

‘Exercising a close vigilance over their daughters’: Cork women, American sailors, and Catholic vigilantes, 1917–18

During the First World War, Irish society experienced power struggles between civil authority, military governance, the constitutional nationalist establishment, and the emerging Republican movement. In the unstable wartime environment, political and social variables sparked intense controversies that mirrored competition for control over the Irish public. Inspired by the Easter Rising and emboldened by growing public disillusionment with the war, Republicans harnessed these eruptions to help fuel their attempt to overthrow Dublin Castle.

In the city of Cork during 1917 and 1918, challenges to state rule could be seen in numerous riots that displayed anti-government characteristics. Perhaps the most extraordinary of these were two separate rounds of street clashes in September 1917 and March 1918. Interactions between local women and American sailors caused local outrage, which led to mob attacks on the visitors and their female companions.

An explosive mixture of health concerns, moral panic, and anti-war sentiment produced violent scenes that undermined civil and military authority in Cork. Driven by a confluence of war-related events, the episode posed questions of sexual control and contested street power in one Irish city on the eve of revolution.

I

In May 1917, a few weeks after the United States entered the First World War, a vanguard of six U.S. Navy destroyers docked at Queenstown (now Cobh) before scores of curious onlookers. Amid heavy German submarine activity on the western approaches to Europe, an American fleet was stationed at Queenstown to protect troop transports that ultimately carried two million doughboys to France.¹ By late summer 1917, Queenstown hosted ninety-two U.S. Navy warships (mainly destroyers and smaller anti-submarine vessels) and

¹ Joseph Taussig, *The Queenstown patrol, 1917: the diary of Commander Joseph Knefler Taussig, U.S. Navy* (Newport, 1996), pp 18–22; Paul Halpern, *A naval history of World War One* (London, 1994), p. 359; E. K. Chatterton, *Danger zone: the story of the Queenstown command* (London, 1936), p. 329; Liam Nolan and John Nolan, *Secret victory: Ireland and the war at sea 1914–1918* (Cork, 2009); Cork Harbour Commission meeting minutes (hereafter C.H.C.M.M.), 6 June 1917 (Port of Cork Authority Archives, Cork (P.C.A.)).

up to 8,000 sailors.² Within weeks of arriving, hundreds of American ‘blue jackets’ were taking regular shore-leaves in Cork and Queenstown. As might be expected, many of these visitors spent their liberty pursuing the opposite sex, and some of their efforts were commercial in nature.

Cash-rich and assertive, the Americans proved popular among the city’s female population. Dublin Castle explained, ‘American seamen who come ashore in very high spirits and with an abundance of cash prove very attractive’.³ According to a British naval officer, ‘In the early days you would find U.S. sailors walking along the streets of Cork with a girl on each arm, and perhaps a third bringing up the rear hopefully’.⁴ An I.R.A. veteran recalled, ‘Their pay and allowances were then huge, by British standards, and they spent money like water on all kinds of luxuries throughout the city’.⁵ The American naval commander in Europe, Rear Admiral William S. Sims, put a chaste spin on the situation.

Our men had much more money than the native Irish boys, and could entertain the girls more lavishly at the movies and ice cream stands. The men of our fleet and the Irish girls became excellent friends: the association, from our point of view, was a very wholesome one ...⁶

Some of the Americans’ relations with the opposite sex were innocent and many were romantic, but the visiting sailors also seem responsible for an upsurge in local prostitution.⁷ Unfortunately, written records from the Cork women at the centre of the dispute are unavailable. The lack of documentation makes it impossible to determine how far the protagonists were driven by their own patriarchal and class constructs, and to recognise the precise boundaries of contemporary social standards and female sexual freedom. While an increase in recreational, consensual sexual relations was clearly apparent in Cork, the scarcity of records makes it very difficult to disentangle these from different forms of prostitution. Evidence does indicate that something was amiss in Cork during 1917. At this time, Cork’s public bodies were controlled by John Redmond’s Irish Party, which had generally supported the Allied war effort. The previous year, a councillor boasted to the Cork Corporation: ‘the fame of the city of late was second to none for the virtue of its young girls’.⁸ Yet, Cork’s political elite grew so agitated by the new situation that they deliberately subjected the city’s reputation to unflattering scrutiny.

Maria Luddy and Diarmuid Ferriter have persuasively argued that Irish prostitution in this period was popularly associated with both venereal disease

² Sir Lewis Bayly, *Pull together! The memoirs of Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly* (London, 1939), p. 220; Elting Morison, *Admiral Sims and the modern American navy* (New York, 1968), p. 382; John Dinan to American Red Cross Commission, 9 July 1918 (Hoover Institute Library, Stanford University, American National Red Cross Papers, Box 54).

³ Bayly, *Pull together*, p. 233; chief secretary for Ireland memorandum to War Cabinet, ‘Attitude of civil population towards men of United States naval forces at Cork and Queenstown’, 23 Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., CAB 24/27).

⁴ Chatterton, *Danger zone*, pp 255–6.

⁵ Statement of Michael O’Donoghue, (N.A.I., Bureau of Military History witness statement (BMH WS) 1741); see also statement of Seamus Fitzgerald (N.A.I., BMH WS 1737).

⁶ William S. Sims, *The victory at sea* (London, 1920), p. 70.

⁷ For an example, see the *Cork Examiner* (hereafter *C.E.*), 30 Nov. 1918.

⁸ *Cork Constitution* (hereafter *C.C.*), 11 Mar. 1916.

and military personnel.⁹ Prostitution had long been evident in Cork, which possessed a busy port, three nearby British military bases, and a large population living in extreme poverty.¹⁰ The Contagious Disease Acts (enforced from 1864 to 1883) reflected Cork's position in regards to prostitution and venereal disease. The laws empowered local authorities in 'subjected districts' to: certify women as prostitutes; order their compulsory medical inspections for venereal disease; and detain infected women in 'Lock Hospitals' for up to nine months.¹¹ Just three subjected districts were created in Ireland: the Curragh, Queenstown, and Cork. Between 1872 and 1881, authorities registered 664 Cork women as prostitutes. Scholars have shown that prostitution continued in Cork during the early twentieth century.¹²

Wartime concern over prostitution and other sexual activity became apparent in Cork during 1915 and 1916. In May 1915, two dissident Cork Poor Law guardians claimed the workhouse was 'managing a brothel for Kitchener's Army' and demanded Dublin Castle pay for the maintenance of unwed mothers rather than Cork ratepayers.¹³ (Other guardians promptly shouted down the two men for 'showing us up in every part of Ireland'.¹⁴) While ministering to local prostitutes in 1916, Church of Ireland clergyman, Canon William Flewett, lamented: 'It was a terrible sight to go out and see the children – they were nothing more – walking the streets at night inviting sin and running in the way of destruction'.¹⁵ Following a complaint the same year from a Catholic priest, Father John Russell, the Cork Corporation appointed a taxi inspector to stop 'outrageous and scandalous behaviour'.¹⁶ Apparently, 'a foul pest was going around at night', hiring hackney taxis solely to use their backseat. When police raided a Cork brothel a few months later, Catholic bishop, Daniel Cohalan, warned the young women of his flock: 'One shudders at the thought that the motor ride or excursion trip, might on some occasions end for a poor girl who had been good and virtuous in a house of ill fame'.¹⁷ Thousands of young American sailors entered this simmering environment in the summer of 1917.

Shortly after the Americans' arrival, public protests began in Cork. At the Cork Corporation meeting of 8 June 1917 former mayor, Sir Edward Fitzgerald, condemned scenes around the city. 'It was a scandal to allow the streets of Cork

⁹ Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society, 1800–1940* (Cambridge, 2007), pp 25–6, 138–40, 156–62, 209; Diarmuid Ferriter, *Occasions of sin: sex and society in modern Ireland* (London, 2007), pp 27–9, 59–60.

¹⁰ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 22, 24, 32, 37, 51, 57, 112–3. See also Colman O'Mahony, *In the shadows: life in Cork 1750–1930* (Cork, 1997), pp 245–54. The military bases were Victoria Barracks, Ballincollig Barracks, and Queenstown Naval Station.

¹¹ Maria Luddy, 'Women and the Contagious Disease Acts 1864–1886' in *History Ireland*, vi, no. 1 (spring 1993), pp 32–4; Ferriter, *Occasions of sin*, pp 27–9.

¹² Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp. 112–13, 145; Frances Finnegan, *Do penance or perish: a study of Magdalen asylums in Ireland* (Piltown, County Kilkenny, 2001), pp 159–65, 168, 202.

¹³ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, p. 180. See also *The Irish Citizen*, 15 May 1915 (reference courtesy of Sarah-Anne Buckley); *C.E.*, 21 May 1915; *C.C.*, 21 May 1915.

¹⁴ *C.C.*, 21 May 1915.

¹⁵ *C.C.*, 4 Nov. 1916.

¹⁶ *C.C.*, 11 Mar. 1916.

¹⁷ *C.E.*, 21 Aug. 1916.

to be used as at present by soldiers and sailors and bad characters – well-dressed bad characters.’¹⁸ The Corporation asked the Royal Irish Constabulary (R.I.C.) county inspector to repress ‘the unseemly conduct’ carried on by servicemen and ‘young girls on the streets and other thoroughfares of the city’.¹⁹ The following week, another councillor complained about women and servicemen spending nights at the waterworks, a secluded area on the city outskirts. The Corporation again referred the matter to the police.²⁰ Public objection may have arisen from the visibility of these activities. Writing to the *Irish Independent*, ‘Corkonian’ complained of ‘women of the most undesirable class ... whose doings were bringing disrepute to the city and preventing decent people from allowing their families to walk the streets after dusk’.²¹

During the Cork diocesan synod on 9 July 1917, the city’s Catholic clergy tackled the menace with pastoral vigour:

We deplore the lack of parental control which we witness in the city; that we appeal to parents to exercise the closest vigilance over their young daughters; and that we again call on public authorities to safeguard public morality in the outskirts of the city.²²

Pulpit denunciations proved ineffective. The Cork Harbour Commission had recently opened public access to Carrigrennan Woods, located on the railway line between Cork and Queenstown. Hundreds of new weekend visitors drew the ire of Carrigrennan owner, Arthur Julian, who complained repeatedly to the Cork Harbour Commission.²³ In late June, Julian reported disreputable conduct by sightseers ‘of an objectionable class’.²⁴ He held the board ‘morally responsible for the fall of young girls. Young couples did not seek secluded spots for innocent purposes’.²⁵

Amid rising resentment, Cork priests apparently encouraged their parishioners to form a ‘vigilance committee’ to police wayward young women.²⁶ Before the First World War, Irish vigilance groups campaigned against pornography, drunkenness, and prostitution.²⁷ In Cork, Irish Party officials during 1911–12 led a cross-party, ecumenical campaign against ‘immoral, suggestive, or irreligious’ written material.²⁸ Cork’s Catholic ‘Advisory Committee’ had recently fought to ban children from attending evening cinema shows.²⁹

During the war, the massive increase of soldiers and sailors within Ireland created new concerns. A ‘moral panic’ arose over the sexual activity of working-

¹⁸ C.C., 9 June 1917.

¹⁹ Cork Corporation meeting minutes, 8 June 1917 (Cork City and County Archives (C.C.C.A.), CP/C/M/12).

²⁰ C.C., 14 June 1917.

²¹ Letter from ‘Corkonian’, *Irish Independent*, 15 Sept. 1917.

²² C.C., 10 June 1917.

²³ See C.H.C.M.M., 30 May 1917, 4 July 1917, and 17 July 1917 (P.C.A.).

²⁴ Arthur Julian to Cork Harbour Commission, C.H.C.M.M., 25 July 1917 (P.C.A.).

²⁵ C.C., 26 July 1917.

²⁶ R.I.C. 1917 intelligence notes (T.N.A., PRO 903/19).

²⁷ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 162–3, 165, 172–6, 179; *Irish Independent*, 2 July 1912, 14 Dec. 1914, 5 Apr. 1919; *Anglo-Celt*, 18 Oct. 1919.

²⁸ *Southern Star*, 16 Nov. 1911, 6 Jan. 1912; *Irish Independent*, 5 Dec. 1911, 6 Dec. 1911, 1 Jan. 1912, 2 July 1912; *Sunday Independent*, 7 July 1912.

²⁹ Cork Corporation Law and Finance Committee meeting minutes, 20 Dec. 1916, 17 Apr. 1917, 9 May 1917, 13 June 1917 (C.C.C.A., CP/C/CM/F/A14).

class women separated from husbands on wartime service; the exposure of Irishmen serving in the British military to prostitution; and the spread of venereal disease beyond its normal social confines.³⁰ Starting in 1915, female vigilantes in Dublin and Belfast organised ‘Women’s patrols’ in red-light districts to prevent prostitutes plying their trade.³¹ Similar wartime sexual policing occurred across urban Great Britain. Studies of anti-prostitution activists in Britain, Dublin, and Belfast indicate that they displayed strong class bias, featured wealthy unionist suffragettes, coordinated efforts with police, and championed the war effort. Cork’s anti-prostitution vigilantes of 1917–18, however, were seemingly composed of working-class Catholics, lacked suffragettes, attacked police, and opposed the war. In addition, while the Women’s Police Service targeted women for prosecution, Cork vigilantes physically assaulted both men and women involved in these activities. Unstable political conditions in Cork produced a very different response to the same perceived prostitution problem experienced in Dublin, Belfast, and Great Britain.

The Royal Navy claimed the anti-prostitution campaign in Cork was ‘fomented by Sinn Féin leaders’.³² The British army likewise reported that the committee was composed ‘entirely of Sinn Féin sympathisers’,³³ while the Royal Irish Constabulary identified the vigilantes as ‘Sinn Féiners’.³⁴ The anti-sailor demonstrators clearly expressed anti-government sentiments, yet Republican records largely omit mention of these activities. Participants seem to have acted as unorganised individuals, rather than as representatives of separatist organisations. This reflected the fluid state of Cork Republicanism prior to the national organising conventions for the Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin, held in October 1917. Afterwards, Cork separatists increasingly channelled popular

³⁰ Lucy Bland, ‘In the name of protection: the policing of women in the First World War,’ in Julia Brophy and Carol Smart (eds), *Women-in-law: explorations in law, family, and sexuality* (London, 1985), pp 23–49; Philippa Levine, ‘“Walking the streets in a way no decent woman should”: women police in World War One’ in *Journal of Modern History*, lxvi, no. 1 (Mar. 1994), pp 34–78. For further discussions of British ‘moral panic’ see Susan Pederson, ‘Gender, welfare, and citizenship in Britain during the Great War’ in *American Historical Review*, xcv, no. 4 (Oct. 1990), pp 983–1006; Janis Lomas, ‘“Delicate duties”: issues of class and respectability in government policy towards the wives and widows of British soldiers in the Great War’ in *Women’s History Review*, ix (2000), pp 123–7; Angela Wollacott, ‘“Khaki fever” and its control: gender, class, age, and sexual morality on the British home front in the First World War’ in *Journal of Contemporary History*, v, no. 2 (Apr. 1994), pp 325–47.

³¹ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 39–40, 153–4, 174–7; *Irish Citizen*, 23 Oct. 1915, Jan. 1917; *Irish Times*, 2 Jan. 1915, 14 Jan. 1915, 15 Apr. 1915, 26 Jan. 1916, 18 Jan. 1916, 19 Jan. 1918.

³² Admiralty memorandum for the War Cabinet, ‘Attitudes of civil population towards men of the United States naval forces at Queenstown,’ 19 Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., CAB 24/26).

³³ Monthly report of Irish Command Military District intelligence officers, Southern District military intelligence report, Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., CO 904/157). All T.N.A., CO material has been drawn from the microfilm *British in Ireland* series as held by the library of University College Cork.

³⁴ R.I.C. county inspector’s monthly report for Cork City and East Riding (henceforth cited as C.I. report) Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., CO 904/104).

discontent into Republican structures.³⁵ The Cork vigilance demonstrations attracted the same demographic as the Republican movement – young members of the working-class and lower-middle class, losing their social deference, and drawn to direct action. Their actions in September 1917 and March 1918 seemed motivated by a mixture of sexual puritanism, parochialism, and anti-war sentiment.

II

The Cork Vigilance Committee struck city streets on the weekend of 1–3 September 1917. Over three successive nights, bands of civilians assaulted American sailors and local women walking together.³⁶ Much of the abuse was verbal as the vigilantes followed courting couples and ‘hurled insulting and sometimes disgusting epitaphs at the parties’.³⁷ Many men and women were also pushed and shoved, and occasionally punched and stoned. On Saturday night, a rowdy crowd of 300 cornered three couples in front of the Palace Theatre. After their American dates fled, the three women were slapped and only saved from further damage by a police baton charge.³⁸ One victim testified that her male assailant shouted, ‘The priest of the parish has sent us out to prevent ye from going with American sailors’. Later that night, demonstrators smashed the window of the British army recruiting office in Patrick Street.³⁹

The attacks continued across the city centre on Sunday and Monday evenings. On Monday night, a crowd of about 300 hissed and booed different groups of Americans, including some sailors walking without female companions. They surrounded one unlucky tourist outside the Coliseum Theatre in King Street (now MacCurtain Street), but he was rescued by a police patrol. The mob then fell in behind ‘a group of juveniles, bearing a Sinn Féin flag in front’.⁴⁰ The police immediately charged with their batons, receiving a scattering of stones and shouts of ‘Up Dublin’ and ‘Up the Huns’. The crowd moved towards the British army recruiting office, which was under police guard owing to previous mob attacks (it was damaged on four separate occasions in 1917).⁴¹ As demonstrators plotted their next move, they spotted and chased four American sailors.⁴² Admiral Sims later wrote that ‘several’ of his men were seriously injured in similar collisions around the city.⁴³ ‘The Sinn Féiners made quite a row’, U.S. Navy Commander Joseph Taussig noted in his diary.⁴⁴ ‘The Irish-American fracas is an

³⁵ John Borgonovo, ‘Evolution of a revolution: Cork city 1916–1918’, (Ph.D. thesis, University College Cork, 2010), chapters three and five; idem, *The dynamics of war and revolution: Cork city, 1916–1918* (forthcoming, Cork, 2013).

³⁶ C.I. report, Sept. 1917, (T.N.A., CO 904/104); Southern District military intelligence report, Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., CO 904/157).

³⁷ *C.C.*, 3 Sept. 1917.

³⁸ *C.C.*, 3 Sept. 1917

³⁹ *C.C.*, 4, 22 Sept. 1917.

⁴⁰ *C.C.*, 4 Sept. 1917.

⁴¹ *C.C.*, 25 June, 4 & 28 Sept. 1917.

⁴² *C.E.*, 4 Sept. 1917.

⁴³ *New York Times*, 23 June 1921.

⁴⁴ Taussig, *Queenstown patrol*, p. 113.

awful mess', fumed his comrade, Lieutenant Lucien Green of the *U.S.S. Tucker*, 'and it is a rotten shame the way our men are being treated'.⁴⁵ Following the attacks, the naval authorities cancelled all shore liberty in Cork city.⁴⁶ Blacksmiths aboard the American flagship *U.S.S. Melville* were detected manufacturing brass knuckles for the sailors' next visit to Cork, and it was reportedly 'common knowledge that blood would have flowed' had the city not been put out of bounds.⁴⁷ Lt Green wrote of the enlisted men, 'if they could but have half a chance there would be no more of this beastly business'.⁴⁸

Responses differed within Cork's political establishment, reflecting tension between the pro-war unionist elite, and more subdued Redmondite home rulers. Appalled by the anti-American violence, the unionist *Cork Constitution* newspaper published anonymous letters demanding that city officials formally apologise to the U.S. fleet. One writer denounced 'the ragamuffins of the city' while another asked, 'Is the rabble which held the streets Sunday and Monday night to express the accepted views of the citizens of Cork?'.⁴⁹ On the other side of the political divide, anonymous letters to the Redmondite *Cork Examiner* attempted to ease hostility against the visitors. Correspondence assured readers of the Americans' 'respectability and good conduct, more especially where ladies were concerned',⁵⁰ and reported that the Cork assaults thrilled the Germans, who, it was promised, had been historically responsible for producing the first caricatures of the Irish resembling apes.⁵¹

The police arrested only one man during the September disturbances, Irish Volunteer James Dunne, who was charged with punching a woman outside the Palace Theatre.⁵² At his trial, Dunne's solicitor emphasised the popular outrage at perceived public immorality in Cork: 'It was a scandal. Anybody could see what was going on. If one walked down the Lower Road [near the train station] one could see bands of girls waiting for American sailors'.⁵³ The defence proved effective, as city magistrates acquitted Dunne.⁵⁴

A few weeks later, a delegation of Irish Party officials and business leaders travelled to Queenstown to apologise to 'the sailors of our gallant ally'. Led by Lord Mayor T. C. Butterfield, they presented a memorial to Vice-Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly (Royal Navy) and Captain Poinsette Pringle (U.S. Navy) on behalf of 'the respectable inhabitants of Cork', denouncing the 'unseemly and disgraceful' attacks.⁵⁵ After expressing regrets to the U.S. Navy and the American

⁴⁵ Diary of Lt. Lucien Byron Green, 26 September 1917, and 27 October, 1917 (courtesy of Rollie Green, Carrigaline, County Cork).

⁴⁶ *C.C.*, 5 Sept. 1917, 6 Oct. 1917; Southern District military intelligence report, Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., CO 904/157); Vice-Admiral Lewis Bayly to Vice-Admiral William Sims, 23 Oct., 1917 (T.N.A., CAB 24/30); Green diary, 4 Sept., 26 Sept., 27 Oct. 1917.

⁴⁷ Sims, *Victory at sea*, p. 72; Bayly, *Pull together*, p. 233; Chatterton, *Danger zone*, pp 255–6.

⁴⁸ Green diary, 26 Sept. 1917.

⁴⁹ *C.C.*, 6 Oct. 1917.

⁵⁰ Letter from 'Uncle Bob', *C.E.*, 25 Sept. 1917.

⁵¹ Letter from M. J. Crimmins, *C.E.*, 28 Nov. 1917.

⁵² *C.E.*, 24 June 1918, 1 & 11 July 1918.

⁵³ *C.C.*, 22 Sept. 1917.

⁵⁴ *C.I.* report for Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., CO 904/104); *C.C.*, 6 Oct. 1917.

⁵⁵ Cork delegates 'appointed at an influential meeting of citizens' to Vice-Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, 22 Oct. 1917 (T.N.A., CAB 24/30).

people, the delegation essentially requested that the sailors and their wallets be allowed to return to Cork.⁵⁶ The naval officers responded by complaining of Cork's frequent anti-government riots and illegal Irish Volunteer parades.⁵⁷ When pressed, Butterfield could not promise to end seditious demonstrations, since they were beyond his control. Bayly dismissed a compromise that would have allowed daytime access to the city, because 'it would appear that the men were free to spend their money by day and then required to leave the town before dark'.⁵⁸ Instead, Admiral Bayly extended his Cork ban indefinitely, for both British and American sailors alike. After bidding farewell to the furious naval authorities, Lord Mayor Butterfield reportedly told his colleagues, 'But by the grace of God I left through the door and not by the window'.⁵⁹

The attacks on American sailors coincided with the Republican movement's overtaking of the constitutional Irish Party, which had dominated the city's political establishment. As public opinion flocked to Sinn Féin, the civic power dynamic changed in favour of the Republicans.⁶⁰ Anti-government demonstrators also challenged the Crown's command of city streets, clashing with police on eleven separate occasions from June until November 1917.⁶¹ Separatist protesters could no longer be controlled by R.I.C. batons, so Admiral Bayly appealed for police and military reinforcements to suppress the anti-navy demonstrations.⁶² Fearing the deployment of troops would produce fatal (and politically disastrous) collisions, Dublin Castle refused his request.⁶³ Though Bayly's authority was unquestioned on water, he found it checked on land by stone-throwing civilians. With the government unable to protect his sailors, Bayly removed them from harm's way. For the rest of the war, the city of Cork remained out of bounds to naval enlisted personnel, though naval officers and (more significantly) British soldiers retained access. Owing to the ban, Cork women were cut off from the U.S. Navy. Scores of them now travelled by train to Queenstown, and were routinely greeted at the station by large crowds of enthusiastic Americans.⁶⁴

Residents tended to identify the prostitutes as English rather than Irish. The Queenstown Urban District Council attributed 'immorality in our streets' to 'strangers'.⁶⁵ When three women were detected *in flagrante* at Carrigrennan Woods, the Cork Harbour Commission carefully identified the offenders as 'Liverpool

⁵⁶ Bayly to Sims, 23 Oct. 1917 (T.N.A., CAB 24/30).

⁵⁷ Admiral Bayly to Admiral Sims, 'Questions asked by the Lord Mayor of Cork in the presence of Captain Pringle, USA, and the deputation', 23 Oct. 1917 (T.N.A., CAB 24/30).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Chatterton, *Danger zone*, p. 257; J. M. Barry, *Old Glory at Queenstown: the US maritime presence at Queenstown, 1840–1920* (Cork, 1999); Sims, *Victory at sea*, pp 71–2.

⁶⁰ John Borgonovo, 'Throwing discretion to the wind: the 1918 general election in Cork city' in Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid and Colin Reid (eds), *From Parnell to Paisley: constitutional and revolutionary politics in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), pp 78–96.

⁶¹ See Borgonovo, 'Evolution of a revolution', chapter five.

⁶² Admiralty memorandum for the War Cabinet, 19 Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., CAB 24/26).

⁶³ C.I. report for Dec. 1917 (T.N.A., CO 904/104); R.I.C. Inspector General's report for January 1918 (T.N.A., CO 904/105); Bishop Cohalan to Liam de Róiste, 7 Dec. 1917 (C.C.C.A., De Róiste papers, C48).

⁶⁴ Sims, *Victory at sea*, pp 71–2.

⁶⁵ C.C., 21 Mar. 1918.

ladies'.⁶⁶ In a newspaper letter, 'Corkonian' claimed of prostitutes, 'it is also known that 99%, if not all of them, are English women who have come over here within the past two years'.⁶⁷ This is consistent with Maria Luddy's work and Ben Novick's analysis of Sinn Féin's wartime propaganda, which ascribed moral vice to British rather than Irish influences.⁶⁸ This was not a uniquely Irish response, though, as anti-prostitution agitators in pre-war Britain likewise blamed vice on outsiders rather than on local women.⁶⁹ Finally, it is noteworthy that the disturbances were ignored by the two leading female political organisations in Cork, the anti-war Cumann na mBan and the pro-war Munster Women's Franchise League. Nationalism in both cases (Irish and British) trumped gender issues. One exception was Marie Lynch, a Poor Law guardian, Sinn Féin convert, and prominent suffragette who tried to diffuse the anti-prostitution climate later in 1917.

Communal norms and U.S. Navy control over its sailors should be considered when comparing Irish/American relations in Queenstown to those in Cork. Queenstown bore the brunt of the American shore-leaves, yet did not face as much turmoil as Cork. Living in a port town with a long tradition of sailors seeking recreation, Queenstown residents likely possessed a higher tolerance of boisterous sailors. In addition, U.S. Navy shore patrols (military police) toured Queenstown's streets, which probably deterred unruly excesses.⁷⁰ Despite this, Queenstown did experience disturbances in early September, two days after the Cork riots. On 5 September 1917, the Americans 'were out in great numbers', and damaged some public houses during intramural brawls between rival ship crews.⁷¹ At one point, a large crowd of Queenstown residents faced off against a number of sailors, but an American shore patrol separated the parties and ushered the sailors back aboard their ships.

Two nights later, an American's flirtation with a Queenstown woman proved deadly.⁷² Fred Plummer, a painter at Haulbowline shipyard, had befriended Machinist Mate John Parente from the American flagship *U.S.S. Melville*. While the two men enjoyed an evening promenade, Parente made a pass at Plummer's girlfriend, asking her to take a walk, so, in her words, 'he might see what kind of girl I was'. The offended Plummer announced 'he would not have any young girl insulted by a stranger' and the two men squared off.⁷³ Punched by the American, Plummer fell against a curb-stone and suffered a fatal skull fracture. British army intelligence reported that Plummer's death 'caused considerable bad feeling' among Queenstown residents, which was reciprocated by American sailors, 'who are now greatly incensed at the local attitude towards them'.⁷⁴ At Sunday Mass

⁶⁶ C.H.C.M.M., 10 July 1918 (P.C.A.).

⁶⁷ *Irish Independent*, 6 Oct. 1917.

⁶⁸ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society*, pp 190–1; Ben Novick, *Conceiving revolution: nationalist propaganda during the First World War* (Dublin, 2001), pp 154–7.

⁶⁹ Lucy Bland, "'Purifying the public world": feminist vigilantes in late Victorian England' in *Women's History Review*, i (1992), pp 397–412.

⁷⁰ *C.E.*, 8 Sept. 1917; *Irish Independent*, 12 Sept. 1917; *Anglo-Celt*, 15 Sept. 1917.

⁷¹ *C.E.*, 8 Sept. 1917.

⁷² *C.C.*, 12 Sept., 6 Oct. 1917; *Irish Independent*, 12 Sept. 1917; Case notes, Parente vs the Crown (National Archives I, Washington DC, secretary of the navy general correspondence, 1916–1926 (hereafter S.N.G.C.), Box 2492, RG 80, 28, 979-100-9) .

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Southern District Military Intelligence report for Oct. 1917 (T.N.A., CO 904/157).

in St Colman's cathedral, three American naval officers stormed out after the priest labelled their comrades 'vultures ... who were preying upon the purity of our daughters of Queenstown'.⁷⁵ Other pulpit denunciations followed, but as the *Irish Independent* reported, 'The intense feeling at Queenstown is not so much against the sailors as against the girls, who travel in hundreds from Cork to meet them'.⁷⁶ A few days later, American diplomats received a disturbing report from Queenstown:

Late Sunday afternoon about 200 girls of flapper type who arrived by train from Cork were met by crowd of about fifty youngsters (street urchin type and eldest not over 17) armed with sticks and stones and chased back to station where they boarded next train. Some girls had hats and dresses torn off.⁷⁷

British authorities found themselves saddled with the controversial Plummer case. Witnesses stated that when the fight began Plummer had his hands in his pockets; Parente made to shake Plummer's hand, but then punched him unexpectedly; after onlookers separated the two men, Parente pretended to walk off but broke away and sprang back to deliver the fatal blow.⁷⁸ On 5 October 1917, the R.I.C. charged Parente with manslaughter, which seemed appropriate. U.S. Navy authorities handed Parente over to the police for trial, but he was immediately released on bail.⁷⁹ Despite strong evidence for a prosecution, the attorney-general advised Cork police 'though the charge is one of manslaughter, there is an element of accident in the case'.⁸⁰ The crown solicitor took the hint and abandoned the prosecution at a hearing in December, apparently with the understanding that the U.S. Navy would compensate Plummer's family.⁸¹ Aboard *U.S.S. Melville*, Parente's shipmates had raised a fund of \$300–400 for such a payment, but senior American naval authorities refused to forward the money to Plummer's parents. The family's compensation claim was later investigated by assistant secretary of the navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, but both Roosevelt and his successor refused to award damages. The U.S. Navy did not discipline Parente for the incident, though he was 'transferred to a distant port of the station in order

⁷⁵ Ensign Dennis Ryan, *U.S.S. Conyngham*, to senior officer present, 9 Sept. 1917 (National Archives I, Washington D.C., Records collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, P Bases – Queenstown, General Correspondence, Folder 1, Box 452, RG 45); Admiralty memorandum for the War Cabinet, 19 Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., CAB 24/26); Sims, *Victory at sea*, p. 71.

⁷⁶ *Irish Independent*, 12 Sept. 1917

⁷⁷ Memorandum of Associated Press of America correspondent to U.S. Consulate, Cork, 14 Sept. 1917 (National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, U.S. Consular Records, Cork, Ireland, RG 84, vol. 113).

⁷⁸ Copy of notes in the case of Parente vs the Crown (National Archives I, Washington D.C., secretary of the navy general correspondence, 1916–1926, Box 2492, RG 80, 28,979-100-9).

⁷⁹ Captain J. R. P. Pringle, senior officer present, US Naval Forces Europe, to US Consul, Queenstown, 4 Oct. 1917; Pringle to R.I.C. District Inspector, Queenstown, 27 Sept. 1917 (National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, U.S. Consular Records, Cork, Ireland, RG 84, vol. 113).

⁸⁰ Attorney General to R.I.C. Cork county inspector, 20 Sept. 1917 (T.N.A., C.S.O.R.P. 1917/23,039).

⁸¹ Assistant secretary of the U.S. Navy, Gordon Woodbury, to Francis Healy, Queenstown, 3 Mar. 1921, (S.N.G.C., RG 80, Box 1941, 26, 524-451).

that his further presence at Queenstown might not be the occasion of any untoward incident'.⁸² The case was closed without further communal hostility or antagonism from the U.S. Navy, which seemed to satisfy Dublin Castle and naval authorities, if not the family of Joseph Plummer.⁸³ Admiral Sims later added insult to injury by incorrectly describing the episode in his celebrated memoir *The victory at sea*. Sims's erroneous version included the claim that the fight resulted from Parente's intervention to stop the 'hooligan' Plummer from striking his girlfriend.⁸⁴ Despite strenuous appeals from Queenstown officials, Sims never corrected his account.

III

The anti-American disturbances cannot be easily attributed to xenophobia. Because of Cork's thriving port and large British military presence, generations of local women had been courted by non-Irish servicemen and merchant sailors.⁸⁵ Cork Republicans did not attempt to stop women dating British soldiers until 1920.⁸⁶ Hundreds of non-Irish soldiers could be found in the city's two major bases, and they were unaffected by the trouble. In July 1917, a U.S. Navy baseball exhibition at the Mardyke cricket grounds drew up to 4,000 polite, if bewildered, spectators.⁸⁷ Considering Ireland's long and warm relationship with the United States, the question remains as to why the Americans aroused such a violent reaction from Cork residents.

The American sailors seem to have upset Cork residents in three ways: firstly, they engaged with local prostitutes in a more open manner than was deemed permissible; secondly, they broke another social taboo by making vocal sexual advances on local women; thirdly, they enabled local women to transgress communal limits on physical contact with men who were not their husbands. Maria Luddy has suggested that in Ireland prostitution was generally permitted if it occurred out of sight.⁸⁸ Tacit approval disappeared once prostitution became visible to the general public. In the late nineteenth century, visibility frequently sparked 'moral panics' about public health and possible contagion. Such a dynamic appeared in Cork, especially during the second bout of disturbances in March 1918.

American interaction with 'respectable' women was also problematic in Cork. The British army ultimately attributed the vigilantes' formation to 'the disrespectful attitude shown by the Americans towards local women'.⁸⁹ Éamon

⁸² Letter and attachments of acting secretary of the navy to chief of bureau of navigation, 8 June 1920, (ibid., Box 2492, 28478-100-9). See also U.S. Consul Charles Hathaway's undated notes, (National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, U.S. Consular Records, Cork, Ireland, RG 84, vol. 113).

⁸³ *C.E.*, 29 Sept. 1917; *Irish Times*, 13 October 1917; *Irish Independent*, 15 Dec. 1917.

⁸⁴ Queenstown Urban District Council to secretary of the navy Josephus Daniels, 20 Feb. 1920, (S.N.G.C., 28478-100-9); Sims, *Victory at sea*, p. 71.

⁸⁵ See Gerry White and Brendan O'Shea, *A great sacrifice: Cork servicemen who died in the Great War* (Cork, 2010).

⁸⁶ For examples, see *C.C.*, 9, 21 July 1920.

⁸⁷ *C.C.*, 17, 26 July 1917.

⁸⁸ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 36–7.

⁸⁹ Southern District Military Intelligence Report for Oct. 1917 (T.N.A., CO 904/157).

de Valera claimed 'the attacks at Cork on American sailors were in part the result of a determination of the Irish manhood to protect Irish women'.⁹⁰ Dublin Castle pointed out, 'the free and easy relationships which spring up naturally cause some disquiet and annoyance', adding, 'all the philandering that goes on is by no means platonic'.⁹¹ Cultural tensions seem to have arisen over acceptable male/female interactions, as experienced by Machinist Mate Parente, who inadvertently brought about a case of manslaughter by asking a woman to take a walk. In Cork, an additional catalyst for unrest may have been provided by a report that a young local woman 'was found drugged in a park after being in the company of a naval rating'. That alleged episode was later investigated by the influential Irish-American politician, U.S. Senator James Phelan of California.⁹² While there was no verification of the alleged episode, the story appears to have circulated in Cork at the time of the disturbances.

Months and years after the clashes, American commentators cited various anti-American provocations by Cork residents, including spitting on sailors and insults to their flag.⁹³ However, such aggression does not appear in contemporary records, and was likely conflated with earlier events and the disturbances discussed in this article. There was one recorded episode at the Palace theatre in 1917 when the cinema audience hissed newsreel footage of U.S. troops marching through London.⁹⁴ At the same show viewers also heckled newsreels showing British soldiers, as they had been doing for a number of months. The problem became so acute in 1916 that authorities stationed a military policeman at each show 'to detect hissing'.⁹⁵

Accusations concerning insults to the American flag may have stemmed from a two-day riot in Cork during June 1917, when a mob wrecked the British army recruiting office on Patrick Street. Flags of the Allied nations, including the United States, hung outside the office, and these were torn down during the episode.⁹⁶

Evidence indicates that tensions in Cork were not one-sided. An anonymous letter to the *Cork Constitution* illustrated American culture shock.

⁹⁰ *New York Times*, 3 Nov. 1919.

⁹¹ Chief secretary to War Cabinet, 23 Sept. 1916 (T.N.A., CAB 24/27).

⁹² J. L. Fawsitt to Liam de Róiste, 12 Feb. 1919 (T.C.D. MS 10539/449); Phelan to Charles Hathaway, U.S. consul at Queenstown, 20 Jan. 1919, and Hathaway to Phelan, 11 July 1919 (National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, U.S. Consular Records, Cork, Ireland, RG 84, vol. 113); Liam de Róiste diary, 14 July 1919 (C.C.C.A., U271A/27). Phelan's letter refers to a 'marine' rather than a 'naval rating'.

⁹³ Letter from J. P. O'B., C.C., 9 Dec. 1918; letter from 'Doughboy', C.C., 24 Dec. 1918; letters from 'A sailor who has been there' and 'Common sense', *New York Times*, 6 July 1919; letter from Wallace Irwin, George Barr McCutcheon, and Julian Street, *New York Times*, 14 June 1921; letters from 'An ex-serviceman' and Frank M. Taylor, *New York Tribune*, 1 Dec. 1920.

⁹⁴ Memorandum of Associated Press of America correspondent, 14 Sept. 1917 (National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, U.S. Consular Records, Cork, Ireland, RG 84, vol. 113); Bayly to Sims, 'Questions asked by the Lord Mayor of Cork', 23 Oct. 1917 (T.N.A., CAB 24/30).

⁹⁵ Borgonovo, 'Evolution of a revolution', pp 79–80.

⁹⁶ John Borgonovo, "'Thoughtless young people'" and "'The battle of Patrick Street'": the Cork city riots of June 1917' in *Cork Hist. Soc. Jn.*, cxiv (2008), pp 10–20.

Sir,

Your beggars are a disgrace to your city, running after our sailors ... Your beggars in Cork are brazen beggars: And your females with shawls over their heads are worse again. Shocking in the extreme. Such I never saw but in Cork.

JCB (An American Officer)

P.S. And as for Home Rule, I would prefer giving it, (after what I have seen), to African niggers.⁹⁷

An obvious aggravation to the Americans was the large number of healthy males in Cork who refused to serve in the armed forces. 'There seemed to me a great many men for a country supposed to be at war' mused Commander Joseph Taussig of the U.S. Navy, after his first visit to Queenstown. 'I have since learned that the Irish people have generally held aloof from any participation in the war and do not consider themselves a party to it'.⁹⁸ Admiral Sims claimed that his sailors 'were disgusted at the large numbers of able-bodied men whom they saw in the streets, and did not hesitate to ask some of them why they were not fighting on the Western Front'.⁹⁹ Two other American naval officers reported 'open hostility' between the two sides:

The average male Sinn Feiner was blessed with health and physical force yet he did not wear the uniform of the British military forces. The American looked upon him, therefore, as a slacker ... We were amazed, indeed, at the large percentage of the male population, all of military age, going about their daily existence of loafing during the day and sneaking around in military formations in preparation for their threatened revolt by night.¹⁰⁰

In addition, senior British and American naval officials incorrectly believed local Republicans were supplying Allied shipping information to Germany. Paul McMahon has shown that this false impression came from the paranoid Royal Navy director of intelligence, Captain Reginald 'Blinker' Hall, rather than any serious espionage threat from Irish separatists.¹⁰¹ Owing to Hall's inaccurate reports, Admiral Bayly assumed that in Queenstown, 'there were spies in the dockyard, as well as everywhere else around us'.¹⁰² To frustrate supposed Republican agents, Bayly's anti-submarine 'Q-ships' (warships disguised as unarmed merchant vessels) undertook elaborate security precautions after departing Cork harbour, including repainting themselves at sea and changing false masts and funnels. In 1918, Bayly sought to remove shipyard workers 'of doubtful loyalty', but found it impossible. The R.I.C. county inspector later remarked, 'I am afraid if action were to be taken against every disloyal man employed at Haulbowline, the yard would have to be

⁹⁷ C.C., 21 June 1917.

⁹⁸ Taussig, *Queenstown patrol*, p. 21.

⁹⁹ Sims, *Victory at sea*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Lt. (J. G.) Kenneth B. Keyes and Lt (J. G.) King Whitney, *New York Times*, 8 Nov. 1919. See also letters from Henry Beston Sheahan and J. T. Rowland, *New York Times*, 5 Nov. 1919; letter from J. P. O'B, C.C., 9 Dec. 1918; letter from 'Doughboy', C.C., 24 Dec. 1918.

¹⁰¹ Paul McMahon, *British spies and Irish rebels: British intelligence and Ireland, 1916–1945* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp 23–5; Bayly, *Pull together*, p. 195; Sims, *Victory at sea*, p. 72.

¹⁰² Bayly, *Pull together*, p. 195.

closed'.¹⁰³ At the growing Queenstown hospital complex, American Red Cross officials excluded Irish staff, since 'the proposition of having some Sinn Féiner in close proximity to the camp does not appeal very strongly'.¹⁰⁴ Upper echelon suspicion of Irish Republicans likely filtered down through the ranks, and contributed to mutual suspicion between sailors and local residents.

IV

During the First World War, Sinn Féin's wartime propaganda characterised venereal disease as an infliction made upon pure Ireland by an immoral British army garrison.¹⁰⁵ This expanded upon earlier Republican efforts to use fear of venereal disease to discourage Irishwomen from dating soldiers and Irishmen from joining the British army.¹⁰⁶ Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh has also pointed out that many anti-venereal disease activists were motivated by genuine health concerns for marginalised prostitutes and working-class children.¹⁰⁷ Though anti-venereal disease sexual policing began in Dublin and Belfast during early 1915, it was not detected in Cork prior to 1917.

In the autumn of 1917, persistent Cork rumours blamed the Americans for infecting local women with venereal disease. Writing to the *Cork Examiner*, Poor Law guardian, Marie Lynch, addressed the issue as directly, if delicately, as possible.

Many wild stories, unproved by any specific facts, were spread throughout the city regarding the conduct of some American sailors towards girls. It was mentioned that the Cork Union could produce evidence to bear out the allegations against the sailors. Upon investigation there I found there was not the slightest proof of the scandal mentioned. I questioned many of the medical profession in our city, and learned they also regarded the charges as unfounded. I am quite aware that many good people were led by specious arguments to believe those wicked tales against the sailors, and were so deceived themselves. Now it is a well-known fact that the American Navy, composition and organisation, is one of the best in existence. Strict and constant supervision is exercised over every man by the officers in charge, aided by the most perfect medical cooperation.¹⁰⁸

Anxiety about venereal disease figured in Cork's next round of street disturbances in March 1918. During 1917, Westminster passed the Public Health (Prevention and Treatment of Diseases) (Ireland) Act, which financed and mandated treatment of venereal disease in Irish hospitals.¹⁰⁹ At the end of the year, the Irish Local Government Board instructed Cork health authorities to implement

¹⁰³ R.I.C. Cork county inspector to district inspector, Queenstown, 3 Mar. 1920; Bayly to Secretary of the Admiralty, 29 June 1918; W. F. Nicholson, secretary of the Admiralty, to under-secretary, Dublin Castle, 6 Aug. 1918 (T.N.A., CO 904/123).

¹⁰⁴ Captain R. C. Russell, American Red Cross Queenstown, to American Red Cross Committee, London, 5 Aug. 1918, Queenstown Office, Ireland, 1919 (Hoover Institute Library, Stanford University, American National Red Cross Papers, Box 55).

¹⁰⁵ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 172–8; Novick, *Conceiving revolution*, pp 150–7.

¹⁰⁶ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 170–2.

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, *Kathleen Lynn: Irishwoman, patriot, doctor* (Dublin, 2006), pp 38–9.

¹⁰⁸ *C.E.*, 19 Sept. 1917.

¹⁰⁹ Ferriter, *Occasions of sin*, pp 59–60.

venereal disease treatment programmes.¹¹⁰ Officials met in February 1918 to coordinate their response, with delegates representing the Cork Corporation, Cork County Council, Poor Law Guardians, and the South Charitable Infirmary.¹¹¹ Matters came to a head in March, when the County Council and the Cork Corporation refused to comply with the government's treatment scheme.¹¹² The non-cooperation of those bodies mirrored the stance taken by the Sinn Féin health department in Dublin. It called for mandatory venereal disease testing of all soldiers returning from overseas service, and denounced any attempt by the British government to foist disease treatment onto Irish public boards.¹¹³

Also in March 1918, the British government issued Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) Regulation 40D, requiring the arrest of women who infected members of the armed forces with venereal disease.¹¹⁴ Around the same time, the government announced the opening of a military venereal disease hospital in Buttevant camp, north Cork, but it had to be abandoned owing to local protests.¹¹⁵ In Cork, residents believed that a new V.D. hospital was to be opened on Spike Island to treat British servicemen. It is unknown if the government intended to treat infected soldiers there, or whether the rumours stemmed from fears raised by the Local Government Board scheme and the introduction of Regulation 40D. It is clear that civic leaders assumed that such a clinic was to be opened.

On 15 March 1918, Bishop Cohalan called a special conference of city priests, which produced the following resolutions.

1. That we again call attention to the terrible evil of young girls going to Queenstown for the purposes of vice. We most earnestly remind parents of the duty incumbent on them of exercising a close vigilance over their daughters. We appeal to our young girls to remember and esteem the fair fame of Irish womanhood for purity; and we warn them of the terrible danger which they are running of contracting a loathsome disease by indulging in sexual vice.
2. It being rumoured that the Government contemplates the establishment of a hospital for syphilis on Spike Island, in this diocese, we most strongly protest against the establishment of such a hospital in our midst. The rare local cases of the disease which occur must be treated somewhere. Ireland has got practically nothing of the millions spent on the war, and it is nothing short of an outrage to establish in our midst a hospital for treating English and other patients afflicted with this loathsome and most dangerous disease of syphilis, caused by sexual vice.¹¹⁶

The next day, the Queenstown Urban District Council passed a motion that opposed the opening of any V.D. clinics in Cork, applauded the bishop's warning

¹¹⁰ Cork Corporation Public Health Committee meeting minutes, 13 & 27 Nov. 1917, 8 Jan. 1918 (C.C.C.A., CP/C/CM/PH/A27); Cork Poor Law Guardians meeting minutes (P.L.G.), 17 Jan. 1918 (C.C.C.A.).

¹¹¹ Cork Corporation Public Health Committee meeting minutes, 15 Feb. 1918 (C.C.C.A., CP/C/CM/PH/A27); Cork P.L.G. meeting minutes, 21 Feb. 1918 (C.C.C.A.).

¹¹² Cork Corporation Public Health Committee meeting minutes, 12 Mar. 1918 (C.C.C.A., CP/C/CM/PH/A27); Cork P.L.G. meeting minutes, 6 Dec. 1917, 17 Jan. 1918, 18 July 1918 (C.C.C.A.). See also Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 187–91.

¹¹³ Ó hÓgartaigh, *Kathleen Lynn*, p. 39.

¹¹⁴ Levine, 'Walking the streets', pp 52–7; Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 192–3; Ferriter, *Occasions of sin*, pp 59–60.

¹¹⁵ *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, ciii, 1096–7 (25 Feb. 1918); civ, 783 (19 Mar. 1918).

¹¹⁶ *C.E.*, 15 Mar. 1918.

to women visitors, and protested 'against the disgraceful scenes of immorality' on public thoroughfares.¹¹⁷ The Cork Sanitary Authority likewise denounced the treatment of V.D. patients in Ireland.¹¹⁸ The Cork Poor Law guardians instructed the Cork workhouse to report the number of venereal disease cases treated, and whether those patients were quarantined. The guardians resolved:

That all foreigners suffering from the disease indicated be immediately deported to their own country. That as medical treatment should be undergone in the country where the disease had been contracted, that no afflicted person be allowed to enter the Port of Cork, with a view to preventing miniature leper colonies being set up on Irish soil.¹¹⁹

Within days, Cork residents responded to clerical appeals 'to take the law into their own hands'.¹²⁰ As mentioned earlier, since the U.S. Navy put Cork city out of bounds in September, a 'trainload' of Cork women embarked daily for Queenstown to meet American sailors.¹²¹ On 18 March 1918, hundreds of men, women, and boys descended on the Cork's Glanmire (now Kent) train station and attacked the 5 p.m. train departing for Queenstown. 'Many girls were roughly handled, assaulted, and their garments torn' reported the *Cork Examiner*, as the crowd pulled female passengers from the carriages.¹²² The mob targeted women travelling, 'for, as alleged, purposes of immorality', but because it was a bank holiday they also attacked a number of 'quite innocent persons' (female day visitors returning to Queenstown).¹²³ After some minutes, police armed with rifles made a baton charge and chased the crowd from the platform. Regrouping outside the station, vigilantes showered the constables with stones and fired a few revolver shots.¹²⁴ Following hours of stone-throwing, the mob attempted to assault passengers boarding the 9:40 p.m. Queenstown train, but was scattered by police using 'their rifle butts to some effect'.¹²⁵ The following evening, a crowd attacked a woman in King Street. When she reported the incident to the nearby R.I.C. barracks, a 'mob' jeered and shouted insults, until dispersed by police baton charges.¹²⁶ Apparently to rein in the mob violence, the following week city clerics announced the formation of a new vigilance committee, 'under the guidance of the priests'.¹²⁷ Church officials 'requested that the matter be now left to the Vigilance Organisation, and that persons willing to aid by advice or information, or other active cooperation, will speak to the priest of their district'. This seemed to end the trouble in Cork.

John O'Callaghan has described a similar series of street clashes in Limerick city stemming from a venereal disease moral panic during the same period of February and March 1918.¹²⁸ Limerick anti-prostitution agitators targeted British

¹¹⁷ *C.C.*, 21 Mar. 1918.

¹¹⁸ *C.C.*, 19 Apr. 1918.

¹¹⁹ Cork P.L.G. meeting minutes, 21 Mar. 1918 (C.C.C.A.).

¹²⁰ C.I. report for Mar. 1918 (T.N.A., CO 904/105).

¹²¹ Sims, *Victory at sea*, p. 72.

¹²² *C.E.*, 19 Mar. 1918.

¹²³ *C.C.*, 19 Mar. 1918.

¹²⁴ C.I. report for Mar. 1918 (T.N.A., CO 904/105).

¹²⁵ *C.C.*, 19 Mar. 1918.

¹²⁶ *C.C.*, 20 Mar. 1918.

¹²⁷ *C.E.*, 26 Mar. 1918.

¹²⁸ John O'Callaghan, *Revolutionary Limerick: the republican campaign for independence in Limerick, 1913–1921* (Dublin, 2010), pp 73–4.

soldiers, as indicated by the title of the short-lived underground newspaper, *Soldier Hunter*. Its editors vowed to use physical force to protect Limerick women from moral contamination, in the name of ‘social hygiene’. Street fights between residents and soldiers (members of the Welch Fusiliers) resulted in the latter’s confinement to barracks for three days. The parallels with Cork even include a local rumour of a foreign serviceman drugging a local girl. However, beyond subtle distinctions between the two rounds of street clashes, there was one additional and significant difference in Cork. The Cork vigilantes ignored British soldiers from the sizeable city garrison, even though these non-Irish troops were ‘outsiders’. Here again, varied local environments produced different responses to similar social pressures.

V

Within days of the Glanmire station riot, events at Westminster overshadowed concerns about venereal disease. Conscription in Ireland quickly dominated political thought in Cork. During the remainder of the war, there were no further mentions of a vigilance organisation or additional clashes between Cork citizens and American sailors. An epilogue occurred in July 1918, when a local priest surreptitiously landed by row-boat onto a beach below the notorious Carrigrennan Woods. During his stealth inspection of the Woods, Canon Thomas Barrett of Passage West stumbled upon three American sailors and three women engaged in ‘a revolting act’.¹²⁹ Reacting to the canon’s report, the Cork Harbour Commission closed Carrigrennan Woods despite its popularity as a picnic spot with the city’s working classes. Redmondite harbour commissioner, J. J. Horgan, proclaimed, ‘If they only succeeded in keeping young girls and young boys out of the place and preventing them from seeing such conduct, they would be doing good work (hear, hear)’.¹³⁰

As the war drew to a close, lingering anti-American sentiment faded in Cork. Separatists looked forward to the Paris peace conference, with expectations raised by President Woodrow Wilson’s promises of self-determination for small nations. Republicans now focused on winning American support for the Irish independence claim. On 4 July 1918, large crowds attended an elaborate American independence day celebration at Cork Harbour, while the city’s public buildings flew the stars and stripes.¹³¹ Two months later, the Cork Corporation changed the name of Great George’s Street to Washington Street, to honour America’s first president.¹³² Some weeks afterwards, the Corporation awarded President Wilson the freedom of the city, to be collected on his way to Paris (he declined).¹³³ Local unionists gleefully used the anti-sailor disturbances to undermine Cork’s opportunistic pro-American tack. Letters to the *Cork Constitution* unfavourably compared the city’s welcome for President Wilson

¹²⁹ See the secretary’s and caretaker’s reports, C.H.C.M.M., 10 July 1918 (P.C.A.). ‘Revolting acts’ comes from the 17 July 1918 meeting.

¹³⁰ C.H.C.M.M., 17 July 1918 (P.C.A.).

¹³¹ *C.E.*, 5 July 1918.

¹³² Cork Corporation meeting minutes, 27 Sept. 1918 (C.C.C.A., CP/C/M/12).

¹³³ Cork Corporation meeting minutes, 20 Dec. 1918, and 10 Jan. 1919 (C.C.C.A., CP/C/M/12).

with its treatment of his navy,¹³⁴ and suggested erecting a statue representing the Allied nations, with Ireland behind them, holding a dagger in one hand and German gold in the other.¹³⁵

Though largely unreported during the war, the Cork disturbances gained international attention in 1920 when Admiral William Sims published his Pulitzer prize-winning memoir, *The victory at sea*. Sims had emerged as a popular American hero of the First World War, and his book achieved commercial and critical success.¹³⁶ The memoir also reinforced the admiral's reputation as an anglophile with a penchant for controversy. In it, Sims described mob assaults on his sailors in 'that dangerous city' of Cork, and general Irish hostility to the American naval presence. He further claimed Irish Republicans had passed shipping intelligence to Germany, prolonging the war, assisting German spies, and costing American lives.¹³⁷

Sims's timely book was released while Éamon de Valera and Sinn Féin toured the United States to secure recognition of the Irish Republic. De Valera himself answered Sims via a press release:

President Eamon de Valera has stated plainly that the attacks at Cork on American sailors were in part the result of a determination of the Irish manhood to protect Irish women. President de Valera went further and said that with the same situation confronting them today the men of Cork would inflict the same punishment as before.¹³⁸

The iconoclastic Admiral Sims was then in a dispute with the U.S. secretary of the navy, Josephus Daniels, over shortcomings in the American preparations for the First World War.¹³⁹ In this context, Sims continued to use the Cork disturbances to denounce attempts by 'hybrid Americans' (i.e. Irish-Americans) to 'stir up hatred against our allies in the war'. In Boston, Sims denounced 'the domination of the country by "hyphenated" interests', and blamed Irish Republicans for putting 'a great many of your sons at the bottom of the sea'.¹⁴⁰ Speaking to the English-Speaking Union in London in June 1921, Sims called for an Anglo-American partnership to 'run this round globe' and again claimed Cork Republicans had 'the blood of English and American boys on their hands'. More provocatively, he also characterised Sinn Féin's Irish-American supporters as 'asses', who were 'making war on America'.¹⁴¹ The comments aroused a furore in the United States, offering Daniels an opportunity to order Sims's recall to Washington D.C. However, a strong public defence of Sims allowed the admiral to escape with a written reprimand.¹⁴² Thus closed this strange episode in Irish-American relations.

¹³⁴ Letters from 'Doughboy' and 'Curious', *C.C.*, 24 Dec. 1918.

¹³⁵ *C.C.*, 7 Nov. 1918.

¹³⁶ Morison, *Admiral Sims*, pp 276–84.

¹³⁷ Sims, *Victory at sea*, pp 69–72.

¹³⁸ *New York Times*, 3 & 17 Nov. 1919.

¹³⁹ 'Sims–Daniels controversy' (Hoover Institute, George Barr Baker papers, newspaper clipping collection, Box 13); Sims draft statements and assorted preparation material in connection with his testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee of Investigation into the Naval Conduct of the War, c.1919–1920 (Hoover Institute, Tracy B. Kittridge Papers, Box 11).

¹⁴⁰ *New York Times*, 16, 26 Jan. 1921. See also Alan Ward, *Ireland and Anglo–American relations, 1899–1921* (London, 1969), pp 246–7.

¹⁴¹ Morison, *Admiral Sims*, p. 482; *New York Times*, 23 June 1921. See also the US Navy file on the episode (S.N.G.C., RG 80, Box 2493, 28,478–210).

¹⁴² Morison, *Admiral Sims*, pp 482–6; *New York Times*, 11, 22, 23 June 1921.

VI

The 1917–18 anti-sailor disturbances in Cork appear to have been driven by Catholic indignation at outspoken advances on young women, and a ‘moral panic’ following a visible and potentially unhealthy upsurge in prostitution. The situation was further complicated by tensions between gender, class, and sexual boundaries. In other cities at other times, similar reactions have greeted sudden influxes of outsiders, including foreign servicemen.¹⁴³ However, many Cork vigilantes also expressed anti-government and anti-war sentiments, and eagerly attacked police when given the opportunity. Considering the historic ties between Ireland and the United States, the enmity shown these American visitors would appear abnormal. But these were neither normal times nor normal visitors. The American sailors were uniformed combatants in a war that had become unpopular in Ireland. They arrived at a time of rising political instability, when state power was being challenged by separatists on the streets of Cork. When mixed with Irish cultural norms, these political and social ingredients produced an explosive reaction.

In the weeks following the November 1918 Armistice, the American sailors recovered from earlier public hostility. The naval ban on Cork seems to have been informally relaxed; during Sinn Féin’s general election triumph in December 1918, American sailors reportedly attended ‘every S.F. meeting and concert’.¹⁴⁴ On 31 March 1919, the last American blue-jackets in Cork Harbour returned to the United States via Dublin.¹⁴⁵ Hundreds of Queenstown residents bid farewell to the sailors’ troop train, which was decorated in red, white and blue bunting and a large banner reading, ‘Au Revoir, Erin. Bound for the U.S.A.’. To avoid offending the British government, U.S Navy authorities reportedly prohibited their men from carrying banned Irish tricolours at the station. However, as the train pulled away, sailors in the final car unveiled a giant tricolour, which they waved from their window to the crowd’s delight. The *Cork Examiner* reported that these last American sailors left County Cork ‘to the accompaniment of tumultuous cheering’.¹⁴⁶

JOHN BORGONOVO

School of History, University College Cork

¹⁴³ For a fascinating discussion of similar tensions in Northern Ireland see Leane McCormick, ‘“One Yank and they’re off”: interactions between US troops and Northern Irish women, 1942–1945’ in *Journal of the history of sexuality*, xv, no. 2 (May 2006), pp 228–57.

¹⁴⁴ M. O’Leary to Con O’Donovan, 8 Jan. 1919, ‘First and Second Report on the Correspondence of 97 Irish Internees’, Postal Censorship Reports (T.N.A., CO 904/164). See also a report of a Sinn Féin election meeting, *C.C.*, 23 Nov. 1918.

¹⁴⁵ *C.E.*, 1, 3 Apr. 1919.

¹⁴⁶ *C.E.*, 3 Apr. 1919.