

Emigration Across the Atlantic: Irish, Italians and Swedes compared, 1800-1950

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Emigration across the Atlantic by Europeans during the 19th and 20th centuries, and especially during the so-called age of mass European migration from 1850 to 1914, forms a key part of Europe's recent history. However, converging and diverging trends in European emigration across the Atlantic from 1800 to 1950 have not received enough attention in the literature to date. The aim of this article is to demonstrate these differences and similarities by analysing emigration from three societies located on Europe's western, southern and northern periphery: Ireland, Italy and Sweden. The article focuses on the scale of emigration that occurred, the reasons behind emigrants' departure, the various origins and destinations of the emigrants, and the attitude to emigration in sender and receiver states. Finally, the article looks at the legacy that emigration has left in the Americas and Europe today.

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Introduction

Bad or oppressive laws, heavy taxation, an unattractive climate, uncongenial social surroundings, and even compulsion ... have produced and are still producing currents of migrations, but none of these currents can compare in volume with that which arises from the desires inherent in most men to "better" themselves in material respects.¹

Formulated in the late-19th century, Ernst Georg Ravenstein's (1834–1913) (→ [Media Link #ab](#)) fundamental law of migration generally holds true for much of the emigration that took place from Europe across the Atlantic from 1800 to 1950. Yet scholars have tended to focus their attention mainly on one specific country's experience of emigration and have thereby neglected to identify some important correlations and contrasts between different European countries. Comparing a number of case studies can help historians to recognise common patterns while also enabling them to highlight abnormalities between cases. By taking the example of three European countries, Ireland, Italy and Sweden, which have a host of similarities (e.g. peripheral European location, extensive emigration histories) and differences (e.g. official reaction to emigration, gender of emigrants), this article seeks to make some general observations about emigration across the Atlantic, while also underlining some of the distinct features of each country examined. Repressive landlords and authorities, poor farmland and compulsion (famine in the case of the Irish who left in the mid-19th century) all served to increase the number of emigrants who left their homelands during this period. However, the great-

est factor prompting so many (mostly) young, unskilled and single Irish, Italian and Swedish migrants to leave their homes was their longing to improve their lot.

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This article will demonstrate convergences and divergences in European emigration across the Atlantic by discussing 1) how many people migrated, 2) why people left, 3) where emigrants went to and where they came from, 4) emigrants' age and gender, 5) the reception emigrants received in the receiver countries, 6) the reaction to emigration in the sender states, 7) whether emigrants ever returned home and 8) what legacy of emigration remains today in the sender and receiver states.

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Migration history

Ireland

Irish emigration across the Atlantic began long before 1800. In the 1600s, approximately 25,000 Irish Catholics left – some were forced to move, others left voluntarily – for the Caribbean and Virginia, while from the 1680s onwards Irish Quakers and Protestant Dissenters began to depart for the New World.² Considerable Presbyterian emigration from Ireland's northern province of Ulster took place from the 1710s onward, alongside smaller Anglican Protestant and Catholic emigration from Ulster and the southern province of Munster.³ This pattern continued until the end of the Napoleonic Wars (→ Media Link #ad) in 1814. Ireland had benefited considerably from price rises associated with war on the European Continent, only to suffer as a result of the drop in export price levels following the Battle of Waterloo. From 1815 to the start of the Great Irish Famine (1846–1852), between 800,000 and one million Irish sailed for North America with roughly half settling in Canada and the other half settling in the United States.⁴ Significantly, no other European country contributed as many emigrants per capita to the New World as Ireland during this period.⁵ Until the early 1830s, Protestant departures exceeded the number of Catholics leaving Ireland.⁶ Thereafter, Catholics greatly outnumbered Protestants. The demise of the cottage spinning industry in the first half of the 19th century – especially from the early 1830s onwards – led to a massive displacement of workers. Nonetheless, the rise of the linen industry in east Ulster, which was able to compete successfully with Lancashire factories, meant that migration in Ulster was predominantly from the countryside to Belfast. No comparable industrialisation took place in southern Irish towns and cities, which meant that most people in search of work in rural Ireland had to emigrate across the Atlantic or, to a lesser extent, across the Irish Sea to find employment.⁷

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Most of the approximately 1.8 million Irish who arrived in the United States between 1845 and 1855 – before, during and immediately after the Great Irish Famine – came from much poorer backgrounds than the Irish migrants who had gone before them; for example, almost one third of the new arrivals during this period originated from the poorer Gaelic-speaking regions of Ireland.⁸ The extreme conditions of the Famine period understandably provided strong motivation for many Irish people to leave Ireland.⁹ Yet, the outward flow continued after the Famine and throughout the second half of the 19th century (→ Media Link #ae) because of the decline in domestic industry, the shift in farming from tillage to pasture, and the increasingly impartible nature of Irish inheritances whereby farms were passed on in their entirety to the eldest son rather than being divided among all sons.¹⁰ Between 1850 and 1913, over 4.5 million Irish people left their homeland.¹¹ (→ Media Link #af)

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High mortality during the Famine and the continuing trend of large-scale emigration set in train by the Famine saw the island's population drop dramatically from a high of almost 8.5 million in the mid-1840s to 6.5 million in 1851, and to 4.4 million by 1911.¹² (→ Media Link #ag) Post-Famine emigrants departed for more varied reasons, including the declining demand for agricultural labour, the fall in wages in Ireland relative to the United States, the desire to avoid or postpone marriage, and the accumulation of extensive contacts between Ireland and the Irish community in North America.¹³

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People of all religions continued to depart the newly independent southern Irish state even after it gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1922. Catholics left because of the prospect of greater prosperity elsewhere;

Protestants emigrated because of the prospect of an Irish Free State dominated by the Catholic Church and more limited economic opportunities. A major shift in the direction of Irish emigration occurred from the mid-1920s onwards due to new American immigration quotas and the effects of the Great Depression in America throughout the 1930s. Consequently, many Irish people chose instead to move to the United Kingdom, as no travel restrictions applied between the two countries.

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Italy

Statistics for Italian emigration begin in 1876, not long after the unification of the country in 1861. However, emigration from Italy began much earlier. Italians of all kinds, including merchants, bankers, members of religious orders (→ Media Link #ah), military personnel, students, exiled politicians and political activists had all emigrated in varying numbers at different times to diverse European countries in the centuries and decades leading up to the *Risorgimento*.¹⁴ From the 19th century onwards, emigration also occurred across the Atlantic. Of the approximately 550,000 Italians who are estimated to have migrated between 1789 and 1871, over fifty per cent left for the Americas (47 per cent to South America and 9 per cent to North America).¹⁵ South America's newly liberated independent republics needed people – preferably white Europeans – to populate their vast lands and to fill the labour gaps that the emancipation of African slaves (→ Media Link #ai) threatened to cause in the second half of the 19th century.¹⁶ In 1864, one Italian politician called Argentina the "Italian Australia" because its vast territory and small population was attracting many Italians in much the same way as Australia was attracting Britons.¹⁷ The United States' growing Italian community (which went from approximately 10,000 in 1860 to almost 45,000 by 1880) included Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882) (→ Media Link #aj) at one point and other revolutionaries, as well as thousands of other migrants seeking to improve their economic circumstances.¹⁸

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Industrialization (→ Media Link #ak) only took place in northern Italy towards the end of the 19th century – long after neighbouring European countries had begun the process (it took considerably longer for industrialization to reach southern Italy). Consequently, Italy had a large surplus of people working on the land in rural communities. Indeed, in the last quarter of the 19th century, Italy's population rose by over seven and a half million people.¹⁹ Demand outstripped supply, resulting in increasing poverty. With opportunities limited in Italy but increasingly plentiful elsewhere, migration began to occur on a massive scale towards the end of the 19th century.²⁰ From 1876 to 1900, over five million Italians left their homeland, with annual departure rates rising steadily as the 19th century came to an end. France, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany and Switzerland needed cheap manual labour, as did the United States. Job opportunities created by the industrialization of neighbouring countries within relatively easy reach of Italy explained the prominence of emigration to other European countries, especially in the case of those from northern Italy, who made up three-fifths of emigrants from 1876 to 1900. Southern Italians, by contrast, tended to venture across the Atlantic.²¹ The Americas promised a much more exotic and enriching experience than neighbouring Europe. Stories of Brazil's and Argentina's vast open spaces and rich, sparsely populated farmland attracted many Italians, especially those already working in agriculture. (→ Media Link #al) Compared with the troubled political, economic and agricultural conditions in Italy, the prospects offered by South America – which rivalled Europe as the most popular destination for Italians towards the end of the 19th century – enticed hundreds of thousands of Italians to escape the poverty many had to endure. The rise of migration from southern Italy to North America in the early years of the 20th century meant that the United States soon overtook South America and competed with Europe in terms of popularity. (→ Media Link #am)

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The promise of higher wages meant that many turned to North America in the early years of the 20th century, as Italy went through its most significant phase of emigration in the country's modern history with nearly nine million departing between 1900 and the First World War. (→ Media Link #an) During this period, many Italians departed for the United States, Argentina and Brazil.²² After 1918, emigration across the Atlantic recommenced, but it never reached the heights of the pre-war years. The "booming of the guns of August 1914 brought to a sudden close the era during which foreigners were relatively free to traverse borders" as passport controls were reintroduced with vigour.²³ The United States' 1921 and 1924 Immigration Acts limited arrivals by introducing quotas for countries. Ethnic composition also became important, with the U.S. preferring northern Europeans to eastern and southern Europeans.²⁴ Brazil and Argentina continued to receive Italian migrants until the onset of the global economic depression following the Great Crash of 1929.

After the fall of Fascism and the end of the Second World War, relatively large-scale emigration from Italy recommenced. However, it failed to reach anywhere near the peak of half a century earlier. The main destination now became Europe, with France, Switzerland and Belgium most popular, followed by South America in the immediate post-war years. Emigration to the United States continued, although numbers remained low compared with pre-World War I levels.

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Sweden

The first recorded Swedish migration to North America took place in 1638, when a small group of emigrants founded the colony "New Sweden" near Delaware. By 1655, however, the Dutch had seized the colony.²⁵ The next phase of migration from Sweden to North America took place a little under 200 years later and proved much more successful and enduring than the first. Numbers remained small but steady from the 1840s until the 1860s, with the Swedish population in the United States numbering 18,000 before the American Civil War.²⁶ From the 1870s onward, however, Swedes migrated to North America in increasingly larger numbers after the crop failures crisis in the late 1860s. Mass migration continued until the First World War.

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Most migrants in the early period set up farmsteads in the American Midwest. As occurred in the case of all three countries considered in this article, chain migration took place with relations and friends following earlier migrants after hearing of the latter's successes in letters sent from America to Sweden. Conditions in Sweden further encouraged migrants as crop failures in 1867 and 1869 placed significant pressure on a rapidly growing population. By the 1870s, 100,000 Swedes had settled in the United States and during the 1880s, 330,000 more Swedes arrived.²⁷

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Emigration decreased substantially in the 1890s because of increasing industrialisation in Sweden and growing social and economic problems in the United States. Furthermore, by that time the American frontier had reached the Pacific Ocean and the Great Plains had largely been settled, meaning that new migrants no longer had the option of setting up their own homesteads in the country as cheaply as before. This development saw a rise in Swedish emigration to Canada (which had unsuccessfully attempted to entice Swedes to the country in the 1870s) because land remained more freely available there.²⁸ Emigration to America increased once again in the early-20th century (→ Media Link #ao) but with the outbreak of the First World War Swedish emigration to America almost stopped completely from 1914 and remained low immediately following the War due to considerable economic uncertainty in both America and Sweden.²⁹ America's decision to introduce immigration quotas in the 1920s led to a notable decline in numbers. Apart from in 1923, when 25,000 migrated before the introduction of more restrictive immigration laws, Swedish emigration remained remarkably low in the 1920s and 1930s, with the number of emigrants falling below America's annual Swedish quota of 3,300 migrants. Indeed, return migration to Sweden outnumbered emigration to America by approximately four to one in the 1930s.³⁰

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Comparing emigration

Scale of departure

Economists Timothy J. Hatton (*1949) (→ Media Link #ap) and Jeffrey G. Williamson (*1935) (→ Media Link #aq) refer to the period between 1850 and 1914 as Europe's "Age of Mass Migration".³¹ Social historians Jan (*1947) (→ Media Link #ar) and Leo Lucassen (*1959) (→ Media Link #as) have recently pointed out that, although European migration increased sharply after 1850, European societies were already quite mobile before this, as the case of Ireland demonstrates.³² Studies have also revealed that the age of mass migration was not confined to Europeans, since Indians and Chinese migrated all over the world on a similar scale to Europeans from the mid-19th century up until the beginning of the Second World War – a time of a remarkable "expansion and integration of the world economy". Additionally, not all

countries restricted immigration after the First World War.³³

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What makes the period between 1850 and 1914 so important, however, is that, in contrast to previous European migration, it represented a period of extraordinary migration across the Atlantic. Indeed, over 50 million Europeans migrated to North and South America between 1850 and 1914. Ireland, Italy and Sweden contributed over 15 million of these emigrants; and more departed beforehand, especially from Ireland. In total, over 6 million Irish people headed across the Atlantic in the hundred year period between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the start of the First World War.³⁴ Considering Ireland's population reached a peak of approximately 8.5 million before the Great Famine and fell to 4.4 million by 1911, the number of Irish people leaving for North America relative to the population of the island throughout this period was extraordinary. The rate of emigration from Ireland was more than double that of any other European country.³⁵ Italy also provided millions of migrants to the New World during this period. Indeed, Italians made up the largest group of migrants who came to America from 1880 to 1920.³⁶ Of the approximately 20 million Italians who left their country between 1876 and 1950, around 10 million migrated to the Americas (about 5.5 million to North America and 4.5 million to South America).³⁷ While proportionally less Italians than Irish emigrated, the sheer numbers of Italians crossing the Atlantic meant that they too had an enormous effect on North American culture; and also – unlike their Irish and Swedish counterparts – on South American culture, particularly in Argentina and Brazil. Although not as large in terms of overall numbers, one in five Swedes migrated to North America between 1840 and 1930, amounting to 1.2 million people overall.³⁸

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Reasons for leaving

People left Ireland, Italy and Sweden for similar reasons, although the Great Irish Famine represents a notable exception. Most migrants moved to improve their economic status.³⁹ Religious persecution played a minor role in early Swedish emigration, but numbers leaving for this reason remained small. Similarly, some Irish and Italian migrants left for political reasons, but this type of migration again represented a fraction of overall figures. Most people departed to escape poverty because of the limited economic opportunities available to them in their home countries. In Ireland, land reforms after the Famine often meant that only one son received the family farm, effectively making the other male siblings landless labourers. This also made it increasingly difficult for young Irish women to marry a man with land. Given the large size of Irish families, these people made up a sizeable portion of the Irish population. The availability of higher wages in America compared to Ireland, as reported by family members and friends through letters (→ Media Link #au) and remittances sent from abroad, tempted many young Irish people to depart their native land.

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Similar factors motivated Italians and Swedes to cross the Atlantic, but with certain important differences. In Italy, for example, the prospect of inheriting land often led young males to emigrate for a limited period in order to accumulate more wealth while waiting to inherit.⁴⁰ Underemployment in agriculture also led many Italians to migrate for a short period annually before returning home. Serious crop failures in 1867 and 1869 and, by the end of the 1870s, declining prices, led to a notable jump in Swedish emigration to America, which during the same time period experienced an explosive growth in its economy.⁴¹ The passing of the 1862 Homestead Act raised the prospect of obtaining better farmland in the American Midwest, which could be purchased at extraordinarily cheap prices. The emergence of steamship travel in the 1860s also resulted in decreasing travel costs for migrants from all three countries.

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Origins and destinations

Limited agricultural opportunities were an important factor in emigration from Ireland, Italy and Sweden, and, consequently, most migrants came from agricultural areas in these countries. Before the 1830s, most migrants from Ireland came from the northern province of Ulster. These predominantly Presbyterian migrants, who bore many similarities to Swedish migrants from the rural areas of Dalsland, Öland, Halland, Värmland and Småland, went from working on Irish farms to setting up their own American farms on the Great Plains. During and after the Irish Famine, most emigrants from Ireland came from the mainly rural, and poorer, western province of Connaught and the southern province of Munster, rather than from the north or east of the country. Irish urban centres, especially Dublin and Belfast, contributed lit-

tle by way of emigrants.⁴² Unlike their Ulster predecessors, Irish migrants after the 1830s headed principally to America's eastern cities, especially New York, Boston and Philadelphia, rather than to agricultural areas. (→ Media Link #av)

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This mirrored the changes that Swedish emigration underwent in the late-19th century. By 1900, most Swedes lived in urban American centres and came not just from rural areas but also from towns and cities – a pattern that continued in the first half of the 20th century with Chicago figuring most prominently. (→ Media Link #aw) Italians also emigrated mostly from rural areas to the eastern cities in the United States and Buenos Aires in Argentina. Farming played only a minor role in Italian emigration to the United States, although small numbers of Italians did go on to establish wineries and fruit farms on the American west coast.⁴³ Agricultural work figured much more prominently in emigration to South America, where the seasonal migration of agricultural labourers was far more prevalent. Before 1900, the majority of Italians emigrating across the Atlantic came from northern Italy; after 1900, southerners predominated.

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Who migrated?

The majority of migrants from Ireland, Italy and Sweden who travelled across the Atlantic were young, single and unskilled. Irish Presbyterian and Swedish families who set up farms in the American Midwest in the early-19th century and in the second half of the 19th century respectively were notable exceptions to this trend. Young, single people with little work experience had less to lose than their older, more skilled counterparts who had to provide for their families. During the first half of the 19th century, males dominated Irish emigration by two to one. After 1850, however, rural Irish women experienced a significant erosion of their socio-economic status, prompting considerable migration.⁴⁴ The choice for young single Irish women often lay between becoming an independent worker across the Atlantic or an unpaid helper in her family home in Ireland, and many chose to emigrate as a result.⁴⁵ (→ Media Link #ax) Indeed, after the Great Famine, Irish males and females travelled in roughly equal numbers across the Atlantic – a pattern that was closely mirrored by Swedish emigration. Chicago had a large surplus of Swedish women, who often worked as maids, whereas in the American countryside there remained a shortage of Swedish women compared to the number of male Swedish farmers.⁴⁶ Approximately half of Irish female emigrants in America worked as domestic servants in cities.⁴⁷ Mixed migration led to the formation of lasting Irish and Swedish communities. By contrast, males dominated Italian emigration across the Atlantic by roughly four to one.⁴⁸ Italian Catholic culture allowed women less freedom than Irish Catholic culture, so that Italian women were discouraged from emigrating to become domestic servants similar to Irish and Swedish women. Another reason for the preponderance of Italian males related to the high rate of return migration. Some Italian men already had wives, who remained in Italy awaiting their husbands' return. After 1900, Italian women did begin to travel in larger numbers; nonetheless, they remained in the minority until after 1913, when they began to outnumber men.⁴⁹

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The reception of migrants

Irish, Italian and Swedish migrants received a mixed reaction across the Atlantic. Americans generally welcomed Swedes because of their perceived work ethic, their religious background (most Swedes were of the Lutheran tradition and were thus welcomed by the majority Protestant population in the United States) and their high level of education (90 per cent of Swedish migrants were literate and they tended to learn English quickly). By contrast, American reactions to Irish and Italian migrants varied considerably, depending on their background and the period during which they arrived. For instance, Irish Presbyterian and Anglican migrants who moved to America in the first half of the 19th century, as well as the first groups of Italians to settle in the country in the mid-19th century, experienced little animosity from locals because their numbers were relatively small and, in the case of the Irish, they were Protestant.

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When migration from Ireland and Italy to America increased substantially – from the 1830s in the Irish case, and from the late-19th century in the Italian case – so too did the discrimination they encountered from locals, who began to see them as a threat to their own way of life. Given that many Irish and Italians came from poor, uneducated, rural Catholic backgrounds, they differed significantly from previous migrants. Furthermore, Italians and mono-lingual Gaelic-speaking Irish migrants experienced severe language difficulties which sometimes made interaction with natives difficult. Nonethe-

less, Irish and Italian emigrants did gradually rise up the social ladder in American society. The fact that they were white Europeans proved a distinct advantage and they quickly climbed above freed black slaves, who they often lived alongside when they first settled in American cities. One commentator on the Irish experience in America suggested that Irish migrants arrived green and soon became white in order to climb above black Americans, who they initially competed with for jobs.⁵⁰

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Similarly, Italians in the United States, who sometimes arrived with a question mark over their own race, quickly saw that "to be white meant having the ability to avoid many forms of violence and humiliation, and assured preferential access to citizenship, property, satisfying work, liveable wages, decent housing, political power, social status, and a good education, among other privileges".⁵¹ Having a white European background failed to negate all opposition to immigration. Nonetheless, the American state treated Europeans very differently to Chinese migrants, as the 1888 Chinese Exclusion Act clearly demonstrated.

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Resistance to immigration in the United States became more pronounced in the mid-1890s as the country suffered a serious economic downturn. In 1897, House representatives voted in favour of imposing restrictive measures on immigration. The Senate and the American President disagreed, however, preventing the introduction of the restrictions. In 1906, Washington set up the Immigration Commission under the stewardship of William P. Dillingham (1843–1923) (→ Media Link #ay). Five years later, the commission set out its findings in 42 volumes.⁵² It concluded that immigrants coming into America were of poor quality, competed with natives, represented poor citizen material – because of potential return migration – and contributed to the build-up of poverty in the country.⁵³ Demonstrating the growing hostility to immigrants and in the face of opposition from President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) (→ Media Link #az), the American Congress passed the Immigration Act in 1917, which established a literacy (→ Media Link #b0) test for immigrants. Four years later, unlimited European immigration was brought to an end with the passing of the Emergency Quota Act, which restricted the quantity of migrants to three per cent of a country's population in the United States in 1910. The 1924 amended version of the same act confined immigration to two per cent of a country's population in the United States in 1890, thereby excluding Italians and other more recent immigrant nationalities.⁵⁴ The annual Italian quota was limited to 5,802. The Irish Free State and Sweden had annual quotas of 17,853 and 3,314 respectively.⁵⁵ Canada and various South American states took a less hostile attitude to immigration in the 1920s, but the difficult global economic climate during the 1930s meant that potential European migrants stayed home.

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Attitudes to emigration in sender states

Political reaction to emigration in Ireland, Italy and Sweden varied. British officials generally approved of 19th-century Irish emigration, interpreting the phenomenon in Malthusian terms as a natural response to what they perceived as unsustainable population growth. Nationalist Irish politicians and the Catholic clergy, by contrast, often saw emigration in more negative terms as depriving the country of its "bone and sinew".⁵⁶

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The Italian establishment took a similar view on early emigration across the Atlantic, subjecting migrants to certain controls because of the perceived damage that migration did to Italian society. However, the Italian government quickly removed these restrictions and even facilitated more regulated emigration by ensuring the presence of agents.

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The Swedish state viewed the early migrants who left the country between the 1840s and mid-1860s in very negative terms, regarding them as being of lesser ability than other Swedes and as people wanting to escape their debts, crimes or military conscription. However, the crop crisis of the late 1860s brought about a change in attitude in Sweden, as the numbers of people migrating rose considerably.⁵⁷ Instead, the Swedish establishment began to view its migrants as unfortunate, helpless victims of an overpopulated country with limited job opportunities. By the 1890s, increased industrialization and improving prospects for young people in Sweden meant that emigration began to be regarded negatively again, particularly among the social and political elites. It had, they believed, a noticeably harmful effect on the military due to the decrease in people fulfilling their military service, and also negatively affected agricultural employers,

whose source of cheap labour was dwindling.⁵⁸ Despite the fact that internal migration (→ Media Link #b1) from the Swedish countryside to Swedish towns and cities outnumbered emigration across the Atlantic, criticising emigrants was an easier option than criticising industrial employers and the attitudes upon which hostility to emigration was based were compatible with rising patriotism associated with the rejuvenated national romantic movement in the arts and literature.⁵⁹ Continued concern over Swedish emigration in the early-20th century led to the formation of a special national commission in 1907 to address the issue. When it concluded in 1913, the commission recommended extensive social and economic reform in order to reduce emigration, including universal male suffrage, better housing, general economic development and broader public education. The outbreak of the First World War one year later led to a significant decline in Swedish emigration. In addition to the reforms set out by the commission, Sweden's economy began to prosper after the war and America put in place a series of immigration restrictions, leading to a dramatic decline in emigrant figures after 1918.

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Despite emigration figures declining for Ireland after the end of the First World War and the formation of the independent Irish Free State encompassing roughly three-quarters of the island, emigration from Ireland continued to prevent any consistent rise in the Irish Free State's population. Much of this emigration in the 1920s involved Irish Protestants departing the Free State because of worsening economic opportunities and political fears relating to the dominant role of the Catholic Church in the new state. However, Irish Catholics also continued to migrate, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, thereby challenging the nationalist view that British governance had caused millions of Irish to emigrate in the past. Ireland too set up a commission to investigate the causes of Irish emigration in 1948. By this time, Irish people principally left for Great Britain because of American immigration restrictions.

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The Italian Fascist state also began to regard emigration more pessimistically from the mid-1920s onwards. In contrast to the early 1920s, when dictator Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) (→ Media Link #b2) saw emigration as a remedy to unemployment and a way of spreading Fascism throughout the world, as the decade progressed, the Fascist government began to believe that emigration removed valuable labour resources. In 1928, emigration to the Americas became illegal, concluding "the Fascist transition from emigration encouragement to tolerance to repression".⁶⁰ The regime still promoted emigration to Italy's colonies, however.

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Return migration

When Irish and Swedish emigrants left their homelands, they rarely returned, with only as little as five per cent of Irish and Swedish emigrants between 1850 and 1914 ever moving back home.⁶¹ In sharp contrast, many Italians who set off across the Atlantic travelled back to their Italian homes. Repatriation represents an important part of the Italian migration story. Over the decades of Italian mass emigration, many emigrants had viewed emigration as a temporary arrangement, particularly those crossing the Alps in northern Italy. The transport revolution, prompted by the proliferation of steamship travel from the 1860s onwards, greatly reduced crossing times. This meant that Europe and the Americas converged into one labour market with competing wages. Consequently, many Italians opted to migrate to the Americas seasonally, instead of to neighbouring European states. In sharp contrast to Ireland and Sweden, an estimated 49 per cent of Italians who migrated to the Americas between 1905 (when return migration statistics began) and 1920 managed to return.⁶² Many of the (predominantly southern) farm workers who went to the United States planned to accumulate as much money as they possibly could before returning home to buy their own agricultural plot.⁶³ They presumably returned to find wives or to be reunited with their wives, given the low level of female Italian emigration before the First World War.⁶⁴ Repatriation took place in the case of all three countries in the early 1930s because of the economic difficulties caused by the world recession, but emigration took off again in Ireland from 1936 – predominantly to Great Britain. In the case of Italy and Sweden, however, returning migrants outnumbered those leaving by the late 1930s.

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Legacy of emigration

The Irish state, through constant commemoration of Famine emigrants (→ Media Link #b4), has continually represented Irish emigrants as exiles escaping colonialism and its legacy. In addition to embracing this official version, the popular

memory of migration often associated the emigrant experience with economic struggle. Due to the sheer volume of Irish people who have left the country over the past four centuries, emigration has become a fundamental part of Irish identity. In the 1980s, the famous Irishman, musician and humanitarian Bono (Paul Hewson, *1960) (→ Media Link #b5) described his fellow Irishmen and Irish women as "outsiders", "migrants" and effectively "homeless" people because of the country's history of emigration.⁶⁵ In the 1990s, the well-known *Irish Times* commentator Fintan O'Toole (*1958) (→ Media Link #b6) went even further by stating that Ireland is a "diaspora, and as such [it] is both a real place and a remembered place, both the far west of Europe and the home back east of the Irish-Americans".⁶⁶ In that same decade, Irish President Mary Robinson (*1944) (→ Media Link #b7) frequently referred to the Irish diaspora when discussing Irish identity.

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Despite emigrant representatives sitting in the Italian parliament, the Italian state's memorialisation of its country's emigration history remains weak in comparison. Unlike in Ireland, the Italian establishment had no nationalist narrative to call upon to explain the massive exodus from its lands. To commemorate the country's emigration history was to commemorate the state's failure to provide for its people. In contrast to Ireland, no nationalist myth existed to absolve the state of any blame for vast departures of its citizens, who clearly left in an attempt to attain what the Italian state could not provide: an adequate living. The emigrant population was "defeated in the struggle to gain land, to improve its lot, to pursue that little bit of happiness that represents one of the great founding tenets of democracy".⁶⁷ The Italian state's continued disinclination to officially remember the plight of millions of its emigrants has meant that the Italian memory of emigration has largely been conducted in private. The Italian politician Livia Turco (*1955) (→ Media Link #b8) recently stated the following:

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The migration experience of Italians has not yet been elaborated in the collective culture, there is not even a collection of experiences in the reconstructed historiography, nor have memories, images, symbols been produced. One remembers only the grind; the private adventure has not been integrated into our national history, it does not make up part of our collective ethos, it does not feed the public feeling and ethic.⁶⁸

While many Irish songs and poems lamented emigrants' departure from the beloved homeland, Italian equivalents often used their grief to bemoan the Italian state. As one traditional song recalled, Italians remained hostile to their home state: "Damn Italy, let's get outta here".⁶⁹ "*Italianità* reside[d] in the humble details of everyday life, not in the glories of any nation or its state."⁷⁰

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A similar tendency to forget its country's past emigration existed for much of the 20th century in Sweden.⁷¹ The publication between 1949 and 1959 of Vilhelm Moberg's (1898–1973) (→ Media Link #b9) four novels⁷² based on Swedish emigration to America prompted Swedish academia, and Swedish society more generally, to revisit their emigration history. Nonetheless, a noticeable difference remains between how Swedes and Swedish-Americans understand their emigration history; the former often tend to see it as a tragic part of their history while the latter see it as a heroic episode in shaping their Swedish-American identity.⁷³

▲ 34

The legacy of Irish, Italian and Swedish emigration across the Atlantic lives on in the very fabric of North and South America today. America still identifies itself as a land built by immigrants. Many millions of Americans classify themselves as Irish Americans, Italian Americans and Swedish Americans. Similarly, many Argentineans and Brazilians emphasize their Italian origin. The Irish and Italians have contributed massively to various eastern American cities, particularly New York (→ Media Link #ba), as did the Swedes to the Midwest. All three groups played an important role in the development of Chicago. Many of Argentina's cities, particularly Buenos Aires, bear the hallmarks of Italian influence on the country.

▲ 35

Conclusion

The extent of emigration across the Atlantic from Ireland, Italy, Sweden, and Europe generally between 1800 and 1950, and especially from the 1840s until the outbreak of the First World War, was truly momentous. The great exoduses from the three countries represented different phases of the European Atlantic migration: Irish emigration peaked in the middle of the 19th century, Swedish emigration reached its height in the 1880s, and Italian emigration climaxed in the early 1900s. Never before had so many mainly young, unskilled and single Europeans travelled such long distances to start new lives. Most left Ireland, Italy and Sweden because of the poor rural conditions and limited opportunities for improvement at home compared to the apparently plentiful possibilities and rich rewards promised abroad. Although many emigrants initially encountered hardship on the other side of the Atlantic, they saw the potential for improvement, which stood in stark contrast to the stagnant world they remembered back home. For Swedish and Irish migrants, the other side of the Atlantic nearly always meant the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada. For Italians, however, it meant the United States and various South American countries, especially Argentina and Brazil. Italy's emigrants were predominantly male, whereas the Irish and Swedes recorded a more balanced rate of departure between the genders. One reason for this related to the Italians' high rate of return compared to their Irish and Swedish counterparts, which also led to a slight delay in establishing fixed Italian communities abroad.

▲ 36

Irish and Italian Catholic emigrants met with a more hostile reception than their Swedish Lutheran counterparts. The Irish and Italians represented two large but discernibly different groups compared to previous migrants to America. They also tended to congregate in certain eastern cities, especially New York, whereas Swedes and other Protestant migrant groups who preceded them tended to move to the countryside and to cities in a more dispersed manner. The latter propensity aided their quick integration and gradual disappearance as national groups, as the example of the Protestant Irish, or "Scots-Irish", from the early-19th century reveals (indeed, the integration of Catholic Italians with their Catholic Spanish and Portuguese counterparts in Argentina and Brazil may be another example of this).

▲ 37

Attitudes to emigration and immigration varied among the elites in the sender and receiver states. Some openly welcomed mass emigration, as did the British in the case of Irish emigration. The Swedish elites, on the other hand, were concerned about the perceived damage emigration did to the development of the nation. Despite remaining relatively quiet on the topic, some governments – such as that of the post-independent Irish state and the pre- and post-Fascist Italian governments – knew that emigration benefitted their economy by creating more opportunities for those left behind and by providing a crucial source of income through emigrant remittances. Employers across the Atlantic generally welcomed immigration, while low paid native workers condemned it, particularly in times of economic hardship such as the 1890s and the 1920s. On the issue of immigration, American politicians led when they could and followed when they had to – a case in point being their refusal to implement restrictive measures in 1897 and their later approval of the same laws twenty years later in 1917. More restrictions followed in the 1920s, leading other countries across the Atlantic, such as Brazil and Argentina, to also close their doors on European emigration in the 1930s. Nevertheless, despite mass migration from Ireland, Italy and Sweden across the Atlantic coming to a halt from the 1920s onwards, its legacy continues to live on today in both the sender states and the receiver states.

▲ 38

Irial Glynn, Florence

Appendix

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Notes

- ¹ ^ Ravenstein, *Laws of Migration* 1889, p. 286.
- ² ^ See O'Callaghan, *To Hell or Barbados* 2001 and Miller, *Ireland and Irish America* 2008, p. 44.
- ³ ^ *ibidem*.
- ⁴ ^ See Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved* 1983, p. 230 and Ó Gráda, *Ireland* 1994, p. 74.
- ⁵ ^ *idem*, *Across the Briny Ocean* 1983, p. 118.
- ⁶ ^ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles* 1985, pp. 193–198.
- ⁷ ^ Bielenberg / Solar, *Irish Cotton Industry* 2007, p. 22.

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11. ^ Hatton / Williamson, *After the Famine* 1993, p. 575. Ó Gráda reports that these statistics are underestimated. Together they total approximately 4 million. In his opinion this number should be between 4.5 and 5 million, and perhaps closer to the 5 million mark. See Ó Gráda, *A Note* 1975, p. 144 and p. 148.
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30. ^ *ibidem*.
31. ^ Hatton / Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migration* 1998.
32. ^ See Lucassen / Lucassen, *The Mobility Transition Revisited* 2009.
33. ^ McKeown, *Global Migration* 2004, pp. 171–174.
34. ^ Over one million also left for Great Britain during this period. See Ó Gráda, *Nineteenth-Century Irish Emigration Statistics* 1975, p. 149.
35. ^ Hatton / Williamson, *After the Famine* 1993, p. 575.
36. ^ Guglielmo / Salerno, *Introduction* 2003, p. 10.
37. ^ Figures based on data taken from ISTAT, *Appendice II: Espatriati e Rimpatriati – Anni 1876–1973*, contained in: Rossoli, *Un Secolo di Emigrazione Italiana* 1978.
38. ^ Barton, *A Folk Divided* 1994, p. 13.
39. ^ Hatton / Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migration* 1998, p. 12.
40. ^ *ibidem*, p. 121f.
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61. ^ Hatton / Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migration* 1998, p. 9.
62. ^ Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* 2003, p. 72.
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64. ^ Favero / Tassello, *Cent'anni* 1978, p. 29.
65. ^ See Bono [Paul Hewson], *The White Nigger* 1988, pp. 188–191.
66. ^ O'Toole, *The Lie of the Land* 1997, p. 12.
67. ^ Negri, *Italy* 1997, p. 44.
68. ^ Turco, *I Nuovi Italiani* 2005, p. 11 [transl. by author]. The recent growth of emigration museums in Italy over the past decade may change this in the near future. See Tirabassi, *I luoghi della memoria* 2009.
69. ^ *Campagne venete*, taken from Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* 2003, p. 58.
70. ^ *ibidem*, p. 77.
71. ^ As Hildor Arnold Barton notes, "academic historians in Sweden hardly gave any attention whatsoever to the Great Migration before the 1960s, generally regarding it as an embarrassing, if not shameful episode". Barton, *Emigrants Versus Immigrants* 2001, pp. 10–11.
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Citation

Glynn, Irial: *Emigration Across the Atlantic: Irish, Italians and Swedes compared, 1800-1950*, in: *European History Online (EGO)*, published by the Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2011-06-06. URL: <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/glynni-2011-en> URN: urn:nbn:de:0159-20110201190 [YYYY-MM-DD].

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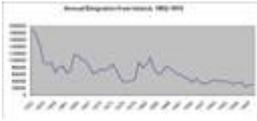
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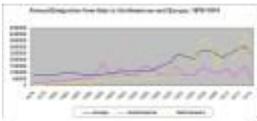
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- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/immigrant-hotel-in-buenos-aires-c.-189020131923?mediainfo=1&width=900&height=500>
Immigrant hotel in Buenos Aires c. 1890–1923

Link #am



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/annual-emigration-from-italy-to-the-americas-and-europe-187620131914?mediainfo=1&width=900&height=500>
Annual emigration from Italy 1876–1914

Link #an



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/italian-emigrants-to-the-united-states-c.-191020131913?mediainfo=1&width=900&height=500>
Italian emigrants to the United States c. 1910–1913

Link #ao



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/swedish-emigrants-leaving-goteborg-c.-1905?mediainfo=1&width=900&height=500>
Swedish emigrants leaving Goteborg c. 1905

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- Timothy J. Hatton (*1949) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/103120589>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/121882691>)

Link #aq

- Jeffrey G. Williamson (*1935) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/106346456>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/124527426>)

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Letter from America, Ireland c. 1902

Link #av



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Irish population in the USA in 1872

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Swedish and Norwegian population in the USA in 1872

Link #ax



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/female-irish-and-english-emigrants-on-arrival-in-new-york-in-1907?mediainfo=1&width=900&height=500>
Female Irish and English emigrants 1907

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- William P. Dillingham (1843–1923) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/17122814>)

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Link #b8

- Livia Turco (*1955) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/10138696>)

Link #b9

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