IRISH NATIONALISTS AND THE MAKING OF THE IRISH RACE. By Bruce Nelson. Pp xiv, 333. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2012. £30.95.

This book, by an American labour-historian, comprises a series of case studies dealing with the relationship between Irish nationalism and black (mostly African-American) freedom campaigners in the period of the Anglo-Irish Union. It participates in, and to some extent modifies, the American tradition of 'whiteness studies' represented by such works as Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish became white* (1995). The 'whiteness studies' argument that the Irish (like other disadvantaged American ethnic groups) were equated with blacks by nativist opponents, and chose to claim equal citizenship as members of the 'white race' (rather than allying with other 'non-white' outcasts) has aroused controversy, including accusations of 'blaming the victims'.

Dr Nelson's study presents a modified picture by focusing on instances where black campaigners took inspiration from Irish nationalism and saw the Irish as potential allies, and on divisions between nationalists over co-operation with blacks. After an introductory survey of Irish history and of racial stereotyping of the Irish as 'Hottentots' and 'white chimpanzees', the book discusses the relationship between Daniel O'Connell and abolitionism, with particular reference to Irish visits by Fredrick Douglass and the less well-remembered black abolitionist Charles Lenox Remond; the ways in which Irish nationalists' support for the Boer republics during the Anglo–Boer war denied or glossed over its implications for South African blacks; and the relationship between American black radicals and Irish separatists during the 1916–22 era, when many blacks saw Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.) as models. (The career of Cyril Briggs, who founded an African Blood Brotherhood modelled on the I.R.B., is described in fascinating detail.)

One advantage of this sort of comparative study is that it draws on areas of historical research with which Irish specialists might otherwise be unfamiliar, in such areas as the difference between the egalitarian image of the Boers held by Irish pro-Boers such as Alice Stopford Green and Michael Davitt – whose earlier denunciations of the plight of Australian aborigines contrasts sadly with his uncritical stereotyping of South African blacks – and their actual social stratification, or the developing attitudes towards Irish nationalism of Marcus Garvey and other 'New Negro' activists of the same era.

The whole book, however, rests on a solid base of original research and analysis. Even when we may be familiar in outline with some of the incidents he recounts (O'Connell and abolitionism; Irish support for the Boers) this book enriches our understanding. For example, while some of O'Connell's nationalist opponents argued that his outspoken refusal to accept financial contributions for the Repeal cause from American slaveholders in 1845 reflected his desire to ingratiate himself with the incoming Whig government, Nelson's account of O'Connell's evolving attitudes on slaveholders' contributions during the 'Repeal Year' of 1843 shows that O'Connell had taken up his later position by October 1843 (influenced, among other things, by his contacts among American abolitionists).

The comparative analysis of the political evolution of Jan Christian Smuts (from Boer rebel to imperial statesman, preaching universal humanitarianism while denying its application to South African blacks) and Erskine Childers (from imperialist to Irish republican, while basing his support for Irish nationalism on the view that the Irish should not be held in subjection because they were white) is very revealing. The role of Liam Mellowes and especially of the Irish-American activists Peter Golden and Helen Merriam Golden in liaising with American blacks and socialists and helping to bring about the famous Irish Patriotic Strike on the New York docks (when black and Irish workers jointly refused to unload British vessels in protest at the death on hunger strike of Terence MacSwiney) is described in considerable detail. (Dr Nelson has published elsewhere on longshoremen and waterfront unionism; he notes that de Valera, unlike his subordinates, avoided direct involvement with such dangerous allies and stressed that Irish nationalism deserved support because the Irish were respectably white.)

There are a few gaps; it would have been interesting to have more on the Land League period, building on the work of Eric Foner and John McKivigan. Although Dr Nelson's carefully-qualified analysis, which avoids extreme praise or blame while making its sympathies clear, is one of the book's strengths, he might have paid a little more attention to the ways in which the chauvinist element in Irish nationalism was deliberately reactive and provocative. Just as antebellum African Americans took to highlighting the hypocrisies and shortcomings of America's boasted republican institutions by contrasting their protection of slavery with monarchical Britain's freeing of its slaves (even celebrating 1 August – the anniversary of the final abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean – in preference to 4 July), so the indifference (or worse) of some Irish nationalists towards slavery was partly inspired by contempt for the difference between the universalist professions of a British constitutionalism which regarded abolition as one of its proudest boasts, and the practice of those same constitutionalists in governing Ireland. This does not, and could not, justify such an attitude, but it helps to explain it, and to highlight the achievement of those who rose above it to pursue a wider vision of human liberation.

PATRICK MAUME
Dictionary of Irish Biography, Royal Irish Biography

IRELAND ON SHOW. ART, UNION, AND NATIONHOOD. By Fintan Cullen. Pp xxi, 206, illus. Farnham: Ashgate. 2012. £65.

Ireland on Show: Art, Union, and Nationhood is another handsome publication by Ashgate written by Fintan Cullen, who is Professor of Art History at the University of Nottingham. Its cover features a black-and-white photograph of the Museum of Science and Art in Kildare Street (as the National Museum of Ireland was formerly known) by the Dublin firm of photographers, William Lawrence. This is one of six photographs taken by Lawrence's firm, in which the centrepiece statue is of Richard Pollock Hamilton *c*.1880, shown surrounded by glass exhibition cases and casts of Irish high crosses. The bronzed plaster of Lieutenant Walter Richard Pollock Hamilton V.C. (an Irishman from Kilkenny, killed in action in Afghanistan during the Second Afghan War) is by Charles Bell Birch A.R.A. (1832–93), a Victorian sculptor who had acted as an assistant to John Henry Foley, the Irish sculptor in London. It was never cast (requiring 2,000 guineas to do so), remaining on display in the centre court of the Museum of Science from 1893 until the 1920s.

Cullen employs this work as a symbol of the changing nature of the Museum as it moved from under one ruling authority to another. It is part of an interesting chapter, 'Art institutions in Ireland', which addresses the Royal Hibernian Academy, National Gallery of Ireland, the industrial exhibitions, notably the 1853 Dublin International Exhibition of Art-Industry, and the Dublin Museum of Science and Art. The latter was established by an Act of Parliament in 1877, opening in 1890 as part of the South Kensington system (South Kensington being a former name of the Victoria and Albert Museum). In discussing the case of the Hamilton statue, he also reflects on the positioning of the famous Irish antiquities (recently arrived in 1890 from the Royal Irish Academy) in an upstairs gallery, until public and press interest resulted in their removal to a more prominent position.

The Hamilton statue, on the other hand, which Cullen carefully situates within the cultural tensions of Ireland's developing national identity while under British rule, was instead given a prominent place in the centre court on the ground floor. Without giving away all the details of a fascinating discussion, Cullen traces the role of this statue in the differing constructs of the Museum between the period 1890 to 1920, following which began the process of deaccessioning as it transferred to the Royal Dublin Society,