

The Irish Question: Woodrow Wilson, the Irish, and Irish-American Diplomacy.

By: Ryan Westerbeck

Advisor: William V. Trollinger

Abstract

The Irish Question was the title often given to nationalist and independence movements in Ireland in the early 20th century. This thesis concerns the period during and immediately following World War 1, from 1916 through 1920, but the core discussion within the thesis focuses on the Paris Peace Conference. During this period, several prominent Irishmen and Irish Americans attempted to reach out to President Wilson to support the Irish independence movement. These attempts were unsuccessful. The following thesis will explain how the representatives of the Irish cause attempted to convince Wilson and the reasons why they failed in securing the support of the United States government.

Research Questions

- How influential was Woodrow Wilson in Irish independence movement?
- What efforts by the Irish and Irish-Americans were made to secure support of other nations?
- How successful were these efforts?
- What were the consequences of the diplomatic failure to secure Irish Independence?

Contact Information

Ryan Westerbeck
University of Dayton
Email:westerbeckr1@udayton.edu.

Important Sources

- Research was conducted at the National Library of Ireland, University College Dublin, and the Library of Congress in order to have appropriate and diverse sources for this project.
- The compiled Papers of Woodrow Wilson published in 1959 were a crucial source in understanding not only the thoughts of Wilson on the Irish but the thoughts of his advisors such as Robert Lansing and Joseph Tumulty.
- Several secondary literatures were important to papers development, but Bernadette Whelan's text *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland: From Empire to Independence*, was perhaps the most helpful text to this thesis.



Facts at the Conference

- David Lloyd George was obstinate in the face of any push for Irish independence in private and Wilson did not want to officially act at the Conference.
- Irish efforts at the Conference were largely directed at France and the United States as leaders Sean T O'Kelly and George Gavan Duffy felt that they were the only two nations that could influence Great Britain

Select Secondary References

Cronin, Sean. *Washington's Irish Policy 1916-1986: Independence Partition Neutrality*. Dublin: Anvil Books, 1987.
Keown, Gerard. *First of the Small Nations the Beginnings of Irish Foreign Policy in the Interwar Years, 1919-1932*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
Whelan, Bernadette. *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland: From Empire to Independence 1913-29*. Dublin: Four Court Press, 2006.
Whelan, Bernadette. "American propaganda and Ireland during world war one: the work of the Committee on Public Information." *Irish Studies Review* (2017): 1-29.

Discussion

- During the Paris Conference, Wilson was pushing his Fourteen Points Plan and Ireland's Independence was a secondary issue for him
- Ireland had declared independence from Great Britain in January of 1919, the same month the Conference began.
- Wilson met with prominent Irish-Americans but never met with any Irishmen while at the Conference.

Conclusions

- Woodrow Wilson was in favor of Self-determination for all nations, but chose not act in support of Ireland to keep the support of Great Britain.
- Wilson was not transparent with this decision and Wilson led the Irish-American delegates to believe that he would act on the issue.
- This deception caused the resentment that led many Irish-Americans to fight the treaty and partially turn against the Democratic party.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my advisor Dr. William Trollinger, Dr. Bobbi Sutherland, and the University Honors Program for making this research possible.