

Fearghal McGarry. *The Rising. Ireland: Easter 1916.* Centenary Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 400 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-873234-1.



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Amid the numerous World War I centennial events this year, another, perhaps lesser-known centennial took place in Ireland. The 1916 Easter Rising was commemorated with ceremonies across the Republic of Ireland. These ceremonies memorialized the week-long rebellion in April 1916, which was an attempt by a group of Irishmen and women to forcibly extract Ireland from the British Empire, taking advantage of the chaos of the Great War. Yet the legacies of the rising are highly contested among Irish historians and in the past hundred years the events of Easter week have received varied treatment. Fearghal McGarry's *The Rising: Ireland: Easter 1916* places the rebellion in a more objective and inclusive light. Initially published in 2011 and republished this year with an updated preface for the centennial, McGarry's work on the rising conveys the events of the rebellion from the perspective of the participants rather than from later generations. While the bulk of the book focuses on the events of Easter week, the final chapter and the new preface shed light on the malleable legacy of the rising.

The initial publication of McGarry's work in 2011 warranted high praise from many, including noted Irish historians Alvin Jackson and J. J. Lee, and for good reason. The work does not seek to reinforce the traditionalist

narrative of the rising. Using the digitized documents of the Bureau of Military History, released in 2003 (gathered between 1947 and 1957, concerning the period of 1913 to 1921), McGarry provides an in-depth examination of the goals and hopes of the rising participants. Unlike many previous accounts of the rising, this book addresses the role of women in the rebellion and does not characterize British army soldiers sent to put down the rebellion as anti-Irish brutes. Where once this would have been viewed as anti-nationalist, the inclusion of other groups in the rising narrative provides a more complex and nuanced understanding of the rebellion. McGarry argues that this allows for a more flexible Irish identity. This is not so dissimilar from the relatively recent inclusion in Irish history of the Great War, an aspect of Irish history that had been largely ignored in histories of the Republic for much of the twentieth century.

The new preface for the 2016 centenary edition situates the legacy of the rising and McGarry's work in the context of the centennial events in Ireland. He astutely points out that commemorations, such as those that took place in Dublin in April, are more instructive about the generation doing the commemorating than about the event itself. Commemorating the rising, as McGarry notes in his final chapter, has been difficult

throughout the past hundred years in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The book illustrates the difficulty in commemorating the revolutionary spirit of 1916 for later generations, especially when many in those later generations believed the revolutionary agenda of 1916 had not been fulfilled. Commemorating a violent rebellion intended to free Ireland of the British Empire was additionally difficult given that Ireland was partitioned into two states, one of which remains within the United Kingdom. The violence of the Troubles in the 1960s and 1970s made commemorating the fiftieth anniversary in 1966 problematic in both Irish states and the ensuing violence in the 1980s did little to help incorporate the rising into either state. As he puts it, "A violent insurrection by militants who aimed to destroy British power in Ireland,

the Easter Rising was not intended to deepen understanding, promote mutual harmony, or heal the divisions of the past" (p. ix.). Thus the difficulty in commemorating the rising: how to commemorate this violent event in the context of the needs of later generations?

While adding much to the historiography of the rising, McGarry's book also points out the connection between national identity and commemorations. The rising, for so long a focal point of what it meant to be Irish, is not a fixed event. Rather, its legacy is changeable, contingent on the needs of the present. This is an excellent read for those looking to better understand this important event in Irish history or those interested in the commemoration of violent events.

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