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# Just Warfare, or Genocide?: Oliver Cromwell and the Siege of Drogheda

Lukas A. Dregne

“This is a righteous judgment of god upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood....”

-Cromwell 1649

# Intro

- Cromwellian land settlement: land confiscation against participants and bystanders in the Irish Rebellion of 1641.
- Rebellion a result of the resentment felt by Catholic Irish regarding loss of land and threats to religion.
- The way he is remembered has changed significantly.
- Originally depicted as dark and deceitful.
- Later rehabilitated by the Victorians.



# Cromwell's Siege of Drogheda

- Began August 1649
- Fleet of over 130 ships, large artillery, full treasury, well disciplined regiments.
- Three objectives:
- Eliminate threat of military support for Charles II.
- Carry through confiscation of land, repay debts of English Nation.
- Improve and reform Irish Institutions.



# Drogheda meets the New Model Army

- Drogheda was a well-fortified gateway to Ulster, near Dublin.
- New Model Army- strict discipline, efficiency, siege making capacity.
- Extremely religious.
- Marked into battle singing hymns and psalms.
- Perceived themselves as engaging upon a holy war.



# Cromwell's motives

- “a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hand in so much innocent blood” – Oliver Cromwell
- A reference to the rebellion in 1641.
- However, Drogheda had never been a confederate town.
- Cromwell felt contempt toward the Irish.
- Siege met to “prevent the effusion of blood for the future.”



# Drogheda's demise

- Drogheda's walls twenty feet high and six feet thick.
- Siege making capacity critical; created two breaches.
- 3,000 Royalist troops killed, also all Catholic Clergy identified.
- St. Peter's Church set alight with 80 inside.
- No apparent general massacre of civilians.





# New Model Army unleashed

- Most discipline, organized, religious – not the most enlightened.
- Cromwell forbid his soldiers ‘to spare any that were in arms in the Town.’
- Remains his most irresponsible and treacherous act of all.

# Profound Impact

- Around 3,500 killed at Drogheda.
- Terror projected mostly toward enemy combatants.
- Fighting gruesome for three reasons:
  - First, antipathy between the English and the Irish went back centuries.
  - Second, nature of military operation.
  - Third, the religion of the soldiers comprising the New Model Army.



# Conclusion

- Drogheda the impetus for the resulting demographic catastrophe.
- Cromwell's targets were not random.
- Disproportionate dint in the legacy of Cromwell, considering his time there.
- Religiosity of his troops more important than his own, also racial animosities and military realities important.

