



Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era

By Christian G. Samito



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In *Becoming American under Fire*, Christian G. Samito provides a rich account of how African American and Irish American soldiers influenced the modern vision of national citizenship that developed during the Civil War era. By bearing arms for the Union, African Americans and Irish Americans exhibited their loyalty to the United States and their capacity to act as citizens; they strengthened their American identity in the process. Members of both groups also helped to redefine the legal meaning and political practices of American citizenship.

For African American soldiers, proving manhood in combat was only one aspect to their quest for acceptance as citizens. As Samito reveals, by participating in courts-martial and protesting against unequal treatment, African Americans gained access to legal and political processes from which they had previously been excluded. The experience of African Americans in the military helped shape a postwar political movement that successfully called for rights and protections regardless of race.

For Irish Americans, soldiering in the Civil War was part of a larger affirmation of republican government and it forged a bond between their American citizenship and their Irish nationalism. The wartime experiences of Irish Americans helped bring about recognition of their full citizenship through naturalization and also caused the United States to pressure Britain to abandon its centuries-old policy of refusing to recognize the naturalization of British subjects abroad.

As Samito makes clear, the experiences of African Americans and Irish Americans differed substantially, and at times both groups even found themselves violently opposed, but they had in common that they aspired to full citizenship and inclusion in the American polity. Both communities were key participants in the fight to expand the definition of citizenship that became enshrined in constitutional amendments and legislation that changed the nation.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Christian Samito's *Becoming American Under Fire* is a superb study of the expansion of citizenship during the Civil War era. He proves that through active defense of the Union, the Irish and African Americans in the North gained the skills and confidence to demand their place in the American social and political arenas. While the expansion of citizenship affected all Americans, few groups made such a dramatic transition from antebellum nativism and slavery to the legal changes that followed the war as did Irish Catholics and blacks. Because of this, they serve as an excellent lens through which to study this process." *HistoryNet*

"Samito argues that the United States underwent a 'crisis of citizenship' in the 1850s as local allegiances combined with rigid racism to produce a mélange of conflicting definitions of who was and was not an 'American.' . . . Thoroughly researched and elegantly written, this important work will be profitably read by students of nationalism and the Civil War era. Highly recommended." *Choice*

"In this well-crafted, thoughtfully prepared book, Samito does a nice job of blending the Civil War experiences of African Americans and Irish Americans to draw his conclusions and to explore what it means to be an American, not only in the nineteenth century but in the twenty-first century as well. Anyone interested in Civil War history, American political history, or the American experience in general would do well to take a look at this work." *Journal of American History*

"By focusing on the importance of citizenship, Samito offers an important addition to scholarship on the Civil War era. . . . This is an outstanding book. It offers a terrific bottom-up approach to citizenship debates in the Civil War era and demonstrates the powerful role played by Irish American and African American men in creating new forms of American citizenship and nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century. It would be extremely useful in any course on the Civil War." *Journal of the Civil War Era*

"One of the main positive and original assets of Samito's intelligently written and highly readable book is the fact that he combines the role and situation of Africamericans and Irish in relation to their being and becoming 'American'. . . . Samito's book adds significantly to our understanding of the Irish as well as the Africamerican experience of the Civil War, and should be on the required reading list whenever the issue of ethnicity is raised in connection with the Union side in the Civil War." *Wolfgang Hochbruck, Amerikastudien/American Studies* (2011)

"The Civil War ushered in the first constitutional definition of U.S. citizenship. In a thorough and systematic

study of this development, Christian G. Samito shows how African American and Irish American soldiers helped earn equal citizenship for their people by fighting for the Union. *Becoming American under Fire* is essential reading for an understanding of this important transformation in the American polity."--James M. McPherson, George Henry Davis 1886 Professor of American History, Emeritus, Princeton University, author of *Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief*

"Christian G. Samito's *Becoming American under Fire* is an important book that clarifies the debt that all Americans today owe to the ex-slaves and Irish immigrants who lived in the United States after the Civil War. Although at the time African Americans were unable to achieve real equality, and also Irish Americans were unsuccessful in liberating Ireland from British rule, in the process of struggling to achieve their goals both groups played major roles--sometimes even in cooperation with each other--in expanding the meanings and protections of citizenship for all Americans."--Kerby A. Miller, Curators Professor of History, University of Missouri, author of *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*

"Christian G. Samito's thoughtful examination reveals how African Americans' and Irish Americans' ideas and actions in wartime contributed to a notion of citizenship grounded in loyalty and consent, not race or place of birth. We have long known that the Civil War 'nationalized' American citizenship. Thanks to Samito, we now know much more about precisely how that happened and what it meant."--Chandra Manning, Georgetown University, author of *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*

"In this important book, Christian G. Samito explains how ex-slaves and Irish immigrants helped to create a new definition of American citizenship. Their experiences in military service, determination to vote, and fervent loyalty to the federal government changed Americans' hazy antebellum concept of citizenship as loyalty to a state into a clear set of rights and duties in a newly powerful nation. This dramatic change defined America in the late nineteenth century, and its repercussions echo today."--Heather Cox Richardson, University of Massachusetts Amherst, author of *West from Appomattox: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*

"Historians are increasingly recognizing the importance of citizenship as a concept, and Christian G. Samito wisely takes a bottom-up approach, recognizing the agency of those displaced groups agitating for inclusion. *Becoming American under Fire* is a very good book on an important and timely topic."--Christopher Waldrep, Jamie and Phyllis Pasker Professor of History, San Francisco State University, author of *Roots of Disorder and The Many Faces of Judge Lynch*

"*Becoming American under Fire* makes an important contribution to the history of American citizenship. Christian G. Samito demonstrates that the Civil War military service of Irish and African Americans led them to make demands for full inclusion and it created a moral indebtedness on the part of the native-born white population that made opposing those demands difficult. No other book illuminates this subject as well as this one does. No one else has related the progress of this development so well to the experience of the Civil War."--Lawrence F. Kohl, University of Alabama, author of *The Politics of Individualism*

From the Back Cover

"The Civil War ushered in the first constitutional definition of U.S. citizenship. In a thorough and systematic study of this development, Christian G. Samito shows how African American and Irish American soldiers helped earn equal citizenship for their people by fighting for the Union. *Becoming American under Fire* is essential reading for an understanding of this important transformation in the American polity."--James M. McPherson, George Henry Davis 1886 Professor of American History, Emeritus, Princeton University, author of *Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief*

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..... "In *Becoming American under Fire*, Christian G. Samito brings his legal and historical training effectively to bear on the complex struggles of Irish American and African American soldiers as they sought to craft and claim meaningful citizenship in the Civil War-era United States. Rich with detail, deeply researched, and carefully argued, this is an important contribution to the literature of the period."--Elizabeth D. Leonard, author of *Men of Color to Arms: Black Soldiers, Indian Wars, and the Quest for Equality*

..... "Christian G. Samito's new book offers a signal contribution to a crucial but understudied aspect of the Civil War--its effect on citizenship. By focusing on the aspirations of Irish and African Americans, Samito shows how the contingencies of war gave opportunities for people at all levels to revise this fundamental attribute. His narrative reveals how a new, more robust national citizenship eclipsed older versions built narrowly around state identity and racial attributes. Samito's story rightly emphasizes the dynamic nature of how Americans have defined and understood citizenship and, in the process, adds a

crucial historical dimension to contemporary debates over identity, citizenship, and politics."--Aaron Sheehan-Dean, University of North Florida, author of *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia*

About the Author

Christian G. Samito earned a law degree from Harvard Law School and a doctorate in American history from Boston College. He is the editor of *Commanding Boston's Irish Ninth: The Civil War Letters of Colonel Patrick R. Guiney, Ninth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry*; *"Fear Was Not in Him": The Civil War Letters of Major General Francis C. Barlow, U.S.A.*; and *Changes in Law and Society During the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Legal History Documentary Reader*. He edits a series about the legal history of the Civil War era, teaches at Boston College and Boston University School of Law, and practices law in Boston.

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The book untitled *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era* contain a lot of information on the item. The writer explains your ex idea with easy approach. The language is very straightforward all the people, so do not worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was written by famous author. The author brings you in the new age of literary works. You can easily read this book because you can please read on your smart phone, or product, so you can read the book within anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can open up their official web-site along with order it. Have a nice study.

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