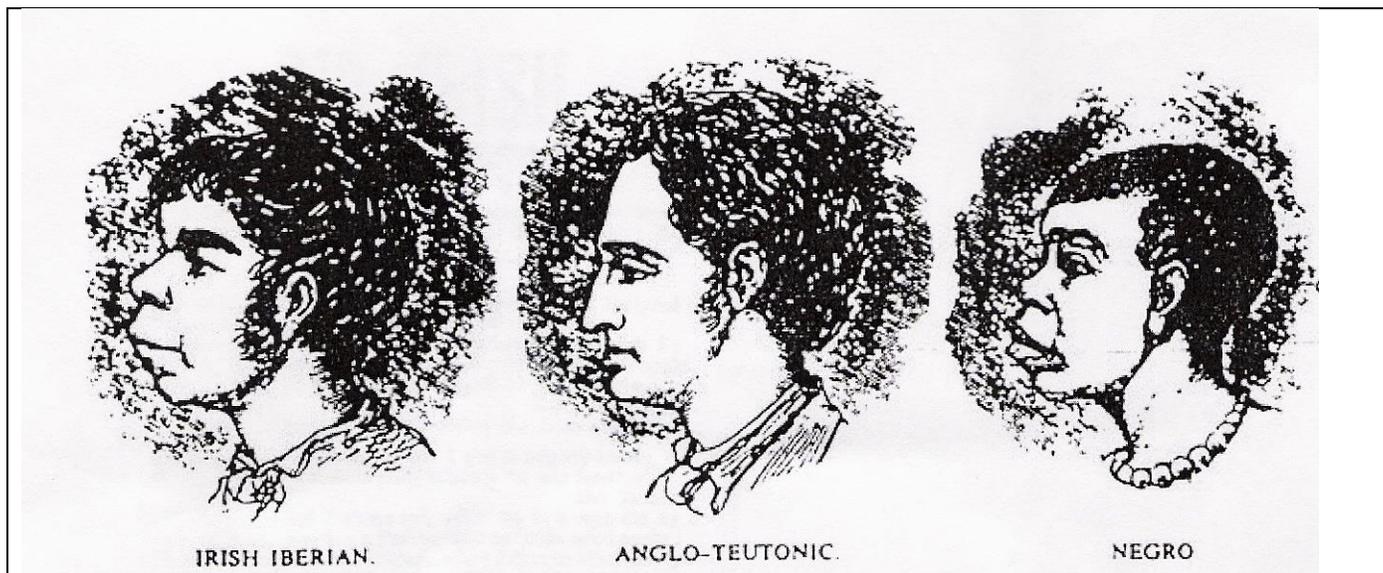


### 13.1 Racism and British Policy in Ireland

Sources: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/irish-butt-of-english-racism-for-more-than-eight-centuries-1342976.html>; <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/05/science/05cnd-brits.html>; <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5312697/DNA-map-Britain-Ireland-reveals-Viking-genes.html>



An illustration from the H. Strickland Constable's *Ireland from One or Two Neglected Points of View* (1899). It shows an alleged similarity between "Irish Iberian" and "Negro" features in contrast to the higher "Anglo-Teutonic." The author claimed "Iberians" were originally an "African race." At the end of the 19th century racists claimed to have the support of science ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scientific\\_racism\\_irish.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scientific_racism_irish.jpg)).

**Background:** Racism, used to justify the British conquest and colonization of Ireland, and British policy during the Great Irish Famine, has a long history. Section A is a series of quotes illustrating British attitudes toward the Irish and its impact on British policy. Sections B and C report on recent genetic testing that have some surprising results.

#### Questions

1. How "race" used in these passages and then image? Does it have the same meaning as we assigned to race today? Explain.
2. In your opinion, how was racism used to justify the British conquest and colonization of Ireland, and British policy during the Great Irish Famine

#### A. British Racism Toward the Irish

Gerald of Wales (12th Century): The Irish are a "most filthy race . . . sunk in vice, a race more ignorant than all other nations of the first principles of the faith"

David Hume (18th century): The Irish are "buried in the most profound barbarism and ignorance."

Parliamentary inquiry into Irish in Britain (1836): "Irish immigration into Britain is an "example of a less civilised population spreading itself as a substratum beneath a more civilised community."

Benjamin Disraeli, future British Prime Minister (1836): The Irish "hate our order, our civilization, our enterprising industry, our pure religion. This wild, reckless, indolent, uncertain and superstitious race have no sympathy with the English character. Their ideal of human felicity is an alternation of clannish broils and coarse idolatry. Their history describes an unbroken circle of bigotry and blood."

Charles Trevelyan, head of administration for famine relief during the Great Irish famine (1840s): "The judgment of God sent the calamity to teach the Irish a lesson, that calamity must not be too much mitigated . . . The real evil with which we have to contend is not the physical evil of the Famine, but the moral evil of the selfish, perverse and turbulent character of the people."

## Questions

1. How do the studies cited in sections B and C offer a different picture of supposed racial “differences” between the Irish and the English?
2. What is the explanation for these findings?
3. How does new genetic research challenge earlier racist theories?

### **B. “English, Irish, Scots: They’re All One, Genes Suggest,” by Nicholas Wade, *NY Times*, March 5, 2007**

A. Britain and Ireland are so thoroughly divided in their histories that there is no single word to refer to the inhabitants of both islands. Historians teach that they are mostly descended from different peoples: the Irish from the Celts, and the English from the Anglo-Saxons who invaded from northern Europe and drove the Celts to the country’s western and northern fringes. But geneticists who have tested DNA throughout the British Isles are edging toward a different conclusion. Many are struck by the overall genetic similarities, leading some to claim that both Britain and Ireland have been inhabited for thousands of years by a single people that have remained in the majority, with only minor additions from later invaders like Celts, Romans, Angles, Saxons, Vikings and Normans. The implication that the Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh have a great deal in common with each other, at least from the geneticist’s point of view, seems likely to please no one.

B. The genetic evidence is still under development, however, and because only very rough dates can be derived from it, it is hard to weave evidence from DNA, archaeology, history and linguistics into a coherent picture of British and Irish origins. That has not stopped the attempt. Stephen Oppenheimer, a medical geneticist at the University of Oxford, says the historians’ account is wrong in almost every detail. In Dr. Oppenheimer’s reconstruction of events, the principal ancestors of today’s British and Irish populations arrived from Spain about 16,000 years ago, speaking a language related to Basque. The British Isles were unpopulated then, wiped clean of people by glaciers that had smothered northern Europe for about 4,000 years and forced the former inhabitants into southern refuges in Spain and Italy. When the climate warmed and the glaciers retreated, people moved back north. The new arrivals in the British Isles would have found an empty territory, which they could have reached just by walking along the Atlantic coastline, since there were still land bridges then across what are now English Channel and the Irish Sea.

C. In all, about three-quarters of the ancestors of today’s British and Irish populations arrived between 15,000 and 7,500 years ago, when rising sea levels finally divided Britain and Ireland from the Continent and from one another . . . As for subsequent invaders, Ireland received the fewest; the invaders’ DNA makes up about 12 percent of the Irish gene pool, Dr. Oppenheimer estimates, but it accounts for 20 percent of the gene pool in Wales, 30 percent in Scotland, and about one-third in eastern and southern England. Still, no single group of invaders is responsible for more than 5 percent of the current gene pool, Dr. Oppenheimer says on the basis of genetic data.

### **C. DNA map of Ireland reveals the Irish have Viking and Norman ancestry, *Daily Mail*, January 25, 2018**

A. The Irish are much more genetically diverse than previously believed and have Viking and Norman ancestry - just like the English, according to new research. A comprehensive DNA map of the people of the Emerald Isle has for the first time revealed lasting contributions from British, Scandinavian and French invasions . . . An estimated 80 million people worldwide claim Irish descent - almost half of them Americans who regard it as their main ethnicity. It has long been assumed this means the blood in their veins is Celtic - but geneticists now say the truth is much more complicated.

B. The Vikings left their genetic footprint in Ireland when they invaded the island, launching their first attack in 795 AD by raiding an island monastery. The Vikings continued to stage small-scale attacks on unprotected coastal monasteries before sailing to River Shannon in the 830s to steal from inland religious settlements . . . The Vikings also enslaved some of the Irish people, and were able to raid the land by taking advantage of the fact that Ireland was particularly politically fractured.