

Irish-Americans' Political Participation in the Progressive Era

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At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the United States was in a critical period of national transformation, with waves of industrialization and urbanization driving dramatic changes in social structure. In this context, Irish-Americans, as active participants in the economic development of the United States, ushered in an important opportunity to rise in the political field. Through active participation in the labor movement and administrative reforms, Irish-Americans not only broke the long-standing negative stereotypes, but also won broad social acceptance and recognition. The ideals of populism, progressivism, political ethics, and individualism inspired them to pursue economic equality, social justice, individual rights, and political and economic reform. The rising influence and status of Irish-Americans in the political field not only effectively protected their own interests and realized their identity, but also injected positive momentum into the political ecology of the United States. Studying the political participation of Irish-Americans will facilitate the understanding of the ethnic dynamics in the political development of the United States, as well as the ethnics' integration mechanism into the mainstream culture and the acquisition of political rights.

Keywords: Irish-Americans, political participation, the Progressive Era

The Progressive Era generally refers to the important period in the United States from the late 19th century to the 1920s characterized by social activism and political reform. In response to the social problems brought about by industrialization and urbanization, Progressive Era reformers pushed through a series of reforms aimed at increasing government efficiency, combating corruption, improving public welfare and education, protecting consumers' rights, and promoting social justice (An, 2013). These reforms not only achieved results in the states, but also influenced the policy formulation of the federal government and promoted the development and modernization of American politics and society (Ma & Liu, 2008). In the process of rapid social transformation, marginalized groups often have the potential to instigate subversive changes. Irish immigrants, benefiting from their white race and fluent English, alongside a strong

sense of national unity, made notable breakthroughs in local electoral politics and even began to influence presidential elections in the early 20th century, which actually reflected the fluidity of "whiteness" in American society. It can also be evidenced by the U.S. Census Bureau's questionnaire in 2024. For the first time, the census has separately listed a new checkbox for "Middle Eastern or North African" (MENA) and a "Hispanic or Latino" box under a question asking for a person's race or ethnicity. Those people had been categorized as either "white" or "colored" in the past. However, with this recent shift, the government's definition of "White" has been redefined to no longer include people with MENA origins (Wang, 2023). In fact, the scope of "whiteness" has been narrowed, suggesting that the identity of ethnic groups is not immutable. The ongoing change in the concept of "whiteness" is also the result of the interaction among elements like race and class. The white community is rife with internal power disparities and layers, encompassing groups such as the economically disadvantaged whites, which contribute to the blurring and fluidity of the white identity (Yu, 2024). This fluidity can be traced back to the early Irish immigrants, who, despite their pale skin, were often marginalized and discriminated against due to their Dublin accents, red hair,

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and religious beliefs. However, by the latter half of the 20th century, as the influx of Asian immigrants grew, the once-mocked physical traits of the Irish no longer served as a tag of exclusion, and their non-mainstream religious beliefs began to be embraced by the traditional Anglo-Saxon Protestants. This shift underscores a decline in the influence of biological and religious factors on ethnic identity, and a rise in the prominence of national identity based on common political appeals. Studying the political identity of Irish Americans can provide insights into the research on fluid American ethnic identities from political and historical perspectives. Examining the interaction between the inclusivity and diversity of the American political system and ethnic identity from a single ethnic perspective can offer valuable lessons for understanding the process of shaping national identity among other ethnic groups, especially by political ways.

The Political Participation of Irish-Americans

The Early Political Participation

The history of Irish immigrants settling in the United States dates back to the 1840s, when the island of Ireland suffered a severe potato famine and a large number of Irish people faced an existential crisis. They began immigrating to the United States on a large scale in search of a livelihood. Therefore, the vast majority of immigrants come from the poorest and most backward southern and western regions of their homeland (Wang, 2003). This wave of emigration continued throughout the 19th century, especially between 1845 and 1855, when about 2 million Irish left their homeland due to famine and political oppression, seeking a new life in the United States. Their arrival made Irish Americans, for a time, one of the largest immigrant groups in the country.

The first group of Irish immigrants to the United States, limited by funds, often could not move further into the interior and thus chose to settle in eastern port cities such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. These cities not only became the preferred destinations for Irish immigrants because of the convenience of their ports, but also provided considerable working opportunities. In 1870, nearly 95% of Irish-born immigrants were concentrated in New England and the Midwest of the United States, especially in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, where Irish immigrants outnumbered other ethnic

groups (Miller, 1991). The cities in these regions provided relatively more employment opportunities, especially in labor-demanding industries such as railroad construction, manufacturing and service industries, which provided the space for Irish immigrants to survive and thrive.

However, Irish immigrants have long been marginalized in American society because of their Catholic faith, their poor background and their alienation from mainstream Protestant culture in the United States. Often marginalized, Irish immigrants were derogatorily labeled as “White Negroes” and faced significant prejudice in the racially charged society of America. As a result, Irish immigrants were forced to do hard, dirty, and dangerous manual labor that even blacks disdained to do. They were mostly temporary workers, exposed to the risk of being fired at any time, but were poorly paid and discriminated against. Thaddeus Russell wrote in *The Rebellious History of America* that the first Irish immigrants were employed in low-paying jobs, mainly building canals along the Canadian border. Even though other Americans were unwilling to do this kind of work, the Irish were accused of stealing all their “good jobs” and labeled as “lazy and sluggish workers” (2010). In 1798, Congress, out of fear of Irish Catholics and anti-immigrant sentiment, passed three Alien Acts, giving the president the power to bar immigrants from any nation at war with the United States, to deport any immigrant, as well as to make it harder for immigrants to get their due right to vote. In the late 1840s, as discrimination against Irish-Americans intensified, a political group called the “Know-Nothings,” later renamed “the American Party,” emerged from the populist movement with the aim of limiting immigration from Catholic countries to preserve America’s native culture. Concerned that major cities would be completely “swamped” by Irish Catholic immigrants, who were seen as hostile to American values and controlled by the Pope, party members often marginalized Irish Americans in politics and social activism, making their political ascent thorny.

Despite these challenges, Irish-Americans remained hardy and motivated, and they played a key role in the nation’s economic boom in the second half of the 19th century. Irish-American President John F. Kennedy made the history of Irish-Americans central to the narrative of the establishment of America (Kennedy, 2022). They helped build the transcontinental railroad and forged important milestones in the industrialization and westward expansion of the United States. Despite the severe social discrimination and economic challenges Irish-Americans faced in the 19th century, they still

played an integral role in the industrialization of the United States. Their efforts and contributions not only promoted the economic development of the United States, but also provided the material foundation for further integration into American society and gradual advancement of social status. At the same time, Irish Americans did not give up fighting for their rights and interests. They began to make their voices heard in politics by organizing labor unions and other social groups. These organizations not only act as communities to support and protect them, but also important platforms for people to fight for equal rights in politics. Through these organizations, Irish Americans began to become actively involved in politics at the state and federal levels, gradually taking their place on the political arena.

Political Participation in the Progressive Era

The Progressive Era is a collective term for the period from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century in the United States, which marked a series of profound social, political and cultural changes. During this period, the United States experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization. The industrial revolution greatly promoted the economic prosperity, but at the same time, it also brought a series of social problems. The government had long practiced a “small government” policy, with insufficient ability to regulate the economy and serious deficiencies in administrative functions, which encouraged the expansion of trust power. At the same time, public officials were often influenced and controlled by chaebol groups, and political corruption was widespread. The rapid economic growth, in addition to its positive impacts, failed to benefit all segments of society. The widening wealth disparity, disregard for labor rights, escalation of environmental pollution, and erosion of social and moral standards emerged as pressing issues that demanded attention during the Progressive Era. Against this backdrop, Irish-Americans seized the opportunities offered by the Progressive Era and actively participated in social movements and administrative reforms.

Irish Americans in the Labor Movement: The Rise and Struggle of the Working Class

Irish Americans played a pivotal role in the social movements of the Progressive Era, and their active involvement significantly contributed to the advancement of public welfare and the amelioration of working-class living conditions. With the rapid development of industrial production, the size of the working class expanded

dramatically, and the labor movement ushered in the most active period in its history, which gave Irish immigrants, who have a large population and most of whom work manually, the opportunity to realize their value and fight for their rights and interests (Wang, 2003).

The Knights of Labor (KOL), founded in 1869, was the first major labor organization in the United States. Before this, most early unions limited membership to skilled workers and white men. However, under the leadership of Terence V. Powderly, an Irish-American, the KOL also included unskilled and semi-skilled workers, immigrants, African-Americans, and women, allowing groups that had suffered societal discrimination to unite and form a synergy. Baldry, the son of Irish immigrants, secretly joined the KOL in 1874 and was elected to the highest position in the trade union in 1879 due to his excellent leadership and its popularity with the people. In addition to his position in union, he was elected mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania, and served three times as a Greenback Labor candidate, during which time the coal miners’ strike in Pennsylvania and the Wabash Railroad strike had their desired results. Subsequently, P. J. McGuire founded the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (FOTLU), the forerunner of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and successfully campaigned for an eight-hour day, a minimum wage and safer working conditions for workers.

In addition to the outstanding contributions of Irish-born union leaders in the labor movement, the collective efforts of rank-and-file workers of Irish descent were equally pivotal. It is estimated that between 1890 and 1920, 75% of the members of the Labor Federation were of Irish descent (Doyle, 1975). In the wave of the American labor movement, Irish women also played a significant role. At first, they mostly earned a living by doing labor such as domestic service and laundry, but over time, they gradually moved into factory work. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these women began to make their mark in the burgeoning American labor movement. Mary Harris Jones, a prominent propagandist for the left-wing labor movement, helped found the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905 to speak out for working class.

In summary, the active participation and firm struggle of Irish-Americans in the labor reform movement not only made outstanding contributions to the rise of the American working class as a whole and the protection of their rights and interests, but also effectively broke the inherent discrimination and prejudice against Irish people and enhanced their status and reputation in society.

Irish Americans under Administrative Reform: Access to and Advancement in Government Positions

In the face of the inefficiency of government administration and the complex social problems brought about by urbanization, Irish immigrants, with their excellent adaptability and enthusiasm for political participation, realized the transformation from passive acceptance to proactive action. They have achieved remarkable success in the government's administrative reform, gained more seats in the Democratic Party, and enhanced their influence in the decision-making process. Simultaneously, they have dominated positions within the United States police force, serving as a crucial pillar for maintaining urban order and safety while significantly elevating the social status of Irish Americans.

The habit of Irish immigrants to live together in American cities made them the largest ethnic group in many cities in the second half of the 19th century, forming a political force to be reckoned with. The Democratic Party garnered widespread support among Irish-Americans due to its inclusive approach to religious diversity and its aggressive advocacy for social reform. "While other immigrants supported the Whig Party or the Republican Party for personal political or economic reasons, Irish immigrants almost unanimously supported the Democratic Party and formed a certain force within the Democratic Party" (Wang, 2003, p. 43).

As the influence of Irish immigrants in American political life grew, party and religious leaders among them began to focus on improving the overall quality and image of the community. They formed the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America (CTAU), which aimed to project an image of self-disciplined, hard-working and thrifty Irish-Americans as positive forces actively involved in the governance of their communities and cities. At the turn of the century, this Union had more than 1,000 associated associations and a membership of 66,000 (Gasparini, 2002). During the wave of urbanization in the United States, Irish immigrants took an active part in the management of cities, gradually getting rid of "the bumpkin who secretly resisted foreign aggression" and "the alien race who resisted discrimination through violence and riots" (Wang, 2003, p. 43), and began to use their constitutional rights as urban residents to fight for their own interests and those of other immigrant groups through political channels such as parliament. Even in some cities, Irish political leaders became the behind-the-scenes political manipulators, forming the famous "city boss" in American

history. "Tammany Hall" in New York City is a typical example. It is an Irish-American dominated political machine with enough votes to maintain control of New York City. Although its leader, William M. Tweed, gained notoriety for corruption and abuse of power, his reign also demonstrated the prominent ability of Irish-Americans in political organization and urban governance. In addition, Boston's Irish-American mayor, James Michael Curley, served as mayor several times in succession in the early 20th century, driving the city's social reforms and infrastructure development. Curley's policies and leadership style, though controversial at times, certainly raised the profile of Irish-Americans in the political arena and gained them a greater voice in city management.

The police force was an important part of the city's governance. The police force played a crucial role in urban governance, especially during a period marked by an influx of new immigrants, intensifying labor conflicts, and escalating confrontations between different races and communities. The original volunteer supervision system could not meet the increasingly complex needs of urban security, and a series of social conflicts promoted the birth of modern police system. The Irish had historically been unfairly stereotyped as the epitome of misbehavior and alcoholism, often finding themselves under the watchful eye of law enforcement. But as Irish voters gained political power in urban areas in the late 19th century, Democratic Party leaders began to woo Irish-Americans by selling police positions. When Tweed, Tammany Hall's notorious boss, was overthrown in 1872, his successor, William Kelly, pushed for a more partisan spoil system. This system allocated government jobs to supporters of the Democratic Party as a way of cementing political alliances. Irish-Americans thereafter began to occupy a majority of positions in police departments, and even many began to assume leadership roles in law enforcement agencies. The situation where Irish people were persecuted and discriminated against in the American society no longer existed, and they even became the symbol of defending justice and protecting social stability.

During the Progressive Era, Irish Americans effectively utilized opportunities for administrative government reform, resulting in increased Democratic representation and heightened influence of the Irish community in governmental decision-making processes. At the same time, their status change from surveillance objects to law enforcement officers marked a significant improvement in the social image and status of Irish-Americans.

The Underlying Driving Force of Irish-American Political Participation

Populism

Populism, a trend of thought derived from the American tradition of “grassroots democracy,” emphasizes the interests of ordinary people and opposes the monopoly of economic elites and corruption of political elites. Its core concept is based on the idealization of farmers and rural life, reflecting the respect for the social value of agriculture and the reflection on the social changes brought about by industrialization. As Richard Hofstadter points out in his writings, the democratic tradition of the United States was formed on farms and in small villages, and the rapid growth of industrialism constituted a harsh disruption to the self-satisfaction that agricultural societies had built up (Hofstadter, 1960). This shock was, first and foremost, reflected in the phenomenon of economic division among social classes. In 1892, the *New York Tribune*, inspired by popular discussion of the rich, published a list of alleged 4,047 millionaires. The following year, a Census Bureau statistician published another study on wealth concentration, estimating that about 71% of wealth was held by 9% of households (Hofstadter, 1960). This data not only shed light on the extreme imbalance in the distribution of wealth in American society at the time, but also added to the perception of the vast chasm between success and failure. It was against this background that the populist movement emerged as a political movement that has always been an integral part of American political life throughout the history (Taggart, 2000), reflecting the desire of ordinary people for economic equality and social justice. In addition, the steady rise in commodity prices from 1897 onwards during the Progressive Era was particularly burdensome for individuals unable to mitigate its impact through increased earnings or those whose income gains were largely offset by higher living expenses. Large disparities in wealth not only led to social injustice, but also inspired a strong desire to change the status quo. Populists view such inequality as a threat to the principles of “grassroots democracy” and the neglect of the needs of ordinary citizens. As a result, they advocate for socio-economic reforms aimed at narrowing the gap between the wealthy and the poor in order to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth. Additionally, during the articulation of collective demands, populists established an antagonistic relationship between the mass and the elite. In the eyes of

populists, the people typically represent the overlooked groups who suffer from economic hardship, political exclusion, or erosion of cultural values, while the elite, in contrast, are the privileged few within the capitalist system, abusing national power and maliciously shaping public opinion (Sun, 2024). The conflict with the elite has strengthened the unity among minority communities of various ethnicities and beliefs, and has also led to an increased alliance with the economically disadvantaged white population.

Irish Americans, who had endured the potato famine and social unrest, naturally aligned with the populists and eagerly engaged in the movement to advocate for their economic rights and challenge the dominance of trusts in the economy. The populist movement provided a platform for Irish Americans to articulate and pursue their political demands, leading to improvements in working conditions and wages while also fostering an understanding of institutional mechanisms for protecting their rights and interests, thus laying a foundation for political participation. As the populist movement peaked in the 1890s with the rise of the People’s Party, Irish-Americans not only took on the role of adversaries to the elite, but also ascended to positions of influence and authority within the elite echelons. Although the populist movement did not achieve lasting national success, it significantly influenced subsequent progressive movements and served as a source of inspiration for political reform in the United States (Hofstadter, 1960). All in all, populism served as a catalyst for social mobility in the United States, particularly from the lower strata to the higher, as well as present an avenue for ethnic groups to integrating into the society dominated by white supremacy.

Progressivism

Progressivism, in its narrow sense, refers specifically to the core ideas of the Progressive Party or Bull Moose Party, which supported Theodore Roosevelt for president in 1912. The party was formed by rebels within the Republican Party, largely consisting of the petty bourgeoisie, including successful middle-class citizens such as small businessmen, professionals, wealthy farmers, and skilled workers. In its broadest sense, progressivism represented a psychological tendency prevalent in the early 20th century: a critique of current evils and a strong desire for change. In his book *The Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter drew a vivid analogy: after 1900, when the already forceful stream of agrarian discontent was enlarged and redirected by the growing enthusiasm of

middle-class people for social and economic reform (1960). This suggests that progressivism had an impact far beyond the “progressive Party” and that it touched all political parties and American political life in a profound way. Irish Americans, though loyal to the Democratic Party, were also agents of change driven by the progressive trend of thought, joining the epochal trend of self-renewal in American society.

Progressivism initially emerged in the form of the labor movement. However, it failed to integrate further with socialist ideas to overthrow the United States political system. A key factor was the “invisible empire” model of control adopted by the United States, which relied on financial and cultural exports to achieve global expansion, in contrast to the traditional classical empire characterized by territorial expansion (Deng, 2023). By the end of the 19th century, the geographic map of the United States was finalized. With the proposal of Turner’s frontier theory, American politicians and scholars began to recognize the disappearance of geographic frontiers and to think about the future direction of the United States. Subsequently, they gradually explored a path of internationalist development dominated by financial and cultural exports. In the Progressive Era, the values of “freedom” and “democracy” were further strengthened as the core tools and weapons of U.S. national strategy (Jiao, 2022).

A central goal of progressivism was to restore the principles of economic freedom and political democracy that were seen as the foundation of American society. Over time, however, these principles have been eroded by big business and corrupt political forces. Progressives are committed to restoring these fundamental principles and seek to re-establish a sense of moral responsibility and integrity among citizens. This philosophy was reflected in the reformers’ approach to immigration. They believed that immigration was an important part of social change, and that laws and policies should be adopted to ensure humane treatment and integration of immigrants into American society. Thus, they advocate that laws and policies should be adopted to protect the basic human rights of immigrants and promote the assimilation process of immigrants so that they can become an organic part of American society. It was against this background that the Americanization movement of the early 20th century aimed to facilitate the integration of new immigrants into American society by promoting their Americanization through English education and other services (Wang, 2008). The process of Americanization had a profound impact on the identity of Irish immigrants and their descendants. Over time, they gradually shed their feelings of alienation as outsiders and instead

came to see themselves as active contributors to American society, catalysts for change, and creators of a new life. This transformation not only bolstered their pride as American citizens but also fueled their enthusiasm and desire to engage more deeply in political life.

Political Ethics

Influenced by American cultural background, religious belief and social experience, Irish immigrants have formed a unique political ethic system. It is based on a strong sense of loyalty to family and community. In Irish culture, family is not only an emotional haven, but also the foundation of social and economic support; Politics is not merely the domain of public affairs, but a means of satisfying individual and family needs (Hofstadter, 1960). This concept sharply contrasts with the Yankee Protestant political philosophy, which emphasized that citizens should participate selflessly in public affairs and that political life should transcend personal needs. In addition, Irish immigrants’ respect for authority and familiarity with hierarchy made them more politically inclined to accept and rely on strong leadership. In their country of origin, Ireland, politics tends to be closely associated with hierarchy and authority, which is also reflected in their involvement in American politics. They tend to engage in politics through solid personal loyalties rather than through abstract laws or moral rules.

This unique system of political ethics has had a marked impact on Irish immigrant participation in politics. On the one hand, this political ethic system made them politically more inclined to support parties and political figures who could provide immediate help and protection, such as the city bosses. These political forces offer jobs, social services and other personal benefits in exchange for immigrants’ votes and loyalty. In addition, this system also weakened the support of Irish immigrants for broader progressive reforms. In fighting for their legal rights, the Irish-Americans at the early stage, like other ethnic groups, tended to cooperate with others, because only by cooperation could they gain the political power to push for social change (Liu & Li, 2023). However, as the movements continued, their political beliefs were grounded more in the practical needs of individuals and communities rather than in abstract notions of the public good, causing them to often clash with the aspirations of progressive reform. What’s more, in the United States, inter-ethnic minority relations are deeply conditioned by the racial hierarchy, which is characterized by significant inequalities in

employment, education and housing. This inequality not only creates differences in social mobility and expectations among different ethnic minorities, but also makes it increasingly difficult to make political consensus among them (Liu & Li, 2023). In the 19th century, in addition to the Irish, there were many other ethnic groups immigrating to the United States, including Germans. During the colonial period in North America, there were many German immigrants on the American continent and a Germantown in North America. Therefore, before the 19th century, German immigrants already had relatively stable social capital and recognition, and were incorporated into the scope of “whiteness” one step ahead of Irish immigrants. So we can see that the divergence of political ethics and capital resulted in a series of social conflicts during the Progressive Era, and the allegiance of immigrant voters to their political leaders became a significant impediment to the accomplishments of progressives.

Individualism

Individualism is a traditional value deeply rooted in American society and political culture. It is the basis of American political resistance, embodied not only in the insistence on individual freedom and autonomy, but also in the pursuit of social justice and equality of opportunity. However, during the Progressive Era, the operations of business and government began to undergo a significant shift from an individualistic approach to a more rigid and standardized system of business management, gradually exhibiting a trend toward bureaucratization. There was a widespread desire among urban residents to achieve economic success through individual effort and acts of kindness. They also expected the economic system to do more than just provide goods and services; they wanted it to be an effective mechanism to incentivize individual effort. However, leaders of large corporations and consortia, along with some Machiavellian politicians, seemed indifferent to the pursuits of personal worth and social responsibility. Within large corporations, the link between individual success and character and effort was weakened, and the actions of the chaebol were even more antithetical to the principles of civic responsibility and individual self-discipline. At the same time, the avenues of individuals’ upward mobility through effort appear to be narrowing.

So progressives, driven by individualism, began to push for reform in a number of areas. Since individualism politically emphasized government representation of the people’s

interests and the right of citizens to participate directly in politics, progressives advocated political reforms, including directly elected senators, citizens’ legislative proposals, and referendums, aimed at increasing the influence of ordinary citizens in political decision-making. At the same time, they called on an active role for the government in social welfare and public health, guaranteeing the basic rights of individuals, and improving the quality of life. At the social level, individualism opposes any form of social division and suppression of individual growth potential, advocating an inclusive social climate in which everyone can gain upward mobility through their hard work and talents, thereby improving their economic situation and social status. This belief that one can achieve one’s dreams and success through one’s own efforts has taken root and become an integral part of American culture, shaping what is widely known as the “American Dream.” This idea has not only inspired countless Americans to pursue their own goals and ambitions, but also provided the driving force for the continued progress and prosperity of society. U.S. Judge Grosscup once said that American society has a unique path of development based on a high emphasis on “individual opportunity,” which implies that everyone should have an equal opportunity to participate in the creation and enjoyment of the nation’s wealth (Grosscup, 1905). It can be seen that “individual opportunity” has been accorded with high status in the United States. For Irish immigrants, the individualistic value inspires their determination to strive for better living and working conditions, and provides the motivation to pursue higher political status and more political rights.

The Influence of Irish-American Political Participation

On Irish-Americans

For Irish-Americans, the social changes of this period not only provided them with the opportunity to show their worth and secure their rights and status in politics, but also strengthened their sense of American identity.

Irish Americans have gained widespread recognition and respect for their active participation in social unions and movements. In elections, they gradually increased their influence in the political arena and began to hold key positions as mayors, governors, and members of Congress by virtue of

their previously accumulated network resources and popular base. After the prejudice and discrimination against the group as being stupid, lazy and violent disappeared, more and more people of Irish descent began to take an active part in government work. As government employees, they gradually got out of the original bottom status, and even successfully joined the middle class and even higher social classes, achieving a remarkable leap in social status. With their rise in politics, Irish-Americans began to play a more important role in policy-making. They pushed for a series of reforms, including labor protection laws, education reforms and social welfare, who not only improved the lives of themselves and their fellow citizens, but also benefited the broader community. Their political activism has also set an example for other ethnic minorities and demonstrated the effectiveness of fighting for rights and interests through political means. Such participation has not only earned them respect and power for themselves, but also contributed positively to the diversity and inclusion of the US political system.

Furthermore, the Progressive Era deepened Irish Americans' sense of identification with the American identity. During the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the United States, large number of immigrants gained access to jobs and upward mobility. Irish Americans gradually transformed themselves from a marginalized group into the backbone of American society through their involvement in the labor movement, political activities, and community building. Their political activism not only enhanced their social status but also strengthened their pride and sense of belonging as American citizens. Simultaneously, their assimilation into American education and increased interaction with their native cultures have facilitated the acceptance of American values and lifestyles, further solidifying their identity as Americans.

On Political Ecology

In the Progressive Era, the pace of social reform and political adjustment accelerated in the United States. Not only did Irish Americans gradually become a significant force on the political scene by actively participating in the labor movement and pushing for administrative reform, but also, in this way, contribute to the realignment of political power in the United States and prevented over-concentration of power in the hands of Anglo upper-class whites. By incorporating the already Americanized Irish descendants into the political system, it not only helps balance the demands and interests between groups of immigrant descendants from different

backgrounds and cultures, but also provides a more flexible and pluralistic political ecology for dealing with social and racial conflicts in the United States, which helps to promote the integration of different ethnic groups and maintain social stability and harmony.

However, the increasing involvement of Irish Americans in politics has been accompanied by a growing sense of identification with the American identity, and with this has come a pursuit of American exceptionalism. The contributions of Irish Americans to the American Civil War led to their gradual acceptance into mainstream American society as assimilable "whites." In this process, the Irish formed alliances with mainstream whites to justify their "white" identity, particularly engaging in the Chinese exclusion movement. An example is the movement led by Irish American Dennis Carney, which, by rejecting Chinese immigrants, earned a reputation as the Irish Know Nothings. This helped them integrate into mainstream American society to a certain extent, while also intensifying the discrimination and rejection faced by the Chinese (Wu, 2021). Moreover, during his tenure as mayor of San Francisco, the Irish-born McCubbin declared the Chinese as unassimilable, believing that no amount of time or education could make them into Americans. It can be seen that the Irish-origin group denied the identity and rights of other immigrants, as well as participated in some highly controversial actions in order to cater to the prevailing exclusionary attitudes in the American society.

Conclusion

The ascent of Irish Americans in the political sphere has been a progressive evolution. Once labeled as Catholics and alcoholics, they have nevertheless managed to establish a secure economic position for themselves through their persistent and determined efforts. Amidst the tide of societal transformation, their active engagement in the labor movement, advocacy for social reforms, and occupancy of pivotal government posts have incrementally amplified their political sway. Furthermore, they have strategically bolstered their subsequent political ascendance by rallying other marginalized ethnic groups effectively, forging alliances with influential political factions, and assuming constructive roles within the government. As historian Miller posits, by the turn of the 20th century, Irish American identities had become multifaceted: they were steadfast Democrats, pious Catholics, the providers for their families, committed members of labor

unions and ardent supporters of Irish independence (1991). This multifaceted identity not only shed the pejorative labels they had been burdened with in the past, but also validated their worth and contributions as American citizens. Consequently, they have emerged as a highly esteemed community within the fabric of American society.

The growing prominence of Irish Americans in the political landscape is not merely a result of economic prosperity or individual striving. It has also been significantly influenced by the convergence of various ideological streams that have molded their shared goals and endeavors. The drive for economic equity and social justice, propelled by populism, has been a key force behind their actions. The spirit of progressivism has inspired them to advocate for groundbreaking changes within political and economic spheres. Additionally, their distinct political ethics system has prompted them to forge alliances with influential political groups and to actively participate in the political arena by building strong personal networks. Furthermore, the value of individualism has energized them to tirelessly champion the cause of individual rights and the promotion of equal opportunities for everyone, without regard to their origins.

The interwoven ideologies have not only invigorated the political participation and rise of the Irish community but also cemented their prominent status within the U.S. political landscape. Through a strategic realignment of their political clout, they have catalyzed a more balanced and cohesive assimilation among a spectrum of immigrant groups. This initiative has introduced innovative strategies to address conflicts and alleviate tensions within the broader immigrant community, all under the banner of multiculturalism. In this way, Irish-Americans have played a pivotal role in shaping a more equitable and inclusive American society, which not only honors its diversity but also nurtures solidarity amidst its varied elements.

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