

Was Oliver Cromwell the father of parliamentary government or a colonial tyrant?

Oliver Cromwell was the father of Parliamentary rule

1. He brought modern, revolutionary ideas of government to England by resisting the rule of the King and tried to find common ground at a time of division

Source 1

No matter how generous the terms or desperate his condition, the king refused to yield. While his opponents sought peace, he sought martyrdom. For years, Charles was offered accommodation and for just as long the war dragged on. Indeed, the historiographical consensus has never been stronger in portraying the reluctance of the regicides to let the axe fall. For some, they were a 'frighted junto' persuaded that the nation was in danger of renewed war from Irish royalists and European mercenaries. A deal with the king was the only certain way to ensure their security.² For others, the grandees and parliamentarian leaders were essentially reasonable men who shrank from the very idea of executing their monarch.³ Cromwell, especially, was willing to make any concession necessary to keep the king alive and at the head of an emasculated monarchy. It was not until his eleventh hour conversion that there could be a trial and that conversion could not take place until he had exhausted every possible avenue of peace—until Denbigh's mission failed.⁴ Even the parliamentarians who survived Pride's Purge and those appointed to the trial court shrank from the task for as long as they could.

Mark Kishlansky, Mission Impossible: Charles I, Oliver Cromwell and the Regicide, The English Historical Review, Volume CXXV, Issue 515, August 2010, pp. 844

<https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/reluctant-regicides/>

Source 2

Cromwell had long been memorialised in Britain as a ‘usurper’, but, given that the drafters of the constitution were crafting a republican experiment in moderate political governance, the danger of a despot betraying the cause held particular resonance. Yet Cromwell could elicit admiration as well, when viewed through the prism of liberty. John Adams wrote that ‘there was never a greater self-deceiver than Oliver Cromwell’, but he also paid indirect homage to the man when he visited Worcester, scene of Cromwell’s great victory, and pondered why ‘Englishmen so soon forget the ground where liberty was fought for.’ ‘Tell your neighbors and your children that this is holy ground, much holier than that on which your churches stand’, he continued. ‘All England should come in pilgrimage to this hill, once a year.’

Extract from an article titled “Cromwell in America”, by Sarah Covington, published in History Today Volume 72 Issue 9 September 2022

<https://www.historytoday.com/archive/history-matters/cromwell-america>

2. Cromwell restored order after Charles I had tried to establish absolute authority

Source 3

Reexamining Cromwell's reports from 1643 also reveals how the new soldier quickly and correctly identified the importance of Newark in Nottinghamshire. This royalist stronghold was strategically located on the major thoroughfares of the Great North Road and Fosse Way, and also dominated the River Trent. For several months in the spring and summer of 1643, Cromwell tried to coordinate local forces to capture the town.

Cromwell realised that as well as disrupting communications between parliament in Westminster and the northern parliamentarians, Newark threatened the parliamentarians' hold on East Anglia, imperilling access to vast resources of food, money and manpower. So convinced was he of his "vision" that he ruthlessly exposed in his reports to, and speeches within parliament the superior officers who failed to appreciate his strategy. Leading parliamentarians Lord Grey of Wark, Lord Grey of Groby, Lord Willoughby of Parham and the Earl of Manchester were all castigated and replaced for their "failure" to see things as Cromwell did.

Extract from an article titled "Why Oliver Cromwell may have been Britain's greatest ever general – new analysis of battle reports", by Martyn Bennett, Professor of Early Modern History, Nottingham Trent University. Published on academic website *The Conversation* published on 20 June 2017

<https://theconversation.com/why-oliver-cromwell-may-have-been-britains-greatest-ever-general-new-analysis-of-battle-reports-79301>

Source 4



Left: Image from James Cranford's woodcut print *The Teares of Ireland* (1642), which illustrated witness statements about the 1641 Rebellion. The caption states "English Protestantes strip[p]ed naked and turned into the mountaines in the frost & snowe, whereof many hundreds are perished to death & many liynge [lying] dead in ditches & Sauages [savages] upbraided them saynge now are ye wilde Irisch [Irish] as well as wee."

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/07/irish-rebellion-archive-online>

3. He brought MPs from Ireland and Scotland to parliament for the first time and sought consensus through Parliamentary rule

Source 5

While with a strong and yet a gentle hand,
You bridle faction, and our hearts command,
Protect us from ourselves, and from the foe,
Make us unite, and make us conquer too;

Your drooping country, torn with civil hate,
Restored by you, is made a glorious state;
The seat of empire, where the Irish come,
And the unwilling Scotch, to fetch their doom.

A race unconquered, by their clime made bold,
The Caledonians, armed with want and cold,
Have, by a fate indulgent to your fame,
Been from all ages kept for you to tame.

They, that henceforth must be content to know
No warmer region, than their hills of snow,
May blame the sun, but must extol your grace,
Which in our senate has allowed them place.

Preferred by conquest, happily o'erthrown,
Falling they rise, to be with us made one;
So kind dictators made, when they came home,
Their vanquished foes free citizens of Rome.

Like favour find the Irish, with like fate,
Advanced to be a portion of our state;
While by your valour and your courteous mind,
Nations, divided by the sea, are joined

Extract from 'A Panegyric to my Lord Protector', a poem by Edmund Waller, a former Royalist, praising Cromwell's leadership, printed in 1655

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Panegyric_to_my_Lord_Protector

Source 6

Presbiterians, Independents, all had here the same spirit of faith and prayer ... they agree here, know no names of difference; pittty it is, it should be otherwise any where: All that beleeve have the reall unity which is most glorious, because inward and spirituall in the body and to the head

Cromwell's letter to parliament following the royalist surrender of Bristol in September 1645. He praised the unity of the godly in the city as an example to the nation.

<https://www.olivercromwell.org/wordpress/the-public-profession-of-the-nation-religious-liberty-and-the-english-church-under-oliver-cromwell/>

4. He believed in religious liberty and was a moderate in a time of religious extremes

Source 7

The Guardian

The Observer
History books

Has history got it wrong about Oliver Cromwell's persecution of Catholics?

Hundreds of lost documents have been unearthed revealing the Puritan leader's radical views on religious freedom



Donna Ferguson

Sun 31 Jul 2022 11.00
BST





Oliver Cromwell at the Battle Of Marston Moor in 1644, as illustrated by John J Crew.
Photograph: Print Collector/Getty Images

Oliver Cromwell was far more committed to religious freedom and equality than historians previously thought, according to new research. The findings suggest he wanted Jews to be allowed to practise openly in England and Irish Catholics to have the right to worship freely, as long as it was in private.

A key piece of evidence historians have previously relied upon to demonstrate that Cromwell despised Catholics is a declaration he made denouncing the Irish Catholic clergy, printed in London in 1650. Morrill and his team unearthed two earlier versions of this declaration, printed only in Ireland, with a different title.

Essex University professor John Walter, an expert on early modern history, said the “exciting” documents Morrill has unearthed suggest Cromwell was actually an extraordinarily tolerant leader by the standards of the time: “Morrill is absolutely right to pose this representation of Cromwell as a complex and godly man who - not least for political reasons - wants to readmit Jews to England and produce stability in Ireland, by offering religious freedom to Catholics,” he said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/jul/31/has-history-got-it-wrong-about-oliver-cromwells-persecution-of-catholics>

Source 8

“ I desire from my heart, — I have prayed for it, — I have waited for the day to see union and right understanding between the godly people, — Scots, English, Jews, Gentiles, Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, and all.”

Extract from a letter from Cromwell to Colonel Robert Hammond, 6 November 1648

<http://www.olivercromwell.org/wordpress/articles/oliver-cromwell-and-the-people-of-god/>

5. Cromwell and the Parliamentarians created the first, modern professional army and used it to promote parliamentary governance

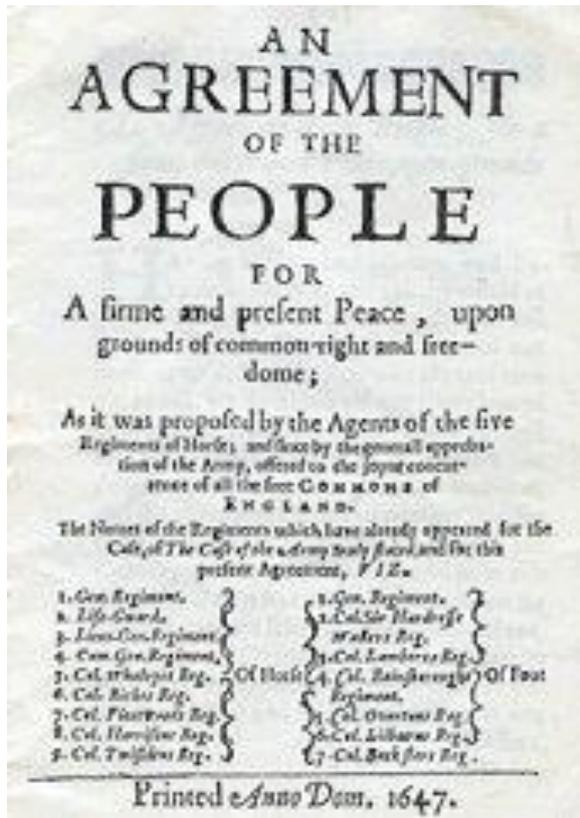
Source 9



Engraving from 1658. It depicts Cromwell in military uniform between two pillars – symbolising his spiritual and his temporal (worldly, political, military) might.

<http://vll-minos.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/uk/cromwell/images/imagesofcromwell.html>

Source 10



1. That matters of religion and the ways of God's worship are not at all entrusted by us to any human power, because therein we cannot remit or exceed a tittle of what our consciences dictate to be the mind of God without wilful sin: nevertheless the public way of instructing the nation (so it be not compulsive) is referred to their discretion.

2. That the matter of impressing and constraining any of us to serve in the wars is against our freedom; and therefore we do not allow it in our Representatives; the rather, because money (the sinews of war), being always at their disposal, they can never want numbers of men apt enough to engage in any just cause.

3. That after the dissolution of this present Parliament, no person be at any time questioned for anything said or done in reference to the late public differences, otherwise than in execution of the judgments of the present Representatives or House of Commons.

4. That in all laws made or to be made every person may be bound alike, and that no tenure, estate, charter, degree, birth, or place do confer any exemption from the ordinary course of legal proceedings whereunto others are subjected.

5. That as the laws ought to be equal, so they must be good, and not evidently destructive to the safety and well-being of the people.

Extract from 'An Agreement of the People', published by the General Council of the New Model Army in 1647

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Agreement_of_the_People

Oliver Cromwell was a Colonial Tyrant

1. Cromwell was the bloodiest of all the English rulers of Ireland

Source 1

Since Cromwell pushed us westward to live our lowly lives
Some of us have deemed to fight from Tipperary mountains high
Noble men with wills of iron who are not afraid to die
And who'll fight with Gaelic honor held on high

A curse upon you Oliver Cromwell, you who raped our Motherland
I hope you're rotting down in hell for the horrors that you sent
To our misfortunate forefathers whom you robbed of their birthright
"To hell or Connaught" may you burn in hell tonight

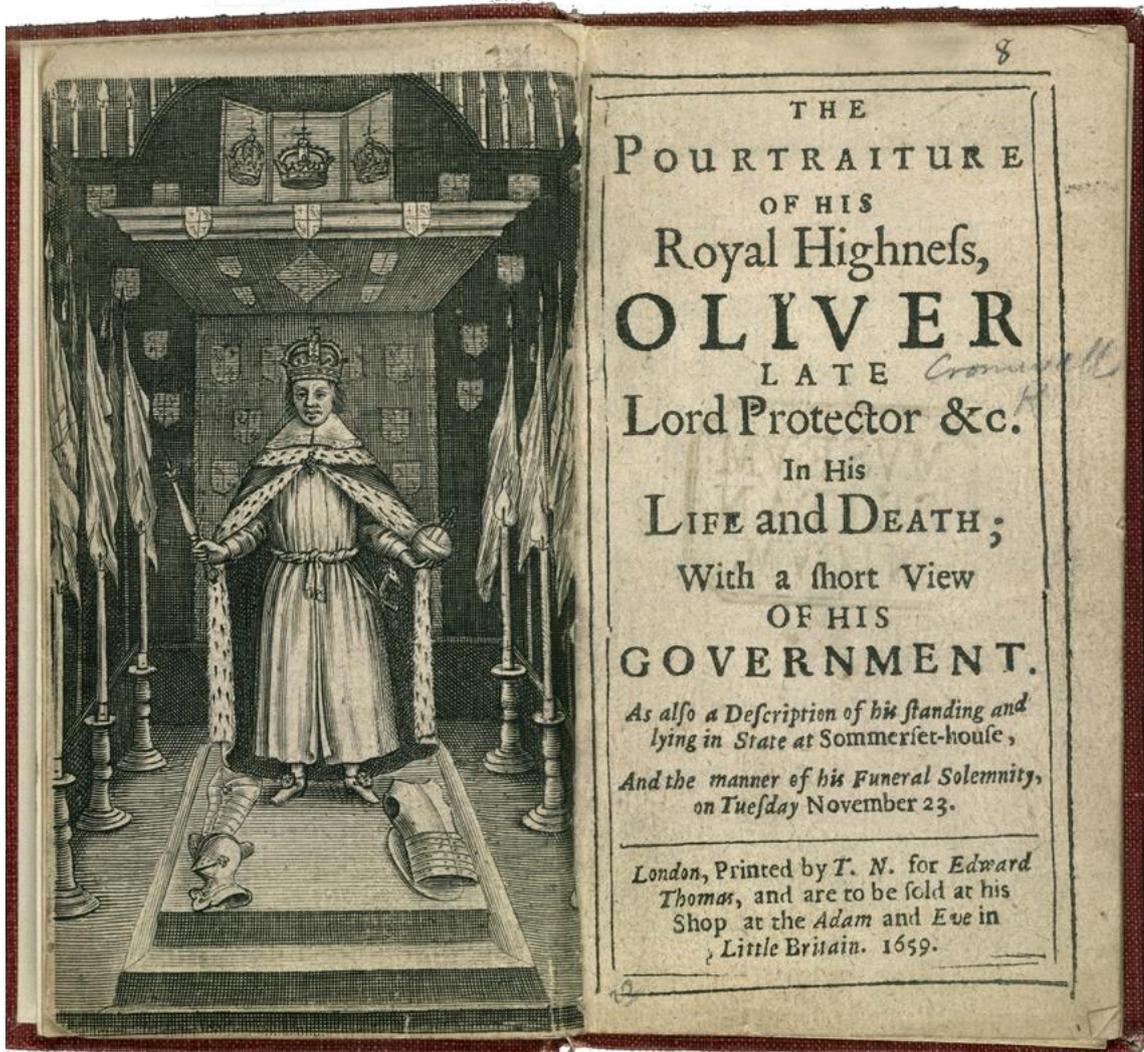
Of one such man I'd like to speak a rapparee by name and deed
His family dispossessed and slaughtered they put a price upon his head
His name is known in song and story and his deeds are legends still
And murdered for blood money was young Ned of the hill

And you've robbed our homes and fortunes, even drove us from the land
You tried to break our spirit but you'll never understand
The love of dear old Ireland that will forge an iron will
As long as there are gallant men like young Ned of the hill

Young Ned of the Hill by The Pogues, an adaptation of an older Irish folk song "Éamonn an Chnoic" released in 1989.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-y2ox2HPnc>

Source 2



Cromwell depicted as a king on the opening page of the book "The Pourtraiture of His Royal Highness, Oliver late Lord Protector &c. in his Life and Death; with a short view of his government.", published in 1659.

<https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/revolutionary-state-royal-palaces-cromwells-england>

2. He committed unprecedented war crimes in Ireland

Source 3

I forbade them to spare any that were in Arms in the Town, and I think that night they put to the sword about two thousand men, divers of the Officers and Soldiers being fled over the Bridge into the other part of the Town, where about One hundred of them possessed St. Peters Church Steeple, some the West Gate, and others, a round strong Tower next the Gate, called St. Sundays: These being summoned to yield to mercy, refused; whereupon I ordered the Steeple of St. Peters Church to be fired, where one of them was heard to say in the midst of the flames, *God damn me, God confound me, I burn, I burn;* the next day the other two Towers were summoned, in one of which was about six or seven score, but they refused to yield themselves, and we knowing that hunger must compel them, set onely good Guards to secure them from running away, until their stomachs were come down: from one of the said Towers, notwithstanding their condition, they killed and wounded some of our men; when they submitted, their Officers were knockt on the head, and every tenth man of the Soldiers killed, and the rest Shipped for the *Barbadoes*; the Soldiers in the other Town were all spared, as to their
lives

Extract from Cromwell's letter to Parliament describing the Siege of Drogheda, 1649

Further reading: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Siege-of-Drogheda>

Source 4

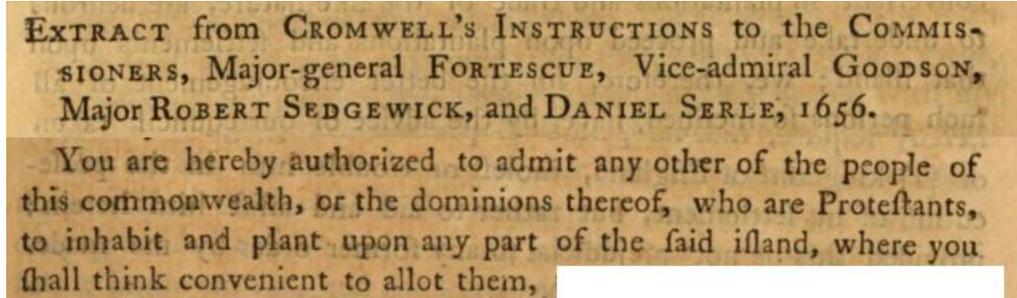


An illustration by Henry Doyle of the massacre at Drogheda, 1649, from 'An Illustrated History of Ireland from AD 400 to 1800', by Mary Frances Cusack, published in 1868

<https://www.theirishstory.com/2011/09/11/today-in-irish-history-11-september-1649-cromwell-storms-drogheda/#.ZAhtb3bMI2w>

3. He was an imperialist - he sought to strengthen England's colonial rule of Ireland, and expanded the early English empire to Jamaica

Source 5



EXTRACT FROM CROMWELL'S INSTRUCTIONS TO THE COMMISSIONERS, Major-general FORTESCUE, Vice-admiral GOODSON, Major ROBERT SEDGEWICK, and DANIEL SERLE, 1656.

You are hereby authorized to admit any other of the people of this commonwealth, or the dominions thereof, who are Protestants, to inhabit and plant upon any part of the said island, where you shall think convenient to allot them,

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101064256074&view=1up&seq=248&q1=cromwell>

Source 6

Jamaica was larger than any of the other Caribbean islands previously settled, and the task facing Cromwell and Parliament was how to populate it...The records of the Council of State in England show that they "voted that one thousand girls and as many young men should be lifted out of Ireland, and sent over, to assist in peopling the colony" ... Henry Cromwell's reply...dated 11 September 1655...

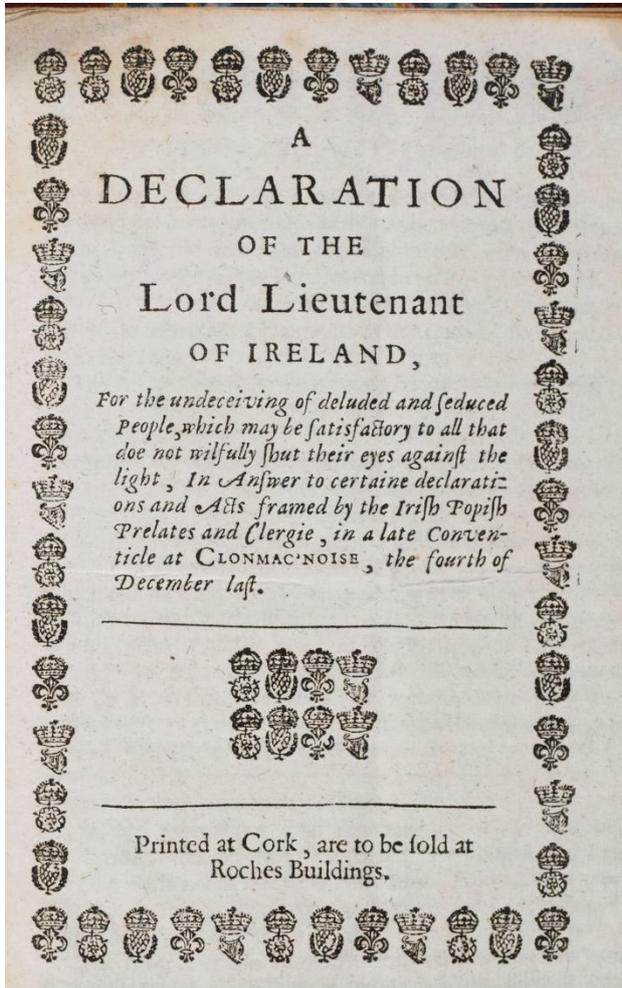
Sir; I received yours of the 4th instant, and give you many thanks for your relation of Jamaica... I have endeavoured to make what improvement I could in the short time allotted me touching the furnishing you with a recruite of men, and a supply of young Irish girls... Concerning the younge women although we must use force in takinge them up, yet it beinge so much for their owne goode, and likely to be of soe great advantage to the publique, it is not in the least doubted, that you may have such number of them as you shall thinke fitt to make use uppon this account.

Extract from O'Callaghan Sean. 2000. *To Hell or Barbados the Ethnic Cleansing of Ireland*. pp. 147-9

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/arid-30934805.html>

4. He was a religious extremist and hated Catholicism

Source 7



A DECLARATION OF THE Lord Lieutenant OF IRELAND.

For the undeceiving of deluded and seduced People, which may be satisfactory to all that do not wilfully shut their eyes against the light. In Answer to certaine late Declarations and Acts framed by the Irish Popish Prelates and Clergie in a Conventicle at Clonmae-Noise.

You are a part of Antichrist, whose Kingdome the Scripture so expresly speakes should be layed in blood, yea in the blood of the Saints; you have shed great store of it already; And ere it be long you must all of you have blood to drinke; even the dreggs of the cup of the fury and wrath of God, which will be powred out unto you.

In the next place you state the interest of his Majesty as you say; And this you hope will draw some English and Scots to your partie. But what Majestie is it you meane? Is it France or Spaine or Scotland? speake plainly!

Extract from Cromwell's public message to the Catholic bishops of Ireland, 'A Declaration of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland', published in Cork in 1650.

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A87205.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

Source 8

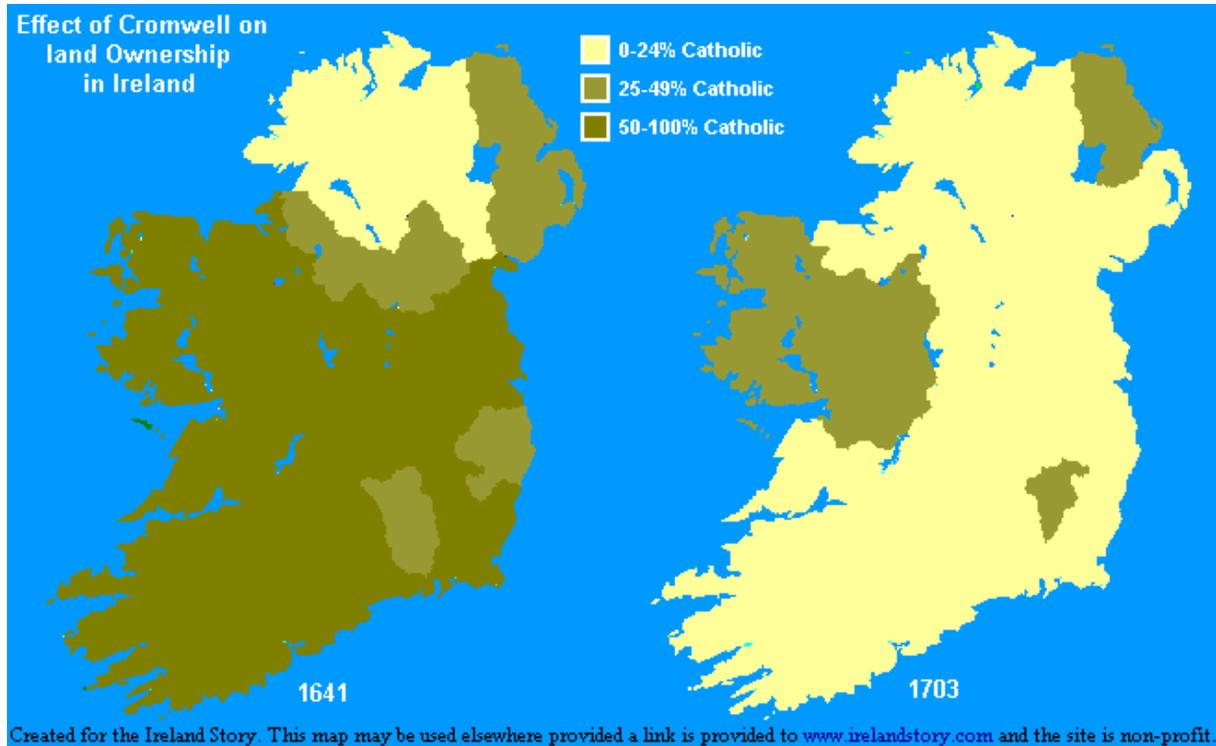


A modern mural in Belfast depicting Oliver Cromwell and a quote by him about Catholicism in Ireland. (Radharc Images / Alamy Stock Photo)

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/column/53313/oliver-cromwell-reviled-in-the-annals-of-irish-history>

5. He committed ethnic cleansing in Ireland

Source 9



Map showing the effect of changes made by Cromwell to land ownership in Ireland

<https://downsurvey.tchpc.tcd.ie/history.html>

Source 10

‘The town is so now in your power, that of the former inhabitants, I believe scarce one in 20 can challenge any property in their houses. Most of them are run away, and many of them [i.e. of the inhabitants] were killed in the service. And it may be wished that an honest people would come and plant here; where are very good houses, and other accommodations fitted to their hands...’

Extract from Cromwell’s letter to the Commander-in-Chief in the town of Wexford, 11 October 1649

<https://www.olivercromwell.org/wordpress/ireland/>