

# THE DISPATCH

The Civil War Round Table of New York, Inc.

Volume 68, No. 8

628th Meeting

March 2019



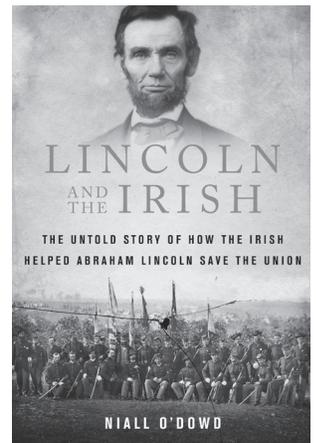
- Guest:  
Niall O'Dowd  
*The Untold Story of How The Irish Helped Abraham Lincoln Save The Union*
- Cost:  
**Members: \$50**  
**Non-Members: \$60**
- Date:  
**Monday,**  
**March 11<sup>th</sup>**
- Place:  
**The Three West Club,**  
**3 West 51st Street**
- Time:  
**Dinner at 6:00 pm,**  
**Doors open 5:30 pm,**  
**Cash Bar 5:30 – 7 pm**

*You must call 718-341-9811 by March 4<sup>th</sup> if you plan to attend the March meeting.*

*We need to know how many people to order food for.*

## Niall O'Dowd The Untold Story of How The Irish Helped Abraham Lincoln Save The Union

Our March guest is an Irish American journalist and author living in the United States. He was involved in the negotiations leading to the Irish Good Friday Peace Agreement and is the founder of *Irish Voice* newspaper and *Irish America* magazine in New York City, as well as overseeing *Home and Away* newspaper. He is also the founder of *Irish Central*, an Irish website which he launched in March 2009.



## The War Before the War

by Andrew Delbanco

REVIEW

How Fugitive Slaves Exposed the Idea of the 'United' States as a Lie

By Jennifer Szalai *NY Times* 11/22/18

Despite its title, Andrew Delbanco's "The War Before the War" isn't so much about confrontation as it is about the earnest, and often self-defeating, methods used to avoid it.

In other words, this is a story about compromises — and a riveting, unsettling one at that. The subtitle gives advance warning of how all that bargaining ended up: "Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul From the Revolution to the Civil War." Delbanco chose to focus his account on fugitive slaves because their plight, he says, "exposed the idea of the 'united' states as a lie."

From the beginning of the Republic the slave system was embedded in the Constitution, even if the framers declined to name it as such. Delbanco highlights the especially tortured syntax of the fugitive slave clause (Article 4, Section 2, Clause 3) to show how the founding document, "so filled with euphemism and circumlocution," was littered with bombshells.

The sentence-long clause starts out convoluted enough — "No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof" — before going on for another few dozen words of passive legalese to declare that slaves who escape even to free states will never be free.

Abraham Lincoln wanted to believe that the conspicuous absence of the words "slavery" and "slave" in the Constitution signaled a profound and principled discomfort; the framers, he insisted, treated slavery like a "cancer" that one "hides away" in order to eliminate it "at the end of a given time." ("No Property in Man," a recent book by the

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## 2019 • MEETING SCHEDULE • 2019

• **Monday April 8<sup>th</sup>** •

Fletcher Pratt Award winner  
Dr. Timothy Smith  
*The Real Horse Soldiers*

• **Monday May 13<sup>th</sup>** •

TBA

• **Monday June 10<sup>th</sup>** •

Dennis Fry  
*Antietam Shadows*

## President's Message

Fellow members of the CWRTNY, the officers and the board of Directors salute your continuous support of this organization. This is not flattery; it is a sincere commendation for what you do in maintaining our nation's history.

Thomas Francis Meagher, Tom Sweeny, James Shields, and Patrick Edward Connor all helped Grant and Sherman and Sheridan to victory. These were men who had fled religious persecution and turned to America's values of freedom of belief in response to the repression of their ancestors.

The Civil War Round Table of New York plays host to some of the most impressive historians in the saga of Irish Americans, including perhaps one of the best Civil War musicians in David Kincaid. This month will be no exception.

As we celebrate and study Irish participation on both sides, let us also celebrate that we live now in a country wherein people of all races, creeds, and religions are free to act on their beliefs, while still maintaining a stable society. It is a blessing to think that we may never again face wars between brothers and neighbors that cut as deeply as our Civil War.

*MICHAEL N. CONNORS*

## NEW RECRUITS

**Gordon Cooke** from NYC, a retired CEO

**Gail Hamilton** from Staten Island, a friend of Margaret Echanique



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During business hours.

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## March During the Civil War

### 1862

7–8 – Pea Ridge a/k/a Elkhorn Tavern. Sam Curtis vs. Earl Van Dorn et al and another victory for the men in blue.

8–9 – The Goliath *Merrimack* duked it out with the David *Monitor* at Hampton Roads. Although a draw it is a major, major, victory for the North. If the *Merrimack* had not been stopped it could have sailed up the Potomac River and shelled Washington with impunity.

### 1863

2 – Congress cleans house and gets the army in fighting shape as they dismiss from the service 33 army officers found guilty of court martial of various charges.

18 – In Paris, the House of Erlanger opened a loan of 3 million pounds to the Confederacy based on 7% bonds for 20 years. The commission was taken immediately. Of course.

### 1864

1–2 – Judson Kilpatrick and Ulric Dahlgren try to raid Richmond and fail; the son of the inventor of the Dahlgren gun is killed.

28 – Copperheads in Charleston, Illinois attack soldiers on furlough: 5 killed and more than 20 wounded in a severe outbreak of anti-war feeling.

### 1865

2 – At Waynesborough, Va., George Custer clobbers Jubal Early's once powerful force and Lee's Bad Old Man is mortified to see the greater part of his command being carried off as prisoners.

4 – With malice toward none; with charity to all. Lincoln's 2nd inaugural. Where did this man with little education learn to write like that?

*The items in this column are From Day by Day in the Civil War by E.B. and Barbara Long*

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historian Sean Wilentz, makes an analogous argument.) But by hiding it, they also protected it. The cancer metastasized. Not even a hundred years after its founding, the United States was embroiled in the Civil War.

So much has been written about antebellum America that little of the information in “The War Before the War” is new; the light it sheds, however, most definitely is. Delbanco, a professor of American studies at Columbia, excavates the past in ways that illuminate the present. Some of the questions that preoccupied Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries continue to hold an eerie and urgent resonance in our own. How to reconcile irreconcilable values? What distinguishes “prudence” from “cowardice”? Can incrementalism aggravate, rather than alleviate, injustice? When does the veneration of civility allow brutality to flourish?

Delbanco traces how the compromises of the Constitution, along with the long history of compromise in the century that followed, tried to paper over a violent reality, disguising a moral issue as a technical one. But the slaves who ran away repudiated that fantasy. They were persistent reminders of the truth.

As the author of a biography of Melville, among other books, Delbanco is a close reader of literature and primary documents, often to revealing effect. Hypocrisy can reside, like the devil, in the details. Delbanco shows how Thomas Jefferson, not long before proclaiming “all men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence, posted an advertisement in the Virginia Gazette offering a reward for an escaped slave of his named Sandy, whom Jefferson peevishly described as “artful and knavish” and “inclining to corpulence.” As Delbanco observes, “To read the irritable prose in Jefferson’s advertisement alongside the same writer’s soaring calls for liberty in the Declaration is, to put it mildly, a startling experience.”

The fugitive slave clause might have been enshrined in the Constitution, but it initially proved difficult to enforce. In the early days of the United States, the federal government was weak; the bigger the country became, the bigger and

more permeable became the boundary between North and South. Northern legislatures, for their part, passed “personal liberty” laws to make it harder for slaveholders to recover their runaways.

Southern apologists for slavery, who liked to talk about “happy slaves,” had to devise ever more labyrinthine theories to explain why such happy people were so determined to escape. One Louisiana physician coined the term “drapetomania,” from the Greek words for “runaway” and “madness,” to diagnose “a disease of the mind” that “induces the Negro to run away from service.” More common was the enraged accusation that deceitful Northerners colluded with “slave stealers” and inveigled slaves to flee.

Delbanco depicts a republic that kept facing the problem of white supremacy and kept electing to punt. Sometimes this involved outright haggling, as in the Missouri Compromise of 1820. But the subject of slavery was so incendiary that in 1836 the House of Representatives implemented a “gag rule,” whereby any antislavery petitions would be tabled automatically without debate.

The antebellum South was tantamount to a rich, expanding, authoritarian power — what the historian Sven Beckert has called “a kind of Saudi Arabia of the early 19th century.” And as much as Northerners wanted to cast slavery as a Southern sickness, the North had long benefited from the slave system too, supplying the capital and processing the raw materials extracted by slave labor into textiles and sugary treats. As Emerson wrote about such refined pleasures, “Nobody tasted blood in it.”

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 deepened the connections as well as the divisions between North and South, as the federal government assumed responsibility for recovering runaway slaves and demanded that the Northern states cooperate. The law denied habeas corpus to captives, rendering even free black people in the North vulnerable to slave catchers. Delbanco accepts that a string of

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precipitating events in the ensuing decade may have hastened the Civil War — the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision that denied citizenship rights to black people, John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry — but he argues that the Fugitive Slave Act “launched the final acceleration of sectional estrangement.”

“The War Before the War” makes a few pointed comparisons to our current moment, though Delbanco emphasizes that, by the truly bloody standards of antebellum lawmaking, which included the vicious beating of the abolitionist senator Charles Sumner on the Senate floor, our politics are a veritable “model of decorum.”

Still, as he lucidly shows, it was in the name of avoiding conflict that the nation was brought to the brink and into the breach. As early as 1827, the editors of *Freedom's Journal*, one of the country's first black newspapers, warned that all the deflecting and deferring could only sustain a terrible accommodation for so long. “National sins,” they wrote, “have always been followed by national calamities.”

**As a reminder, we need you to make reservations a week before the meeting - we must notify the 3 West Club at least 48 hours (business days only) before then and since we now meet on Mondays, there is no window if you call us the weekend before. Also, if you don't show up for the meeting after making a reservation and we have called in a certain number, we may have to pay for your dinner anyway. So from now on, we're going to charge the guest rate - \$60 - if you fail to make your reservation and we may ask you to pay for those no-show dinners. It is better for you to pay than the club should suffer the loss... Now we understand emergencies - illness, transportation problems, etc. We just ask that you let us know as soon as possible - that might allow us to fit in a late reservation. A little consideration would eliminate some of the guesswork we're required to make every month.**



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OF NEW YORK

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