

Dr Margaret Brehony



Cuban-Irish Diasporas: Gender, Race, and Ethnic Whitening Strategies: A Digital Humanities Initiative

This project examines inter-related processes of Irish migration and white colonization strategies in the expanding slave society of nineteenth-century Cuba. The approach is multi-disciplinary, crossing history, social sciences, and digital humanities (DH). It will produce the first open-access digital archive on Irish settlement in the Hispanic Caribbean. Based at the Palacio Segundo Cabo, a cultural centre in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Old Havana, I will conduct research in the Cuban archives and curate a museum exhibition on Irish settlement in Cuba. In the return phase, I will be working with Professor Nuala Finnegan at the Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, University College Cork.

To explore this unfamiliar and compelling history of Irish immigrants in Cuba c. 1818-1850, the investigation is based on colonial records of the Council for White Population and other unexamined sources in the Cuban archives. By capturing the complexities of this Irish experience, the study will throw new light on colonial politics of gender and race in inter-ethnic relationships between Cuba's majority African diaspora and European settlers. Records of kinship, labour relations, and property will be examined to establish how Irish women and men participated in this putative "whitening" strategy in a region of frontier slavery in the Spanish colony. As the first examination of gender, race and Irish ethnicity in Cuba, the project will reproduce rare archival sources amassed during the research in an innovative open-access digital archive of cultural heritage, entitled 'Mapping the Cuban-Irish'. This historic approach to whiteness, class, and gender is also relevant to current migration and integration issues. A better understanding of past colonial legacies of gender and race in contemporary European discourse challenges us to address issues of social inclusion and cultural identity in global migration today.

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