A history of the Irish in America from the eighteenth century to the present, by one of the nations most eminent scholars of the immigrant experience.

Jay Dolan of the University of Notre Dame is one of Americas most acclaimed scholars of immigration and ethnic history. In The Irish Americans, he caps his decades of writing and teaching with a magisterial history of the Irish experience in the United States—the first general-reader’s account to be published since the 1960s.

Dolan draws on his own original research and much other recent other scholarship to weave a fresh and vivid narrative. He follows the Irish from their first arrival in the American colonies through the bleak days of the potato famine that brought millions of poor immigrants; the years of ethnic prejudice and No Irish Need Apply; the rise of Irish political power and the
heyday of Tammany politics; to the historic moment when John F. Kennedy was elected to the highest office in the land.

Dolan evokes the ghastly ships crowded with men and women fleeing the potato blight; the vibrant life of Catholic parishes in cities like New York and Chicago; and the world of machine politics, where ward bosses often held court in the local saloon. Rich in colorful detail, balanced in judgment, and the most comprehensive work of its kind yet published, The Irish Americans will become a must-have volume for any reader with an interest in the Irish-American heritage.

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Where this engaging and well written history really took off for me was the nineteenth century. As a little girl, I liked nothing better than climbing on to my grandmothers lap and listening to her tell stories of her childhood in the olden days. She was born in Manhattan in 1882, the fifth child of Irish immigrants. She told colorful stories about growing up in Hells Kitchen, discrimination, politics, wakes and weddings. Her stories were edited for a childs ears but later other family members fleshed out those stories with more, and sometimes painful, details. This book provides the historic perspective for those stories. I found it very compelling to read about places and people that were familiar to me since the cradle.

The chapters on the twentieth century provided the big picture regarding significant figures and events in my parents lives and my own. You dont know where youre going unless you know where youve been.

The Irish Americans is an ideal companion for people who want a better understanding of what their ancestors experienced here. It would also make a terrific gift for someone working on a genealogy because it provides a bit more information about what events shaped the lives of the people they are researching.

I found this book completely absorbing and highly recommend it to anyone interested in the history of the Irish and their children in America.

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