

“The Evolving Irishman”

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(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>1</sup>

EILIS REGAN, HOST: This is my History of Immigration Final Project on “The Evolving Irishman.” I’m Eilis Regan.

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>2</sup>

(SOUNDBITE OF KENNEDY’S SPEECH)<sup>3</sup>

KENNEDY: But because I am a Catholic and no Catholic has ever been elected President, the real issues in this campaign have been obscured...perhaps deliberately...in some quarters less responsibly than this. So, it is apparently necessary for me to state once again, not what kind of Church I believe in, for that should be important only to me...but what kind of America I believe in.<sup>4</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)

REGAN: That was JFK’s *Speech on His Religion*. As the Democratic Presidential Nominee, he addressed the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, a group of Protestant ministers, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, 1960. Kennedy’s Catholicism shocked a Protestant America—so much so, that he had to defend it.<sup>5</sup> JFK then went on to become a very popular 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. His Great Grandparents, Patrick Kennedy and Bridget Murphy, had emigrated from

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Spiljak, “Empty Days.” Recorded September 8, 2018, track 4 on *Silverlight*, Free Music Archive, digital audio.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> “Transcript: JFK’s Speech on His Religion.” *National Public Radio*. December 5, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16920600><https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16920600>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Ireland...So then, how did the Irish go from being targets of Boss Tweed's demeaning cartoons, wherein they were depicted as apes sitting atop barrels of beer, and No Irish Need Apply signs, to the Presidency?<sup>6</sup> Breege Ward immigrated to the US on April 7, 1955. Her husband, Brendan Ward, came in August of that year. When John F. Kennedy died, Brendan went down to Washington, D.C. to pay his respects.<sup>7</sup>

(SOUNDBITE OF KENNEDY'S INAUGURATION)<sup>8</sup>

BREEGE WARD: I know that we were very happy to have a Kennedy for President...and when he died, I couldn't go to Washington, but Brendan got on the plane and went to Washington to see him laid out in...in Washington because we were that fond of him, really. He was a nice, ordinary man, you know. He seems to be warmhearted, carefree kind of man.<sup>9</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>10</sup>

REGAN: Breege Ward left Foxford, County Mayo, Ireland in 1955. Herself and fine musician Brendan Ward (husband) resided in New York City.<sup>11</sup>

BREEGE WARD: But I was disappointed in the States because it wasn't what we'd read in the magazines.<sup>12</sup>

REGAN: Yeah?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Bulik, "1854: No Irish Need Apply," *The New York Times*, (8 September 2015), <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/08/insider/1854-no-irish-need-apply.html>.

<sup>7</sup> "Interview with Breege Ward," Interview by Eilis Regan. November 24, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> *President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address*. CBS, January 16, 2011, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEC1C4p0k3E>.

<sup>9</sup> "Breege Ward"

<sup>10</sup> "Empty Days."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

BREEGE WARD: And of course we were—we were reading or being shown what the wealthy people had...<sup>14</sup>

REGAN: Yeah?<sup>15</sup>

BREEGE WARD: ...not what the couple I came to...well it was a sister and brother, the Clarks. They were up in Dyckman Street, upper New York. And they lived on the, about the eighth floor, I think.<sup>16</sup>

BRENDAN WARD: A walk-up.<sup>17</sup>

BREEGE WARD: A walk-up. And when I was going up, I said, ‘oh my God...where, are they living on the roof?’ I wasn’t too happy.<sup>18</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>19</sup>

REGAN: Her first job was at Cal Tech.<sup>20</sup>

BREEGE WARD: The girls in the office were doing nothing. They’d be sitting back talking for ages; and I was always finding something to do. They used to say to me, ‘slow down, you’re going to make us look bad.’<sup>21</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>22</sup>

REGAN: Breege left the job when she got pregnant.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Interview with Brendan Ward,” Interview by Eilis Regan. November 24, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> “Breege Ward.”

<sup>19</sup> “Empty Days.”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Breege Ward.”

<sup>22</sup> “Empty Days.”

<sup>23</sup> “Breege Ward.”

BREEGE WARD: And they'd...they'd close the file on you then. But they'd do a report and on the file it said, 'would rehire.' Of course I never went back there though...<sup>24</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>25</sup>

REGAN: And the Irish were good workers. People hired the Irish people. Breege remembers<sup>26</sup> working at Ward Travel Agency, a company she and her husband started in New York.<sup>27</sup>

BREEGE WARD: And I used to have to make up the reports. And they had to be accurate. And people would be going to the beach on a Sunday or a Saturday, and I'd be sitting outside in the garden or the backyard making up these reports and wishing I was at the beach. But Brendan wouldn't be able to go anyway because he was resting to go to bed to go to work that night.<sup>28</sup>

REGAN: Playing Music? Yeah...<sup>29</sup>

BREEGE WARD: Mhmm...City Center was three nights a week—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. We worked hard, but they were good times. It wasn't easy to be out at the dances on Saturday...it didn't end until one o'clock, was it?<sup>30</sup>

BRENDAN WARD: Two.<sup>31</sup>

BREEGE WARD: Two. By the time you got out of the place, it was another hour.<sup>32</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "Empty Days."

<sup>26</sup> "Breege Ward."

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> "Brendan Ward."

<sup>32</sup> "Breege Ward."

<sup>33</sup> "Empty Days."

REGAN: Bridget McGraw was born in Limerick, County Kerry, Ireland in 1937. She came to Rochester, NY on November 13, 1956...she remembers getting her second job.<sup>34</sup>

BRIDGET MCGRAW: And um, he said...matter of fact he said, ‘we have nothing at all to give you.’ I said, ‘okay.’ So, I went home, but Bill Wood was married to a girl from Belfast; and she said, ‘you’ve gotta give her a job. Give her something.’ So, he called a friend of mine that worked there, to know if they, if he had my number. He called me nine o’clock that night, and said, ‘come in for an interview.’ And I thought, ‘you said you didn’t have any job.’ ‘Well, we will.’<sup>35</sup>

REGAN: She chats about the Irish.<sup>36</sup>

BRIDGET MCGRAW: Um, they were delighted to get the opportunity to make money and to be able to work. So, they were very very faithful about showing up for work and...<sup>37</sup>

TED MCGRAW: Of course at that time, Kodak was very good to its employees, too.<sup>38</sup>

BRIDGET MCGRAW: Yeah, and did not want hand-me-downs, I mean, handouts. They were very pride and very proud of being able to support themselves and work for what they wanted.<sup>39</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>40</sup>

REGAN: But that wasn’t always the case. Breege chats about previous Irish immigrants.<sup>41</sup>

BREEGE WARD: For such a fine country, they hadn’t improved; the Irish must have stayed in a circle. At that time, it was kind of stagnant. They weren’t moving. Even though they were all

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<sup>34</sup> “Interview with Bridget McGraw,” Interview by Eilis Regan. November 30, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “Interview with Ted McGraw,” Interview by Eilis Regan. November 30, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> “Bridget McGraw.”

<sup>40</sup> “Empty Days.”

<sup>41</sup> “Breege Ward.”

nice people. They would have come from Ireland at a worse time than we did. A poorer time. They might be lovely people and bright people, but they wouldn't be as much on the ball as...see we weren't allowed to come for years and then they opened the borders again, in the fifties, the early fifties. And that's when there was a big surge of Irish people moving into the States. And even other nationalities [then] seemed to like the Irish. That, the time of them being stereotyped had passed.<sup>42</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>43</sup>

REGAN: It wasn't always *Kiss me, I'm Irish!* In 1830, Charles G. Finney visited Rochester to revitalize its Presbyterian population. He believes that Irish Catholics were evil and illogical.<sup>44</sup> The anti-Catholic and closely intertwined temperance movement, though, did not keep the Irish from infiltrating Rochester. By 1834, there were 800 Irish born men in Rochester. By 1828, the Ancient Order of Hibernians club had already been established. Still, a cholera epidemic that enveloped Rochester in the 1830s was blamed on the Irish; newspapers called the breaking in of the Catholic St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1830, by vandals, an act of anti-popery.<sup>45</sup> Discrimination is nothing new...Vince Parillo, a Professor of Sociology at William Paterson University wrote in his book, *Diversity in America*, that the American ambassador to England, Rufus King, "wrote in 1797 to Secretary of State Timothy Pickering that the Irish immigrants would "disfigure our [The United States'] true national character."<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the Irish persisted. Ireland's transplanted

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> "Empty Days."

<sup>44</sup> Robert G. McCarthy, "Irish American Nationalism in the Burned Over District: A Study of Moderate and Militant Irish American Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Rochester, New York" (master's thesis, University of Rochester, 2000), 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> "Rochester's Irish," *The Rochesterian*, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Vince Parillo, *Diversity in America*, (California), SAGE, 2009), 136.

William Gleason, Henry O'Reilly, James Buchan, and Patrick Kearney saw immense success in Rochester.<sup>47</sup>

(SOUNDBITE OF GLEASON ADVERT)<sup>48</sup>

SPOKESWOMAN: Gears drive, they propel, they control. Gears keep the world in motion. At Gleason, we're constantly in motion, too, helping our costumers keep pass with changing market demands and fueling innovations that drive their ongoing success. As the total gear solutions provider, Gleason delivers the products, processes and services that companies around the world depend on.<sup>49</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>50</sup>

REGAN: William Gleason immigrated to Rochester from Ireland; he brought with him what Rochester's February 26, 1899 Democrat and Chronicle Newspaper called "the genius, the courage, the wit, that have made the Irish abroad so successful"<sup>51</sup>...as in 1847, Gleason invented the first bevel gear planer machine. In 1865, he founded what would become the internationally known Gleason Corporation<sup>52</sup>...hearing this, Irishman John O'Rourke's service in the Civil War may be quite significant; O'Rourke led the 140<sup>th</sup> Regiment to success at the Battle of Little Round Top.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps this war hero buried Rochester's distaste of the Irish Catholics...or

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<sup>47</sup> McCarthy, "Irish American," 3-4.

<sup>48</sup> Gleason Corporation. "Gleason Corporation-The Total Gear Solution Provider." Filmed [October 2018]. YouTube video, 04:22. Posted [October 8, 2018]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8-9QQf-oPk&t=125s>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "Empty Days."

<sup>51</sup> "What Irishmen Have Achieved," *Democrat and Chronicle*, February 26, 1899.

<sup>52</sup> "This is Our Story" *Gleason*, (2018).

<sup>53</sup> John Overlan, "Luck of The Irish: Rochester's Irish Americans," Public Broadcasting Service, DVD, 2000, <https://www.pbs.org/video/wxxi-presents-luck-irish-rochesters-irish-americans/>.

perhaps it was that between 1891 and 1900, 614,000 Irish immigrated into the US<sup>54</sup>...or perhaps there were other people to dislike even more than the Irish. Breege Ward suggests the Italians.<sup>55</sup> (INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>56</sup>

BREEGE WARD: Well, for one thing, the ones [new Irish immigrants] who were coming were more alert and knew more than those who'd come before. They were the ones who had come before who were very limited in what they could do.<sup>57</sup>

BRENDAN WARD: When I came to New York, I didn't know a soul in New York. Not one single person. And sixth months later, I'd be walking down Fifth Avenue, and they, they'd be waving to me...<sup>58</sup>

BREEGE WARD: Mhmm...yeah, there was always someone coming. If you went into an office, there'd surely be someone you'd know. See the people who left before us were badly off. It was a bad time in Ireland. They just had got over the trouble with the North, and ah, it was a hard time. Our time was easier. We weren't in any war; there was no war. There were wars, but Ireland wasn't involved. And things were quieting down in the North, so it was a peaceful time.<sup>59</sup>

BRENDAN WARD: Ah, well, the Irish were pretty highly thought of at that time, though.<sup>60</sup>

BREEGE WARD: Yeah, and education was better in Ireland. A lot of these people only came straight from maybe not even finishing grammar school...They either went to England, or if they were lucky and had somebody in the States who would claim them in, they used to say it was

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<sup>54</sup> Walter Nugent, *Crossings*, (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1992), 51.

<sup>55</sup> "Breege Ward."

<sup>56</sup> "Empty Days."

<sup>57</sup> "Breege Ward."

<sup>58</sup> "Brendan Ward."

<sup>59</sup> "Breege Ward."

<sup>60</sup> "Brendan Ward."

claim them in. And when the Irish, when the signs came down about them, the next group were the Italians.<sup>61</sup>

REGAN: Yeah.<sup>62</sup>

BREEGE WARD: And the Italians were treated badly, then, they were all Mafia.<sup>63</sup>

REGAN: Oh, okay.<sup>64</sup>

BREEGE WARD: ...or kind of labeled as Mafia, whereas they weren't. And then the Irish started to marry the Italians, or if you like, the Italians started to marry the Irish and it became that there were a lot of ah, Irish-Italian weddings.<sup>65</sup>

REGAN: And then, St. Patrick's Day Parades.

(SOUNDBITE OF ROCHESTER ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE)<sup>66</sup>

REGAN: According to Bridget McGraw...

BRIDGET MCGRAW: People in Rochester, that are, will tell you, 'I'm Irish'...and very proud of being Irish.<sup>67</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>68</sup>

REGAN: On the Americanized St. Paddy's Day, everybody's Irish, even if they're not. It's a sea of green and brimming with alcohol. Rochester puts on a big parade. The Ancient Order of

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<sup>61</sup> "Breege Ward."

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> "Breege Ward."

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> RocPic.Com. "Saint Patrick's Day Parade Rochester NY 2016 Part 1 of 2 By RocPic.Com."

<sup>67</sup> "Bridget McGraw"

<sup>68</sup> "Empty Days."

Hibernians started the annual parade back in 1952<sup>69</sup>...Breege shares her opinion on St. Patrick's Day.<sup>70</sup>

BREEGE WARD: You know, like, they used to call the Irish years ago, the Paddys...that's where that comes from. It's kind of a derogatory thing, though they don't mean it that way. But it sounds like that...that's when they came to America, going to the bars and drinking. People didn't drink years ago like that in Ireland. The new generation did start drinking and going out to the pubs, which was an awful mistake. It was the cheap way of getting together on the weekend with their own people; and some of them could take a drink, but some couldn't. And it's the ones who couldn't that show up all the time...because they act stupid, and there seen as being stupid...I would say that's why. In other ways, there's a lot of good talent in Ireland, a lot of good writers, a lot of poets, but you know, I don't know why they did it. And a lot of the Irish people even now would refer to it...it drives Brendan crazy when he hears 'em saying Paddy's Day. And the Irish people are showing 'em how much they can get on in this country.<sup>71</sup>

REGAN: Yeah.<sup>72</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>73</sup>

REGAN: Apparently, some Americans have the wrong idea. Rochester's Democrat and Chronicle's March 17, 1962 issue reported that O'Hara, born in Ireland, refused to sing any popular so-called Irish songs. She said, "I don't hear them [the songs] over in Ireland...the Irish songs that are generally sung in America aren't Irish...I don't even know the words to "When

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<sup>69</sup> "Hibernians Slate St. Patrick's Day Parade," *Democrat and Chronicle*, March 12, 1952, <https://fultonsearch.org/?q=mrs.+murphy&type=bool&num=500&paper=Rochester+NY+Democrat+Chronicle&loc=&from=&to=&fuzz=0>.

<sup>70</sup> "Breege Ward."

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> "Empty Days."

Irish Eyes Are Smiling.” She had recently recorded an album of real Irish songs and said then, that they “should not all be sung in a bar.”<sup>74</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>75</sup>

REGAN: It’s the ongoing and prior assumptions and stereotypes that are the tiny little annoyances. Bridget recalls...<sup>76</sup>

BRIDGET MCGRAW: One of the things that bothered me. And it was only one or two people. They would come up and they’d stand there and they’d...they’d...‘have you ever seen this?’ A banana. And I said, ‘no, I didn’t lose one,’ right...‘no, no I mean did you ever see a banana?’ ‘did you ever wear lipstick? Did you ever wear high heels before you came here? Did you ever see oranges?’ And finally I said to one girl, I said, ‘where do you think I came from...Mars?’ I mean, yes, we had bananas, oranges, apples, high heels, lipstick, we had the whole thing.<sup>77</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>78</sup>

REGAN: To be Irish does not mean to be from Mars. Stereotypes are the residue of a deadened Irish discrimination in America...Discrimination is not universal in its implementation. What the Irish in Rochester experienced was not that of New York City’s Irish in the 1900s, nor is discrimination stagnant. The nativist finger has perpetually pointed at newcomers. The newcomer today, is Mexico. President Trump falsely defines what it means to be Mexican: it means to be a drug dealer, criminal, or rapist. His crowds cheer. They want him to build the wall. They make wide, inaccurate generalizations.

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<sup>74</sup> “Maureen Won’t Sing Those Un-Irish Songs,” Democrat and Chronicle, March 17, 1962, <https://fultonsearch.org/?q=mrs.+murphy&type=bool&num=500&paper=Rochester+NY+Democrat+Chronicle&loc=&from=&to=&fuzz=0>.

<sup>75</sup> “Empty Days.”

<sup>76</sup> “Bridget McGraw.”

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> “Empty Days.”

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>79</sup>

(SOUNDBITE OF TRUMP RALLY)<sup>80</sup>

TRUMP: Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall!<sup>81</sup>

(INSTRUMENTAL)<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> “Empty Days.”

<sup>80</sup> “Trump Leads Build that Wall Chant in California,” NBC News, May 25, 2016, , <https://www.nbcnews.com/video/trump-leads-build-that-wall-chant-in-california-692809283877>.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Alan Spiljak, “Harmony.” Recorded September 8, 2018, track 5 on *Silverlight*, Free Music Archive, digital audio.

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