product of interactions between an elitist Anglo-American perception and an Irish self-perception of Irish identity. The interaction between an Irish self-perception and an Anglo-American perception of Irishness shapes the ways in which the Irish consciously and unconsciously reinforced and transformed the markers of Irishness in the American imaginary.