

Of Irish Descent: Origin Stories, Genealogy, and the Politics of Belonging. By Catherine Nash. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008. xii + 352 pp. Graphs, photos, illustrations, notes, index, and bibliography. \$29.95 (cloth).

The 2007 news of Barack Obama's ancestral connections to the Irish town of Moneygall speaks to the complex dynamics of Irish identity exposed in Catherine Nash's brilliant new book, *Of Irish Descent*. The likely Anglican religion of Obama's ancestor did not seem to affect Irish Catholic enthusiasm for Obama's Irish connection, if sales of green "O'Bama" tee shirts, media coverage, and the Moneygall celebration of Obama's election to the presidency are any indication. At the center of the Moneygall celebration was the band Hardy Drew and the Nancy Boys, performing their popular song, "There's No One as Irish as Barack Obama."

Perhaps this enthusiasm is due to what Catherine Nash, in a discussion of Paul Gilroy's work, explains as an increasingly "critical diasporic consciousness" (p. 12) that has enabled many Irish in Ireland and across the globe to imagine Irish identity as "a plural cultural collective that is characterized by shared affinities, ancestral ties, and diverse expressions and experiences of being Irish or of Irish descent" (p. 10). On the other hand, not all Irish welcome the idea that "relationships and genealogies cross racial lines" (p. 238). For example, the McManus Clan Association endeavors to define more narrowly who is truly Irish, and Nash argues that its website's demarcation of "new" McManus lineages, in many cases headed by slaves who may have been the descendants of their McManus owners, implicitly "distinguishes the original, white Irish McManus lineage . . . [to clarify] who really has Irish ancestry" (p. 238).

Indeed, Nash forcefully demonstrates how those who are invested in pursuing "fluid, inclusive, and reflexive" (p. 273) imagined communities, genealogical searches, and genetic studies are stalked by those with more conservative agendas, ranging from Irish Catholics who participate in Y-chromosome genetic studies that narrowly describe Irish descent as "masculine, patrilineal, and Gaelic" (p. 263) to Irish Protestants who seek genetic evidence that Scottish planters were actually descendants of the "Cruthin people or Picts native to Ulster," hoping to establish indigenous status in Northern Ireland (p. 248). While Nash is optimistic that the quests of American amateur genealogists will end up more complicated and less "conventional" (p. 64) once the researchers arrive in Ireland and Northern Ireland and learn of the genetic mixing that has resulted from centuries of settlement, migration, religious conversion, lineage interruptions, and intermarriage, she dedicates the last chapters of the book to showing how genetic studies almost always support more conservative goals of quantifying Irish difference, of distinguishing between "native" and "settler" (p. 215). Her linkage of genetic studies to the nineteenth-century work of Jonathan Beddoe, infamous for his racialization of the Irish as "Africanoid" with a higher "index of nigrescence" (p. 197), is particularly powerful.

However, Nash's masterful criticism of Y-chromosome genetic studies, which ignore the mother's mitochondrial DNA and centuries of intermarriage across ethnic, religious, and class lines, does not allow for the progressive potential of those same studies, at least for Americans. While I take her and Rebecca Solnit's point that America's "contemporary model of ethnic particularity depends on an insistence on a remembering of the Old World that leaves little room for engaging with the past and the present of those places where people live now" (p. 77), I am also sympathetic to white Americans' search for ethnic identities that have more meaning than "whiteness" has historically allowed. If whites whose ancestors left their particular ethnic identities behind and who may not have many genealogical records participated in a Y-chromosome study, they might find the beginnings of a connection to an ethnicity beyond whiteness. As Nash suggests, if Senator John McCain participated in this type of study, he might learn whether his "Scotch-Irish" heritage is actually "Gaelic" (p. 247). This news might affect his sense of self and relationships with Irish American voters in interesting ways. African Americans, Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. among them, are hoping to participate in this type of study to learn more about their white ancestry, a project that definitely upsets notions of racial purity.

While it is indeed necessary that American, Irish, and Northern Irish yearnings for authenticity engage with the reality of hybridity, it is useful to return to Nash's earlier mention of Paul Gilroy, who she says avoids "disposing of ideas of shared points of departure and shared forms of experience in favor of absolutely indeterminate identities" (p. 12). Pursuing all kinds of genealogical and genetic knowledge but stridently rejecting, as Nash does, the use of that knowledge to romanticize ethnic purity or to make claims for political and cultural entitlement may be the only way forward. Nash's rigorous examination of the political, cultural, and material effects of Irish genealogy and genetics and the numerous examples she provides of ordinary Americans, Canadians, and Northern Irish who are using genealogy to transform outmoded ideas of a "pure points of ancestral origin and an essential . . . Irishness transmitted via descent" (p. 65) are cause for optimism.

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Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad. By Mark I. Choate. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. x + 319 pp. Photos, maps, graphs, bibliography, appendix, and index. \$45 (cloth).

Mark Choate makes an important contribution to the scholarship of Italian emigration by examining how the newly unified Italian state struggled to cope with the loss of thirteen million people between 1880 and 1915. In *Emigrant Nation*, Choate argues that emigration was turned into a positive concept that would expand Italy