

THE UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH JOURNAL OF BOSTON COLLEGE

## THE DEMON OF THE BELFRY

INVESTIGATING THE EVOLUTION OF THE PENNY PRESS AND THE EMMANUEL CHURCH MURDERS

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- *The Digital Pandemic*
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## IRELAND RE-IMAGINED

### *Grasping Historical Perceptions for the Decade of Centenaries*

CZAR SEPE

IRELAND'S DECADE OF CENTENARIES (2012-2022) COMMEMORATES HISTORICAL MILESTONES THAT LED TO THE COUNTRY'S INDEPENDENCE FROM GREAT BRITAIN AND THE CREATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND. HOWEVER, SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE IRISH NATION, ITS HISTORY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CONTESTED SPACE— WHERE OPPOSING POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL GROUPS NEGOTIATE BETWEEN HISTORICAL NARRATIVES—TO LAY CLAIM TO A 'TRUE' IRISH HISTORY. THIS PAPER PRESENTS THE COMPETING HISTORIOGRAPHIES INVOLVED IN THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S DECADE OF CENTENARIES AND IDENTIFIES THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AGENDA BEHIND STATE COMMEMORATIONS. A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE COMMEMORATIONS THAT TOOK PLACE IN THE 2010S PROVES THAT SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FACTORED IN THE WAY IRELAND'S FOUNDING WAS PORTRAYED BY THE GOVERNMENT, THE PUBLIC, AND CIVIL SOCIETY. OVERALL, THIS PAPER CONCLUDES THAT THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF AIMS WERE TO STRIKE A CONCILIATORY TONE WITH NORTHERN IRELAND, 'CROWD-OUT' OPPOSING HISTORICAL NARRATIVES, AND PROJECT IRELAND'S ECONOMIC PROGRESS THROUGH THE IRISH PROCLAMATION. NEVERTHELESS, ACADEMIC HISTORIANS AND THE PUBLIC INTERVENED IN THIS NEGOTIATION TO CREATE RE-IMAGINED HISTORIES OF IRELAND.

Ireland's 'Decade of Centenaries' (DOC) can be characterized as a negotiation between competing historical interpretations and present socio-political concerns. In particular, themes of inclusion, transnationalism, and intersectionality colored commemoration events. To further explore this, the paper will provide the conceptual framework of a 'negotiation' of historical memory. Then, it will analyze the DOC Expert Advisory Group's mission, the First World War and Easter Rising commemorations, the online platform *Century Ireland*, and the #WakeTheFeminist movement. Overall, the Irish Government brought certain needs to the negotiating table: (1) a conciliatory tone with Northern Ireland (NI), (2) a 'crowding-out' of opposing historical narratives, and (3) a projection of Ireland's progress in relation to the Irish Proclamation. In the end, the Government was somewhat successful in this negotiation. With the intervention of academic historians and the public, the DOC accommodated 're-imagined' histories of Ireland, outside of the state's initial scope.

In order to delve into the DOC commemorations, it is essential to provide a conceptual schema for commemoration as a negotiation between historical narratives and current socio-political needs. Pierre Nora challenges the traditional separation between history and memory by proposing *lieux de mémoire*. Such crossover spaces include commemoration, in which both "memory attaches itself to sites," while "history attaches itself to events" (Nora, 1989). Further, Eric Hobsbawm comments on the rise of state commemoration during the nineteenth-century, as "...rulers...rediscovered the importance of 'irrational' elements in the maintenance of the social fabric..." of newly formed nation-states (Hobsbawm, 1983). Accordingly, this top-down concept is challenged in the twenty-first century, considering the idea of historical victimhood, which Guy Beiner notes that "...public remembrance of victims tend to be exclusive and monopolistic, denying the trauma of others and ranking one's own suffering above theirs" (Beiner, 2007). It is apparent that commemoration is in-

trinsically linked with the past. Nevertheless, commemoration is manifested in the present, and is subject to a society's values, whether it be nineteenth-century nation-building or twenty-first century traumatic healing. What is unique to today's notion of commemoration is that it can no longer be imposed solely by the state, rather, a dialogue must take place between historical memories throughout a broad spectrum of society. Politics must be considered in the Irish context because "...commemorative rituals have become historical forces in their own right" (McBride, 2001). As this '*lieux*' is limited because of financial constraints, physical space, and public will, a society must prioritize what is and is not remembered. Therefore, commemoration becomes a multi-faceted negotiation between differing historical narratives on one hand and differing socio-political interests on the other.

From this viewpoint, the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) was tasked to navigate the centenary of Ireland's foundational years. In 2012, the DOC programme was launched, designed to be "...broad and inclusive, highlighting the economic and social conditions of the period, [and] the shifts in cultural norms and the experience of the Irish abroad" (Decade of Centenaries, 2020). A year earlier, the EAG was established to advise the Government on how to approach the decade, chaired by Dr. Maurice Manning. It is noteworthy that a respected Irish academic and politician was appointed to this role. The EAG, supplementing the DOC's statements, argued that "commemoration will be measured and reflective, and will be informed by a full acknowledgement of the complexity of historical events and their legacy..." and "...of the multiple identities and traditions which are part of the Irish historical experience" (Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht, 2015). This spirit of inclusion is molded by past commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising, most notably the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising in 1966, which will be discussed later. Moreover, attempts to create a shared history come in the aftermath of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, in

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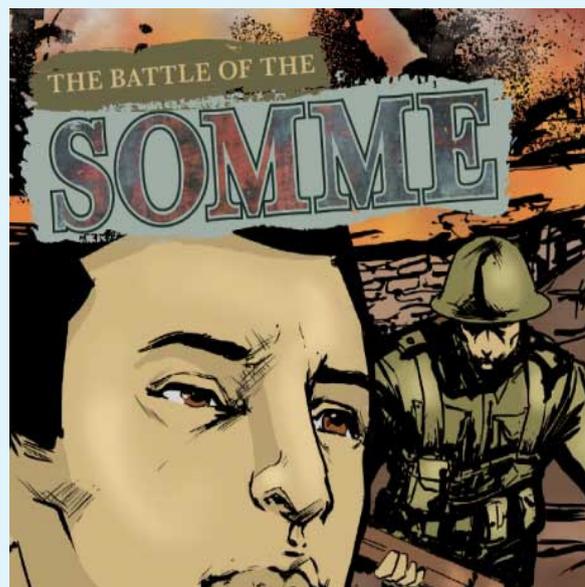
which there came a strong imperative to maintain peace on the island. This is reflected in Northern Ireland's approach to the decade, in which Paul Mullan explains that "by embracing the nuances and complexity of past events, a new understanding can emerge that may help mitigate the potential for further conflict" (Mullan, 2018). Clearly, the notion of inclusion, as well as transnationalism and intersectionality in public commemoration, arose as a result of a fear of conflict and Ireland's past experiences with historical commemoration. Was the DOC successful in orchestrating their expressed goals?

A marker of the DOC's success in tackling the issues of inclusion and transnationalism is the commemoration of the First World War and leading up to the Battle of the Somme in 2016. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, the war was overlooked by Irish society, in what historian F.X. Martin decried as a 'national amnesia.' However, Keith Jeffery focuses on contemporary trends in First World War commemoration, such as the fact that it "...began to be drawn into a wider, more general commemoration of all Irish people who had died for war," rather than a unionist-dominated narrative prevalent in recent history (Jeffery, 2013). The war, through the unionist lens, legitimized NI's place in the British Empire. With its ultimate sacrifice at the Battle of the Somme, Ulster unionists incorporated First World War commemoration as a key part of their heritage. Meanwhile, Northern Irish nationalists viewed the war with contempt because of unionism's fervent embrace of it. During the 'Troubles'—a thirty-year sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland pitting Protestant unionists against Catholic nationalists—these antipathies were heightened so much so that Remembrance Day was a target for Provisional IRA attacks, namely the 1987 Enniskillen bombing.

Though some loyalists scoff at the 'greening' of Great War history, both Irish and Northern Irish state officials embarked on a transnational effort to paint a reconciliatory picture. First, it started with joint commemorations in continental battlefields, like in Messines in 2014, which "...demonstrated the power of using foreign locations as 'safe' spaces for Irish First World War commemoration," as Ca-triona Pennell contends (Pennell, 2017). Placed in a broader European historical context, the Republic can better grapple with its role in the war. Irish President Michael D. Higgins, in an interview on RTÉ News, notes the Republic's duty is to "be able to take all of the experience of its citizens into account" (Century Ireland, 2014). Ireland's participation in the events is premised in the wider Euro-

pean context and in the inclusion of all Irish people. As for the Irish, "there has been an unprecedented and sustained public engagement..." as "...a way of dealing with the instability of the present and future" (Pennell, 2017). By the 2010s, the public welcomed the new consensus of 're-discovery' and reconciliation as a new historical motif that colored public commemoration. In effect, this phenomenon cannot be explained wholly by a 'top-down' theory of commemoration but also with a give-and-take between levels of society.

Indeed, this sense of shared loss culminated in the state commemorations of the Battle of the Somme on 10 July 2016. In the Republic's state ceremony at Islandbridge, all Irish regimental flags, including the 36th Ulster Division, were displayed. In addition, representatives of the Northern Irish Government, like the Secretary of State and the Deputy First Minister, laid wreaths representing both unionist and nationalist traditions. In Belfast City Hall, the Irish Minister for Social Protection laid a wreath at the Cenotaph on behalf of the Irish Government (Century Ireland, 2016). The reciprocity of representation signals the island's attempt to reinforce the inclusive narrative of a shared loss, in which all can relate to the horror of the Somme's carnage. James Evershed, on the other hand, posits that "the 'sharedness' of the Irish government's



THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME COMIC: THE STORY OF WILLIAM MCFADZEAN

approach to commemoration...has not engender[ed] any meaningful reflection on the violence of [Britain's] imperial heritage..." (Evershed, 2019). This critique is not unfounded. For example, the *Creative Centenaries* graphic novel, *The Battle of the Somme*, depicts the heroism of Billy McFadzean in the trenches. Supported by the Northern Ireland Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the graphic novel focuses on Ulster's pride and hints at the triumphalist tone that both states supposedly sought to dampen this time around. Thus, the concept of a shared historical loss shone through in First World War commemorations, following the EAG's inclusive and globalized vision, and a brokered consensus between the Republic and Northern Ireland on historical reconciliation was widely accepted.

After the First World War commemorations, the DOC reached its peak with its remembrance of the 1916 Easter Rising and the Irish Republic's proclamation. There are two inherent historical issues with the commemoration of the Rising; (1) it was orchestrated in direct opposition to the United Kingdom, of which Northern Ireland is still part of, and (2) that it was an undemocratic, violent rebellion that ultimately achieved its goal of independence, which violates today's political norms. Nonetheless, the Rising is central to the Irish state's founding narrative. In this regard, how will the DOC programme adhere to its core tenets of inclusivity, intersectionality, and transnationalism? Rising commemoration has been marred by allegations that they were partisan in the past. For instance, the Rising's fiftieth anniversary in 1966 was commemorated in a patriotic, militarized manner. The highly-politicized events linked Irish president Éamon de Valera, the last surviving Rising leader, with his Government as they wished to cement their legacy as the bearer of Irish independence. Some even argue that the commemorations stirred the forces that would cause the Troubles a few years later. The southern Government chose to forgo official commemoration during the late-twentieth century until the ninetieth anniversary in 2006—eight years after the Good Friday Agreement. Hence, there were credible concerns about commemorating the centenary of Easter 1916.

From the onset, the EAG unequivocally stated that although they outlined a commemoration based on a multiplicity of traditions and identities, "...the State should not be expected to be neutral about its own existence" (Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht, 2015). The group acknowledged that there is a limit to the principles of inclusion, especially to the events of the Rising. Though it may be a noble attempt to de-politicize the Rising, the EAG soon came under government pressure to integrate the peace process into commemorations. According to the *Irish Times*, the advisory committee "...'point blank' refused a government request to use the Northern Ireland peace process as a frame of reference" (McGreevy, 2016). However, Roisín Higgins attests to the innate politics of Rising commemorations, as "Easter 1916 came to represent a moment of possibility against which all subsequent realities could be measured or on which they could be blamed" (Higgins, 2016). For their part, the EAG's resistance to the political interventions still did not prevent the Government, nor other political actors from bringing commemoration to the bargaining table.

Of course, Higgins' insight on the ideas proclaimed during the Rising as a 'measuring-stick' of progress is evident throughout several aspects of the DOC. In particular, RTÉ's dramatic production of "Centenary The Proclamation" projected what seems to be an accomplishment of the ideas enshrined in the document, showcasing the Irish people's diversity and the diaspora community. Beginning with the unfurling of the tricolor by two descendants of leaders in the Rising, the video pans into the scenic countryside and lush farmland of the island. As different people read parts of the proclamation, one notices the wide-ranging locations of the people reading it. There is certainly no coincidence that a man with an American accent, who is assumed to be Irish-American, reads "...and supported by her exiled children in America..." (RTÉ-Ireland's National Public Service Media). In essence, Higgins' analysis strikes at the heart of why so many resources were afforded to the Easter Rising commemoration. For the state, remembering the Easter Rising meant remembering how far Ireland has come since its foundation and in the realization of its ideals. Portraying a progressive, prosperous nation able to

*"For the state, remembering the Easter Rising was meant to remember how far Ireland has come since its foundation, in the realization of its ideals."*

embrace its history and heritage, the Irish Government was keen on underscoring the DOC's tenets of inclusivity, transnationalism, and intersectionality.

In Northern Ireland, the Rising commemorations were not as simple and proved to be a complicated negotiation between competing political actors. As demonstrated in the First World War commemorations, both the Republic and NI were committed to what John Brewer describes as “ethical remembering,” based on “truth, tolerance and trajectory” (Brewer, 2016). This is hard to do for the Rising in NI, especially for unionists, because the event's meaning is against the rationale behind the formation of the Northern Irish state. Alvin Jackson contextualizes the unionist historical interpretation, concluding that the Rising “...was not just about the safely distant history of the neighbouring state, it was also interlinked with the contemporary history and experience of Northern Ireland,” although this was not always the case (Jackson, 2018). This is why unionists have more trouble acknowledging the event, as “...they feel that honoring the sacrifices of the ‘martyrs’ of the Rising could, in fact, signal some agreement with their aim of extricating all of Ireland from the United Kingdom” (Hancock, 2019). On the other hand, Sinn Féin—the leading republican political party—is not exempt from scrutiny, as Landon Hancock points out that they “...tried to use their willingness to acknowledge [the Somme] as a platform to insist upon unionist recognition of the importance of the Easter Rising...” (Hancock, 2019). Thus, the NI republican movement effectively pin unionists against a wall when they could claim that their unionist counterparts are not holding up to the parity of esteem—their end of the bargain.

Meanwhile, Northern Irish minority republican groups created their own commemorative spaces to reaffirm their legitimacy as the “true” heir to Easter 1916. Brendan Ciarán Browne shares incredible insight on the republican groups’ divergent Rising commemorative practices, which is surprising for an event that seemed to unify the republican cause. As an example, he accounts of the groups’ choreographed dance in the Belfast republican cemetery. Interestingly, “...rather than have any ‘official’ discussion between group hierarchies...the events are organised in deference to the historical precedent set in previous years” (Browne, 2016). One can view this as a gentleman’s agreement with the ultimate aim of “...embedding an historical narrative and about keeping the unique and distinct republican politics of the individual groups alive in the public arena” (Browne, 2016). This is

the identity-reaffirming element of commemoration, pivotal to these marginalized groups’ sense of solidarity. There is no need for understanding the other side when nationalist commemoration is the lifeblood of these political groups. In this case, republican actors were crowded out of commemoration by the state, so they negotiated a partition of alternative commemorative space amongst themselves.

Although the DOC was a complicated affair in the Irish and Northern Irish political spheres, the decade accomplished great strides in an intersectional and interdisciplinary study of Irish history, whether from state-sponsored events or grassroots activism. *Century Ireland*, formed in conjunction with Boston College, RTÉ, and the

**POBLAUGHT NA H EIREANN.  
THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT  
OF THE  
IRISH REPUBLIC  
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.**

**IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN** In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty: six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government,  
**THOMAS J. CLARKE,**  
**SEAN Mac DIARMADA, THOMAS MacDONAGH,**

FIGURE 2: PROCLAMATION OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC

Irish Government, provided an innovative tool in Irish history's public engagement. This approach towards digital history "[tried] to capture the full extent of how lives were lived in Ireland those years and not simply give the narrative of the major political and military happenings," as Mike Cronin explains (Cronin, 2017). The website offers podcasts, video interviews, archival photos, and its signature weekly newspaper, which reports on the week's events from a century ago (Century Ireland, 2020). Lauded by the Government and cultural organizations, *Century Ireland* received a warm reception by the Irish public, as deep interest in "every day" history during this period was cultivated. Remarkably, this project demonstrates an acute awareness of its own historical significance, that "it will undoubtedly be seen as a product of its time, but one that offers...a contemporary record of commemoration" (Cronin, 2017).

Another example of the DOC's intersectional approach is its initial failure to be adequately intersectional, as highlighted by the #WakingTheFeminists (#WTF) movement. After the Abbey Theatre's 2016 "Waking the Nation" repertoire featured only male Irish playwrights, a grassroots campaign mobilized to protest the lack of representation of women in Irish arts in general. A resurgence of Irish feminism in culture took hold as #WTF organizers successfully forced a nationwide reconsideration of women's role in Irish society. How can the DOC, trumpeting inclusive thematic histories, be so blind to the fact that its own advisory group is made up of a disproportionate number of men? Oona Frawley explains this phenomenon through Irish academia's proclivity for "oblivious remembering," which "...lacks awareness of or dismisses the systemic biases present in its institutional and/or official approaches to the past" (Frawley, 2021). As a result of this pushback, Irish institutions introspectively looked at its governing structures, ultimately increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, including in the EAG. On the whole, this bottom-up effort pushed state-sponsored commemoration to democratize and better represent the Irish experience, to the benefit of a more nuanced understand-

ing founded upon the Irish Proclamation's notion of equality—of "Irishmen and Irishwomen."

Lastly, the popularization of public historical engagement during the DOC should be embraced by historians, who serve as the sentinels for good history. Diarmaid Ferriter, an EAG committee member, viewed "...that in relation to commemoration, 'we [the EAG] have a duty to prevent hijacking by the government or anyone else'" (Ferriter, 2018). In his opinion, historians are not mere fact-checkers, they also carry ethical obligations to maintain integrity. However, Dominic Bryan adamantly disagrees with Ferriter's claims, saying that "the danger of using commemoration as a moment for historical engagement is that you collude with a statement of political identity..." (Bryan, 2016). Instead, he argues that social scientists, like anthropologists and political scientists, better explain commemoration. Unfortunately, Bryan's picture of history is outdated and generalized, rooted in the nineteenth-century historical method. Contemporary academic history is specialized, with themes of labor, cultural, and gender history emerging as proper historical spheres. In addition, Irish public historians have demonstrated a consistent commitment to "...create about a meaningful and considered state programme..." and "...to highlight and expose political abuses of the commemorations..." which drastically contrasts with Bryan's simple characterizations (Ferriter, 2018). After all, it would not be fair to base criticism of modern anthropology on its imperialistic, racist origins.

On the contrary, public historians must be at the forefront of commemoration, serving as sentinels against propaganda. It must be understood that "public commemoration is futile unless driven by the conviction that it will bring social dividends..." or, simply put, that history cannot be apolitical (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Even so, this should not deter historians from supporting or critiquing events publicly. The DOC has renewed public interest in Irish history, and local communities took the lead in most ceremonies. This democratized history, aided by increased open access to archival material, has made history personal for many.

*Given this public platform, historians have a moral duty in twenty-first century commemoration to mold a historically-educated society.*

Professional historians, therefore, should provide the contextual roadmap for the public's understanding of the centenary so that people can be guided in their historical pursuits. Given this public platform, historians have a moral duty in twenty-first century commemoration to mold a historically educated society.

In conclusion, the Decade of Centenaries has been a negotiation between varying historiographies and multiple socio-political actors. The first half of the decade has proven that public commemoration conforms to present Irish values, namely, an emphasis on inclusion, intersectionality, and transnationalism. Its multi-faceted approach, encompassing Irish culture and transnationality brings nuance to Irish history. The DOC, at times, failed to reflect its aspirations accurately, but the historians and the people pushed back and won. Nevertheless, the DOC has benefited Ireland, not because Irish history has been re-examined or re-discovered but because it has been re-imagined.

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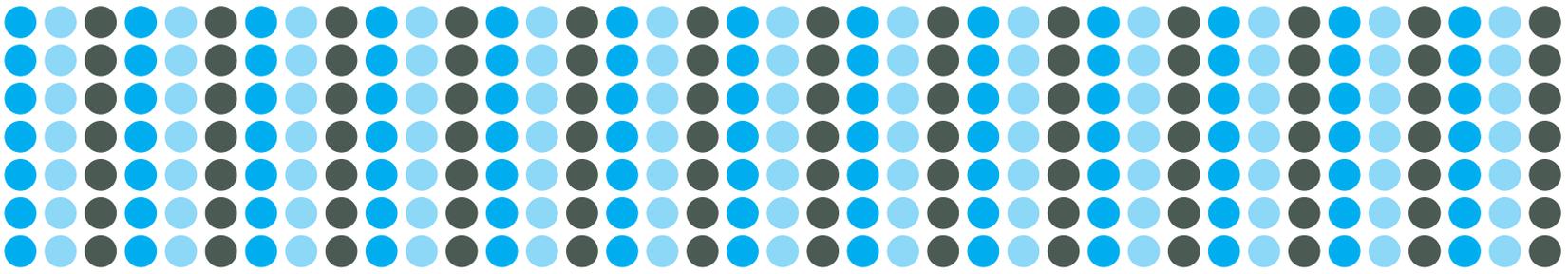
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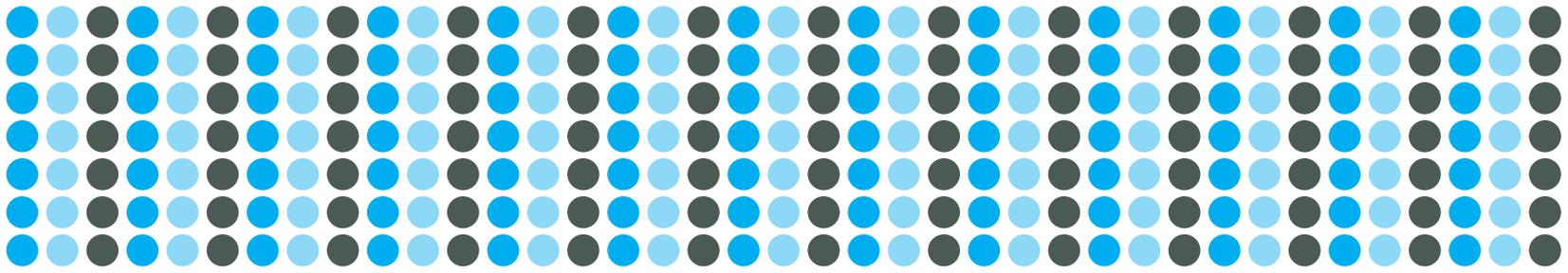
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- 29 FIGURE 4, PANEL A**  
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- 29 FIGURE 4, PANEL B**  
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### 38 **TABLE III INFERENCE POWER AND POWER UTILIZATION**

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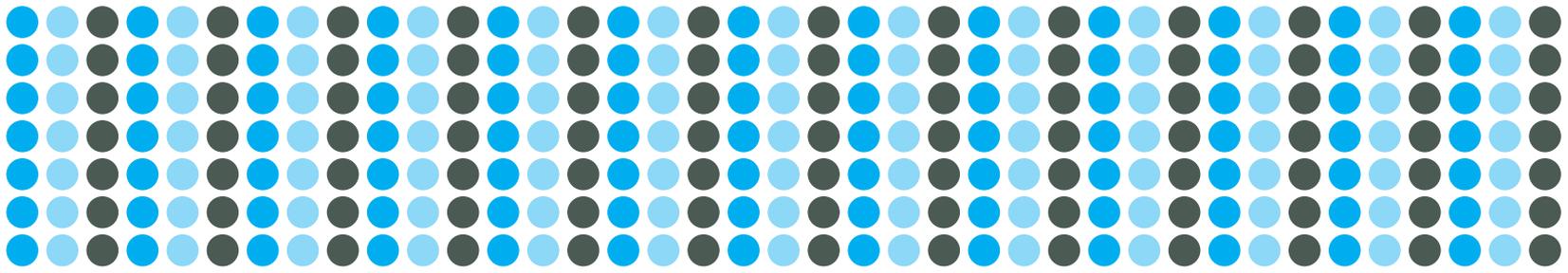
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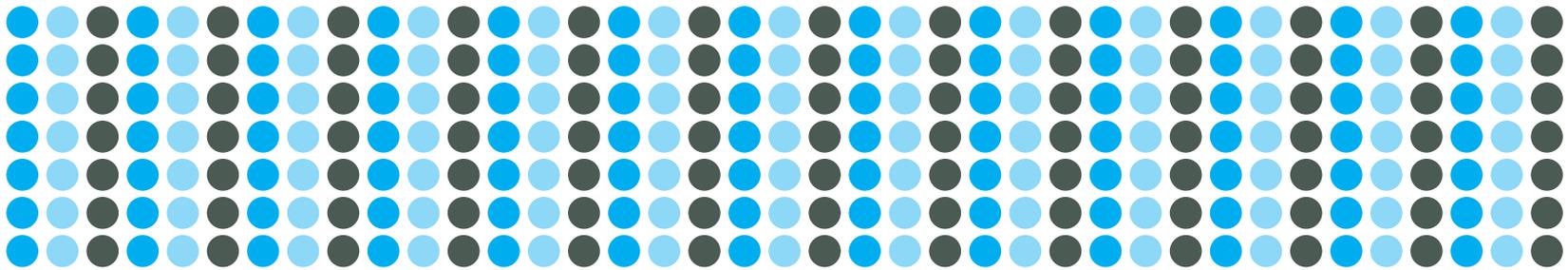
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