



The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930 (Irish Studies)

Margaret Lynch-Brennan

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"Bridget" was the Irish immigrant service girl who worked in American homes from the second half of the nineteenth century into the early years of the twentieth. She is widely known as a pop culture cliché: the young girl who wreaks havoc in middle-class American homes. Now, in the first book-length treatment of the topic, Margaret Lynch-Brennan tells the real story of such Irish domestic servants, often in their own words, providing a richly detailed portrait of their lives and experiences. Many of the socially marginalized Irish immigrant women of this era made their living in domestic service. In contrast to immigrant men, who might have lived in a community with their fellow Irish, these women lived and worked in close contact with American families. Lynch-Brennan reveals the essential role this unique relationship played in shaping the place of the Irish in America today. Such women were instrumental in making the Irish presence more acceptable to earlier established American groups. At the same time, it was through the experience of domestic service that many Irish were acculturated, as these women absorbed the middle-class values of their patrons and passed them on to their own children. Drawing on personal correspondence and other primary sources, Lynch-Brennan gives voice to these young Irish women and celebrates their untold contribution to the ethnic history of the United States. In addition, recognizing the interest of scholars in contemporary domestic services, she devotes one chapter to comparing "Bridget's" experience to that of other ethnic women over time in domestic service in America.

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