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Irish America and the Conflict in Northern Ireland: 1960-1998

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Senior Honors Thesis
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1999-2000

Even before the creation of Northern Ireland as a separate entity, the Ulster province was characterized by conflict. Many historians have written about Northern Ireland. In this paper, I focus on the relationship between Irish America and the Northern Irish conflict. I argue that from 1960, with the election of John F. Kennedy, to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, there has been a transformation in Irish American opinion and advocacy. Initially, Irish Americans tended to endorse the republican movement as represented by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its political wing, Sinn Fein. Then, in response to three developments, both in Northern Ireland and the United States, Irish Americans gradually turned away from the increasingly radical IRA and Sinn Fein, in favor of the more moderate constitutional nationalism epitomized by the Social and Democratic Labor Party (SDLP). When the IRA began to target civilians in its campaigns against the British presence in Northern Ireland, Irish Americans rejected these paramilitary tactics. Another reason for the transformation was the lessening of the radical tendencies of Irish Americans as they became more assimilated in American culture. The final and most important cause of the shift was the rise of constitutional nationalism as a viable alternative to the IRA in the late 1960s.

On the Catholic holy day, Good Friday 1998 the British government, the Irish government and the eight political parties of Northern Ireland signed an historic agreement that would bring end to a centuries old conflict. Since the first British Protestants settled on the Irish island, tensions between the new arrivals and the native Catholic population have been intense and often violent. In an attempt to alleviate these tensions, the British government established a predominantly Protestant state in the North while granting independence to the mostly Catholic South. Instead of lessening the pressure between the two groups, partition only forced it to converge in the new state. Catholics demanded to be reunited with the rest of the Island, while Protestants insisted on remaining part of the United Kingdom.

This dilemma has caused years of strife in Northern Ireland especially in the last twenty-five years. The conflict has not been contained solely in Northern Ireland, but has international ramifications especially in the United States. The U.S became the new home for millions of Irish immigrants. In fact more American claim Irish descent than actual Irish who live on the island. Sickened by the brutal sectarian war that has killed 3,200 and wounded 36,000, Irish Americans have undertaken to procure a resolution to the conflict. It is this quest on which I focus in my thesis. Irish Americans were instrumental in the creation and acceptance of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

In this thesis, I argue that from the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in

1998, there has been a fundamental transformation of the Irish American community in opinion and advocacy concerning the conflict in Northern Ireland. Initially, Irish Americans tended to endorse the republican movement as represented by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its political wing, Sinn Fein ("We ourselves" in the Irish language). Then, in response to certain developments, both in Northern Ireland and the United States, Irish Americans gradually turned away from the increasingly radical IRA and Sinn Fein, in favor of the more moderate constitutional nationalism epitomized by the Social and Democratic Labor Party (SDLP). The reason for this shift is threefold. As Irish Americans assimilated into mainstream American society and culture, they became less inclined to endorse the radical measures taken by the IRA. Another reason for the shift occurred when the IRA began to target civilians in its campaigns against the British presence in Northern Ireland. The increasingly moderate Irish Americans rejected these paramilitary tactics. The final and most important cause of the shift was the rise of constitutional nationalism in the late 1960s with the creation of SDLP. Prior to this, Irish American did not believe that there was a viable alternative to the republican movement. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein was the most vocal advocate for British withdrawal from the province. Since Irish Americans desired this result, they felt compelled to support the IRA. With the establishment of SDLP, Irish Americans had choices as to what would be the best method for resolving the conflict. Whereas Sinn

Fein advocated an all or nothing policy--complete British withdrawal and reunification, SDLP contended that reunification would have to be the result of a democratic process that was responsive to the majority of those living in Northern Ireland. These developments in Northern Ireland and the United States led to the transformation of the dimensions of the conflict and the eventual signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which is a pinnacle of constitutional nationalist policy.

It is important for historians to study Irish American involvement in Northern Ireland, because it is an example of the disjointed experiences of an ethnic group in the United States. Although integrated into American society, Irish Americans still feel close ties with Ireland, a country that most have never even visited. Not only do Irish Americans feel connected with their hereditary homeland, they desire to effect the situation there. Irish Americans effectively used the political machinery in the United States to effect the situation in Northern Ireland. This kind lobbying performed by an ethnic group is not unique to Irish Americans, but also includes those seeking a solution to conflicts throughout the world, like the Middle East and the Balkans. Irish Americans represent a trend in the Post-Cold War world to encourage the U.S government to create an environment in which compromise is possible. In acting as a catalyst to promote compromise and resolution, the United States can redefine its role in the modern world. This new role as mediator is especially

clear when examining the role of the U.S in the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Factions in Northern Irish History

The history of the Northern Irish conflict is complicated and diverse. In order to understand the conflict, it is necessary to define certain factions; nationalism, republicanism, unionism, loyalism and constitutional nationalism. John Whyte, in his *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, clearly delineates the different views of nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland. Whyte writes, "The traditional nationalist view of Northern Ireland can be summed up in two propositions: (1) the people of Ireland form one nation; and (2) the fault for keeping Ireland divided lies with Britain."¹ For nationalists, the partition of Ireland is illegitimate and, consequently, so is the government of Northern Ireland. Nationalists refuse to recognize or participate in any government in Northern Ireland since they view it as an artificial area, which was the result of an illegitimate partition. The other important tenet of nationalism is that the conflict is completely the fault of the British presence in Northern Ireland. According to nationalists, the beginning of the problems in Ireland began with the arrival of the Normans in the 12th century. This was the first foreign invasion to establish its own community on the island. According to Whyte, the

nationalist position "takes for granted that the British presence is the only thing preventing the unification of Ireland."²

Nationalists dismiss as unimportant the fact that the majority of people living in Northern Ireland want to maintain the link with Britain. Nationalists contend that unionists would just relocate to Britain after the island was reunited. Republicans comprise several groups among the nationalists that advocate the use of violence in order to reunite the island under the Dublin government. The best-known republican group is the Irish Republican Army, known as the IRA. The IRA was first established during the War for Independence 1918-1922 to run guerrilla attacks against the British in Ireland.

On the other side of conflict are the unionists and loyalists. Whyte defines the Unionist interpretation of the conflict as based on two propositions: " (1) there are two distinct peoples in Ireland, unionists and nationalists (or Protestant and Catholic): and (2) the core of the problem is the refusal of nationalists to recognize this fact, and to accord to unionists the same right of self-determination as they claim for themselves." ³ According to the unionist interpretation, the conflict did not begin until the outbreak of violence in the late 1960s during the period known as the "Troubles." Unionists want to maintain the link with Britain to sustain the strength of the economy and also out of fear that the Protestant population of

¹ John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 117

² Whyte, 119

³ Whyte, p. 146

Northern Ireland would be essentially disenfranchised if it became part of the predominantly Catholic Irish Republic. One of the main characteristics of the unionist position is an inherent distrust of the Dublin government. A number of IRA campaigns have been coordinated from across the border with the intent of destabilizing the Stormont government.⁴ Another reason for this distrust is that the Irish Republic's Constitution of 1937 makes a territorial claim on the area of Northern Ireland.⁵ On the basis of this unionists believe that the threat posed by the southern government is a real one. The unionist population has accordingly argued that in order to survive on the island its link with Britain must be maintained. Yet for unionists, Britain remains an unreliable ally, which is willing to make too many concessions to nationalists. According to unionists, they not only have to fight within the Northern Irish community, but also with Britain in order to maintain the link. Like republicans, loyalists contend that the use of violence is necessary. They are not fighting to reunify the island, but rather to keep Northern Ireland a separate entity. The most important loyalist group is the Ulster Volunteer Force or the UVF.

The constitutional nationalist movement was born of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland that began in the latter half of the 1960s. The main tenet of the constitutional nationalists is that if there is going to be reunification of the

⁴ Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland: Nation and State*. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994), 229

⁵ Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon, and Henry Patterson, *Northern Ireland 1921-1996: Political Forces and Social Classes*. (London: Serif, 1996), 213

island under one government it has to be the decision of the majority. The primary constitutional nationalist party, the Social and Democratic Labor Party, was founded in August of 1970. Unlike the republicans, SDLP rejects the use of violence as a tool for reunification. A more detailed account of the rise of constitutional nationalism as a viable force in Northern Ireland will follow in the main body of this paper.

Conflict in Ulster 1603-1922

The area of Northern Ireland consists of six counties located in the northeastern section of the island. These six counties were formally part of the Ulster province, which is one of the four provinces of Irish island. The state of Northern Ireland was created in 1921 in the Government of Northern Act. Even before its creation as a separate entity, this section was remarkably different from the rest of the island. It was in this area that the British first settled in the sixteenth century. The British Protestant settlements were self-contained and complete plantation-type establishments. There was little contact with the native Irish population, but the settlements were not designed to eradicate the local Catholic people. Whereas most of the island consisted of small family-based farms, Ireland's industry was located in Ulster. This industry was highly specialized, emphasizing linen and shipbuilding. Ulster industry overproduced for the small local economy of the island. Ulster industrialists were dependent on exports and the availability of markets in

Britain and in British colonies. Although the economy of the south also relied on trade with Britain, especially for cattle exportation, the ties were not as essential as those in the Ulster industries. During this period, there were few opportunities open to the Catholic population. In the late seventeenth century, Catholics had been barred from owning land and voting due to their involvement in the Jacobite rebellion. Because of this disenfranchisement, control of industry was largely in the hands of Protestants. Their wealth was determined by access to British materials and markets. Therefore, maintaining the link with Britain was a great priority. Economics played a major role in Ulster's drive to sustain the union with Britain.⁶

Another development that led to the creation of Northern Ireland and the partition of the island was the Home Rule movement from 1885 until 1920. This movement was dedicated to the establishment of a local government in Dublin. The local Irish population wanted the right to self-determination. This frightened the Protestants living in Ulster for two reasons. First they feared that Home Rule would result in the severing of economic ties with Britain and deny them access to important British markets. Second, they were concerned that since they would be a minority among the Catholic majority they would be heavily discriminated against. In other words, Protestants anticipated that Home Rule would entail "Rome Rule." They feared

⁶ Mary E. Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland since 1800*. (Dublin: Educational Company of

the control that the Catholic Pope would exercise in the affairs of Ireland. There were three Home Rule Bills introduced at Westminster. The first two failed because of pressure from Ulster Protestants. With the introduction of the first Home Rule Bill in 1885, there was mass popular disobedience in Ulster. Since this resulted in the failure of the bill, Ulster Protestants learned that this type of demonstration was an effective method to ensure that their goals were achieved. This was also the first instance that certain religions were linked with specific political goals. Catholics were associated with Home Rule initiatives and Protestants with maintaining the link with Britain. The year 1885 thus marked the emergence of the modern Northern Irish problem with Catholics and Protestants diametrically opposed over the issue of the union. It was during the Home Rule debate that members of Parliament introduced partition as a solution to the demands of Ulster unionists while allowing Home Rule in Dublin. Partition would create a completely separate political structure from the rest of the island. Nationalists were not particularly opposed to partition initially. It was proposed as a temporary measure. As one nationalist leader, John Redmond, described partition as a "Death sentence with a stay of execution." This statement reveals that partition was definitely not viewed as a final solution to the problem. This last Home Rule Bill was introduced in 1914. It was passed but then suspended with the outbreak of World War I. When the bill was passed, political

pundits noted that an additional clause would have to be added in order to appease Ulster Protestants. This clause was enacted in 1920 as the Government of Ireland Act and established Northern Ireland as a separate state from the Irish Free State.⁷

Irish America from 1800-1960

As Irish Americans integrated into American society and culture they become less radical. This tempering of the Irish American community is reflected in the change in sentiment concerning the Northern Irish conflict. When Irish Americans ostracized from mainstream America, they tended to support a radical agenda for the reunification of island of Ireland. As Irish Americans became more American than Irish, their opinions concerning a resolution in Northern Ireland changed as well and they became more inclined to seek a more moderate solution to the conflict. The pattern of Irish assimilation can be traced from the beginning of the Irish presence in the United States.

In order to illuminate the Irish American dimension to the conflict in Northern Ireland, one must to identify certain key players among the Irish American community. When I use the term "Irish American", I refer to those who identify themselves as being of Irish descent, but, more significantly, those who feel a hereditary and cultural tie to Ireland. This term includes many different generations of Irish Americans with diverse backgrounds

⁷ Bew, Gibbon, and Patterson, pp. 7-15

and political perspectives. For my purposes, it is important to focus on two particular groups within the Irish American population: Irish American politicians, or the elected officials who worked within the United States government to influence official policy concerning Northern Ireland; and Irish American activists, who are actively involved in affecting the situation in Northern Ireland by belonging either to political action groups such as the Friends of Ireland and the Friends of Irish Freedom, or fundraising organizations like Irish Northern Aid Committee. This latter group also includes those who are involved with the extensive network of Irish American press.

In order to convey the extent of Irish American involvement in the situation in Northern Ireland it is essential to describe the historical context of Irish American nationalism. The origins of Irish American nationalism are significant because as Andrew Wilson notes, "The tactics they developed to help liberate their homeland set precedents that would be copied by almost all the current Irish-American support groups."⁸ The modern Irish American movement to affect the situation in Northern Ireland derives much from early Irish American nationalism. The United States became a haven for Irish immigrants and nationalists fleeing an oppressive British regime.

The most important wave of Irish immigration to the United States occurred during the Great Famine. Between 1845 to 1854 approximately one million and half Irish people immigrated to the

United States. The majority of those leaving the island were Catholic.⁹ According to Andrew Wilson, this wave of immigrants had strong feelings of antipathy for the British. They blamed the British for having to leave their homeland. Wilson writes, "Nurturing an intense Anglophobia, they vowed revenge for the suffering that they had to endure." The Irish in America also tended to create an idealized image of their homeland. Ireland was viewed as a beautiful fantasyland that the British had compelled them to abandon. These sentiments made Irish American nationalism more radical and militant.¹⁰ Irish leaders sought to use these feelings in order to gain support for their programs in Ireland. The first leader to do so was Daniel O'Connell who organized the Friends of the Irish and Hibernian relief organizations. This was the first instance where an Irish leader used the Irish American network to mobilize support that would force the British out of Ireland. This tactic would become more common during later decades.

Because of Irish republicans' success at raising money in the United States, the British became increasingly concerned about Irish American nationalism. In 1867, a member of the British parliament remarked that there was "a new Irish nation on the other side of the Atlantic, recast in the mold of Democracy, watching for an opportunity to strike a blow at the

⁸ Andrew Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster Conflict*. (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University Press, 1995), 3

⁹ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*, (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University Press, 1976), 65

¹⁰ Wilson, pp. 4-5

heart of the Empire.'" ¹¹ This blow came in the form of an arms shipment on the vessel *Erin's Hope*. The Fenian Brotherhood, an Irish American militant organization, hoped that these arms would help the Irish rebels, who had begun a small rebellion in County Sligo, to force the British from the island. The uprising failed but an important precedent had been set. Irish American had demonstrated that they could be relied on to send supplies and support to enable the Irish rebels to wage war against the British.

~~Irish~~ The Home Rule debate and the War for Independence sparked an increase in Irish American interest in the affairs of Ireland. According to Dennis Clark in *Irish Blood*, "With the advent of the struggle for Irish independence a nationwide network of organizations and sympathetic opinion groups was available to help marshal general American opinion for the Irish cause."¹² These groups sought to influence the American public, who would in turn convince American politicians to exert pressure on the British to grant Ireland independence. Millions of dollars were collected during this period and famous Irish leaders traveled to the United States in order to speak to the various Irish American clubs. The most famous leader to do this was Eamon De Valera who would be the first leader of the Free State. The goal of De Valera and other Irish leaders in the United State was to raise money. This practice of using Irish America as a source for funds is also one that would remain important in later decades.

¹¹ Holland, p. 2

With the dual creation of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland, the fervor of Irish American interest in events in Irish affairs lessened. Many Irish Americans simply felt that the battle for Irish liberation was over. But there remained a core of dedicated individual that still strove to keep Irish Americans passionate about the situation in Northern Ireland. It was not until the outbreak of the troubles in the late 1960s that Irish affairs emerged once again at the forefront of Irish American interest.

Irish American Assimilation

One of the concurrent reasons that there was a shift in Irish American advocacy away from the republican movement to constitutional nationalism is that as Irish Americans integrated more fully into mainstream American society, they became less radical. In other words, as they became more American than Irish, their inclination to support the extreme methods of the militant republican Irish Republican Army weakened. This is not to say that their interest in securing the goal of a unified Ireland rapidly declined, but they did look for an alternative to the IRA. They found this alternative in the Social Democratic Labor Party the primary constitutional nationalist party in Northern Ireland. The SDLP contends that the path to a unified Ireland is a political one, not a militant one. The leader of the SDLP, John Hume, eschewed the paramilitary tactics of the IRA in favor of using the political system of Northern Ireland to accomplish

¹² Dennis Clark, *Irish Blood: Northern Ireland and the American Conscience* (London: Kennikat, 1977), 9

nationalist goals. Like the Constitutional Nationalists, Irish Americans also found that by working through the political system in the United States they gained significant power in society. They were no longer on the outside looking in. This was exemplified in 1960 with the election of the Irish Catholic John Fitzgerald Kennedy instead of Richard Nixon. The election of an Irish American to the highest office demonstrated that the Irish had been integrated completely into American society. The path that the Irish Americans took to assimilate reveals much about the changing nature of Irish American attitudes concerning the conflict in Northern Ireland, why they became less radical, and why they came to support constitutional nationalism.

New Irish immigrants to the United States were viewed quite negatively by the native predominantly Protestant population. In various political cartoons of the late 19th and early 20th century, Irish Americans were portrayed as big hulking brutes with apelike characteristics. This was the popular depiction of Irish Americans. They were considered to be drunken criminals that were dangerous to traditional American society. To some degree the Irish had actually earned this reputation. A number of powerful street gangs were predominantly Irish such as the Bowery Boys, the Roach Guards and the Dead Rabbits. Participants in the New York Draft Riots during the Civil War were mostly of poor Irish Americans who could not afford to pay their way out of the draft.¹³ The nature of Irish immigration reinforced these

¹³ George E. Reedy. *From The Ward to the White House* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991), 45.

stereotypes and encouraged discrimination. Owing to their economic circumstances, Irish immigrants were compelled to remain in urban neighborhoods in Protestant cities such as Boston. In her book, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, Doris Kearns Goodwin writes, "The penniless Irish newcomer had no choice but to remain in a city, which had no space in which to lodge them, trying to eke out a miserable existence in an atmosphere of cultural homogeneity that was rigidly forbidding to aliens."¹⁴ Goodwin deals with the Irish experience in Boston, which was a stronghold of Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. Many of the leading American Revolution patriots and two presidents were from Boston. It was into this environment that the Irish immigrants entered. It is not surprising that the native Bostonians opposed the intrusion of the Irish into their city. This type of tension between the two populations resulted the Irish stereotypes seen in the late 19th and 20th centuries and prevent the easy integration of the Irish immigrant into American society.

The Catholicism of most Irish immigrants contributed to the difficulty of their integration into mainstream America. They were predominately Catholic. In fact, Lawrence McCaffrey, in the argues that it is impossible to separate Irish immigrants from their Catholic religion. Catholicism was not a popular religion in colonial America because of America's tie to Protestant Great Britain. When the penal codes were enacted in Great Britain preventing Catholics from owning property, similar laws were

¹⁴ Doris Kearns Goodwin. *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* (New York: Simon and Schluster, 1987), 52.

enacted in the American colonies. According to McCaffrey, Catholicism in the American colonies was viewed as a "superstitious, anti-intellectual authoritarian monster threatening to devour American values and institutions."¹⁵ Protestant Americans distrusted Catholics because of their professed allegiance to the Roman Pope. They doubted that Catholics could be loyal to any secular government if their main loyalty was to the Church. Protestant Americans' suspicion of the strength of Catholic allegiance to the United States is prevalent throughout the history of Irish Americans.

Such prejudices toward Irish Americans kept them for many years on the outskirts of mainstream American society. This discrimination in turn encouraged the extreme nature of Irish American attitudes about the union of Great Britain with Ireland. According to historian Andrew Wilson, Irish immigrants tended to have a highly romanticized idea of Ireland. They did not remember it as a place that they necessarily had to flee because of poverty and famine; rather they thought of it as a haven. Wilson writes, "They constructed a highly romanticized and sentimental image of their homeland, which contrasted with their situation in the United States."¹⁶ Goodwin finds this same sentimentality in her research about the early experiences of the prominent Irish American family, the Fitzgerald's. John Fitzgerald remembered how his father used to talk about Ireland.

¹⁵ Lawrence J. McCaffrey. *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America* (revised) (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 93

"When he listened to his father talk about his childhood in Ireland he thought there must be no more wonderful place in all the world to grow up in."¹⁷

The Irish in America also tended to blame Britain for forcing them to leave Ireland. In *Irish Blood*, Dennis Clark describes the Irish experience in the United States as "fragmentary." This means that the Irish attempted to maintain their old traditions and culture while also becoming part of American society. The result has been a kind of artificial experience for Irish Americans. Clark remarks, "What exists in America is only a fragmentary reflection of the native place, a partial representation without the balancing context." Another consequence is the continued radicalization of Irish Americans who are driven by their emotions concerning Ireland. According to Clark, these strong emotions largely explain why Irish Americans tend to support the nationalist movement. He contends that certain features of American society greatly affected the Irish American experience in the United States; "The existence of little cells of Irish nationalist agitators in various cities provided the indispensable links for organization of a new underground."¹⁸ These groups were not assimilated into the larger American society and remained quite radical. They tended to support Ulster militants.

¹⁶ Andrew Wilson. *Irish America And Ulster Conflict 1968-1995* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 5

¹⁷ Goodwin, 10

Irish Americans, The Ward and the Election of 1928

As George Reedy writes, "There are compensations for living in the lower depths of society. The bottom rung is one from which people are willing to try anything new." As time passed Irish Americans did become more of a part of American society.

Employment in fire and police departments helped Irish Americans gain some respectability, but by far the most important development for Irish Americans was their entry into local politics. At the turn of the twentieth century in the United States, there was a shift to a more urban economy. This increased the political power in cities. Concentrated in neighborhoods in such major US cities as Chicago, New York and Boston, Irish Americans were in a perfect position to gain political power for themselves. Through the Democratic Party, they acquired many local offices. According to Reedy, Irish Americans chose the Democratic party because "there was no alternative organization through which they could exercise their political savvy. And as they were only sizable group to care about the Democratic Party, they were soon able to shape it into their personal instrument." They did, indeed shape it. This was the era of machine politics and Irish Americans were at the center. The infamous Tammany Hall of New York and the other powerful political machines of New York, Boston San Francisco were all dominated by Irish Americans.

The Irish American population definitely desired to become a part of American society. This desire affected how they felt

¹⁸ Clark, p. 73

about the situation in Ireland. The burning issue for Irish Americans was the continued presence of Britain in Ireland. According to Wilson, "They felt that British control of their mother country was a symbol of Irish inferiority and encouraged the contempt of Anglo-Americans. Only when this 'stain of degradation' was removed could the diaspora achieve respect in American society."¹⁹ Wilson's remark is interesting because it reveals the changing nature of the Irish experience in America. Instead of being totally consumed with issues in Ireland, Irish Americans were becoming more concerned with integrating into American society.

In 1912, according to Goodwin, "It was the conventional wisdom of the day that politics provided the surest road to power for an ambitious Irish youth."²⁰ Many took this route to power. Irish American families that would become prominent in the future, The Fitzgerald's and the Kennedy's, gained power by being political active in the wards. John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald was one of the most powerful machine bosses in Boston. He used his position to encourage Irish Americans to assimilate into American society. He did not want the Irish American community to be relegated to the outskirts of American culture. Fitzgerald contended that it was the responsibility of Irish Americans to attempt to integrate. At a speech in 1906 given to the Boston Young Men's Christian Association, he instructed his fellow Irish American Catholics to "not be provincial in their own separate

¹⁹ Wilson, 10

schools, but instead to go to school with the superior men, read their words listen to them, talk to them."²¹ Fitzgerald hoped that Irish Americans would thereby be able to participate more fully in American society and that they would enjoy a commensurate increase in material prosperity. None of this could happen if the Irish remained separate from the greater United States population. And although they were able to use their growing political power to become more assimilated into American culture, their assimilation remained incomplete in the early 20th century. This became painfully clear when an Irish American, Al Smith, attempted to run for President of the United States in 1928.²²

Albert Smith was a product of the Irish American involvement in machine politics. In *The Catholic Voter in American Politics*, William B. Pendergast describes Smith as a "New Yorker, a Catholic, Irish by ancestry, a wet, a Tammany Hall loyalist, a career big-city politician complete with brown derby and cigar."²³ Al Smith had been a ward leader and a machine boss. His involvement in machine politics led to his election as governor of New York and his eventual capturing of the Democratic nomination for President in 1928. Unfortunately for Smith, mainstream Americans were not ready to accept an Irish Catholic as President of the United States. According to Pendergast, "The dominant issue [of the election of 1928] was Governor Smith's

²⁰ Goodwin, p. 228

²¹ Goodwin, p. 112

²² Reedy, 50-55

²³ William B. Pendergast. *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 102

Catholicism."²⁴ As much as they had become part of the United States, Irish American Catholics were still not completely accepted by the rest of the population. The 1920's saw a rise in the nativist movement in the United States. With the influx of new immigrants from Eastern Europe, the United States recoiled. Anti-immigration laws were passed and the new immigrants were seriously persecuted. The Ku Klux Klan terrorized not only African Americans but Catholics and Jews as well. The KKK adamantly resisted the election of Irish Catholic Al Smith to the presidency. The old theme of doubting a Catholics loyalty to the United States over the Church resurfaced. Protestants in the United States asked how one could be a good citizen in the United States while still also giving his absolute loyalty to the Roman Pope? To many in the United States in 1928, American Catholic loyalty to their country must remain suspect. Al Smith could not overcome this prejudice against Catholics in the United States. Prominent newspaper printed harmful caricatures of Al Smith and his wife Katherine that implied something sinister about their religious affiliation. Editors wrote editorials warning against electing a Catholic as president. Scots-Presbyterian and Anglo-Protestant leaders vociferously argued that the Irish could never be fully accepted into American society because of their religion. "Catholicism locked the Irish into ignorance, shiftlessness, 1900. But the path to the presidency was not an easy one. Kennedy

²⁴ Pendergast, 103

superstition and disloyalty to the American nation."²⁵ One of the more of the common myths about the Catholic faith was that there was a secret organization within the Church called the Knights of Columbus. Supposedly the Knights of Columbus swore an oath to kill all non-Catholics. It is not surprising that in the atmosphere of strong anti-Catholic sentiment, that Al Smith was not elected president and that the Quaker Herbert Hoover was. Al Smith received the majority of Irish Catholic votes as well as the votes of the other descendants of immigrants, but he simply could not attract the mainstream American voter. This is a clear indication that although Irish Americans had made some assimilation gains, they had some ways to go. The election of 1928 was a bitter disappointment to Irish Americans. There were many second and third generation Irish Americans at this point who considered themselves to be more American than Irish. Many of them had decided to support the United States in World War I even though this meant fighting on the side of their traditional enemy, the British. Irish Americans had thought that they had become an essential part of mainstream American society but they were still more outsiders than insiders.

John Kennedy and the Election of 1960

The culmination of Irish American assimilation into American society was the election of John Kennedy to President in 1960. But the path to the presidency was not an easy one. Kennedy

²⁵ McCaffrey, 94

had to combat much of the same prejudice and anti-Catholic sentiment that had kept Al Smith out of office in the 1928 election. Kennedy had an ambiguous relationship with his religion. Like many Catholics, he did not express any great belief in Church doctrine or dogma. But Kennedy's Catholicism was a basic part of his background.

Although Kennedy never denied or renounced his Catholicism, he certainly had to prove to the voters that it would not adversely affect his ability to be the President. According to Pendergast, "The first requisite for the Kennedy campaign in 1960 was to distance the candidate from those aspects of Catholicism most likely to generate suspension or and opposition to his candidacy among non-Catholics."²⁶ One of the reasons that Al Smith failed to capture the non-Catholic vote in 1928 was that he was not able to dispel American distrust of the Catholic religion. One of Kennedy's speechwriters, Theodore Sorenson wrote about Kennedy's Catholicism. He certainly did not believe that all non-Catholics would go to hell, nor did he resist against working with non-Catholics, nor did he challenge the separation of church and state. Kennedy told Sorenson, "'There is an old saying in Boston...that we get our religion from Rome and our politics at home.'"²⁷ This is a clear attempt by Kennedy to combat the misconception that Catholics could not be loyal to a secular government. This was a point that Kennedy stressed over and over again in his campaign.

²⁶ Theodore Sorenson, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), 19

²⁶ Pendergast, 136

There was definitely some strong anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States in 1960. Kennedy did not like to focus his campaign on religion. He did not want to be seen as a Catholic running for President because he was afraid that this would divide the voters based on religion, like it did in 1928. He used different tactics than Smith. Sorenson writes, "Smith in 1928 had defended his church...Kennedy defended himself." Kennedy wanted to move the focus away from religion and more to issues that applied to everyone and to his agenda.²⁸ Despite this attempt the people still focused on the religious issue. It became clear that Kennedy would have to prove to the American people that an Irish American Catholic could indeed be loyal President. In a speech in Washington, DC to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Kennedy expressed his opinion on the separation of church and state. "I am not the Catholic candidate for President. I do not speak for the Catholic Church on issues of public policy, and no one in that Church speaks for me."²⁹ For Kennedy, being an American rather than being an Irish American Catholic was more important. This is what assimilation into another culture consists of. You became part of that society as opposed to being something other. No longer were the Irish Americans thought to be on the outskirts of the mainstream. Wanting to be integrated into society is not enough though, one must be accepted into that society by the other members. The acceptance of Irish Americans

²⁷ Theodore Sorenson. Kennedy (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), 19

²⁸ Sorenson, 109

²⁹ Sorenson, 142

as true Americans is clear when John Kennedy is elected president. According to Pendergast, "Having lost their immigrant mindset with its acceptance of a lower status and experiencing upward mobility when discrimination was increasingly coming under attack, many Catholics saw the 1960 election as a chance to strike a symbolic blow against the barriers to their advancement and that of their children."□ There might be some residual resentment to Irish Americans in America, but that was not anything that could not be overcome. George Reedy writes that the 1960 election "put an end to any lingering feelings of the Irish that they were strangers in an alien land."³⁰ Irish Americans were no longer really Irish Americans but Americans of Irish decent.

IRA Campaign 1971-1981

As Irish Americans were becoming more moderate, the IRA was becoming increasingly radical in its attempts to force the British to withdraw from Northern Ireland. Initially in the 1970s, Irish Americans were sympathetic to the plight of the IRA and supported its agenda. But mainstream Irish America could not condone the extremism of the republican movement.

Another cause of the transformation in Irish American sentiment concerning the conflict in Northern Ireland lay in the decision of the Irish Republican Army to target civilians. The popularity of the Republican movement in the United States peaked in the early 1970s. American media and politicians were

³⁰ Reedy, 175

sympathetic to the cause of the IRA and it was during this period that funding to republican clubs was at its height. This increase in popularity was largely due to events in Northern Ireland. The two most important occurrences were the introduction of internment and Bloody Sunday. Internment was a policy enacted by Britain to reduce the level of violence. In August 1971, British security forces arrested approximately three hundred Northern Irish citizens on the charge that they were "'republicans and leftists.'"³¹ The suspected republicans were interned without trial in camps such as Long Kesh. The idea behind internment was to quickly restore law and order to the Northern Irish state. Unfortunately for the British, internment was an enormous publicity embarrassment. Reports of torture and mistreatment of the internees were widely circulated in the media especially in the United States. Although some papers supported internment as a method to control the situation in Northern Ireland, other condemned internment from the outset as a serious infringement of basic human rights. This negative press intensified when the first group of internees was released. In October 1971 Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* contended that all internment did was to further alienate and anger the Catholic community of Northern Ireland. He writes, "Internment has been a disaster." The British authorities did not intend for internment to be directed not only at Catholics, but also at all paramilitaries. But as of October only Catholics had been interned. Lewis argues

³¹ Geoffrey Godsell, "Anguish in Ulster: New Crackdown" *Christian Science Monitor*, August 10, 1971.

that although British Prime Minister Brian Heath had made progress in ending the conflict by attempting to bring together the Southern and Northern governments, the policy of internment only intensified Catholic distrust of the Ulster Protestant government and the British.³²

On January 30, 1972, thousands of Catholics in Londonderry participated in a civil rights march to protest discrimination. Feeling threatened by the sheer numbers of the marchers and by the various taunts hurled at them, British troops fired into the crowd killing thirteen protestors.³³ The thirteen deaths in Derry incensed Irish Americans. Many began to care again about the situation in Northern Ireland. Frank Donovan, an American journalist, contended, "The shooting deaths of 13 Catholics by British troops on January 30 in Londonderry swept away much of the apathy that Irish-Americans have had toward their native land." Whereas previously, the majority of Irish Americans had been almost exclusively concerned about improving their lives in the United States, Bloody Sunday invigorated their interest in Northern Ireland. According to Michael Corcoran of the American Committee for Ulster Justice, "'It takes violence to wake people up, and Bloody Sunday really woke people up.'³⁴ Previously many Irish Americans may have paid lip service to the idea of a united Ireland, but now they demanded it.

³² Anthony Lewis, "Tet in Belfast" *New York Times*, October 11, 1971.

³³ Bernard Weinraub, "Catholics Protest Killings; Reprisals Vowed", *New York Times*, February 1, 1972.

³⁴ Frank Donovan, "Derry Killings end US Apathy" *Washington Post*, March 16, 1972.

Various media and independent reports on internment that revealed the harsh conditions faced by interned Catholics shocked and angered Irish Americans. One of the leading Irish American newspapers the *Irish Echo* contained an editorial that stated, "There is no way to defend a policy of internment without trial. Men are being abducted by British forces on any premise." The editorial also stated, "When it comes to Ireland, Britain's traditional concept of democracy simply does not apply."³⁵ Irish American newspapers especially attacked the British government after Bloody Sunday. Another *Irish Echo* editorial on Bloody Sunday noted that this "was not the act of rational disciplined members of an army but that of men devoid of judgment understanding, compassion or humanity." The editorial called for Irish American involvement in affecting the situation. "It is up to all of us to renew our dedication to the cause of justice in Northern Ireland and to the reunification of Ireland as one nation free and independent."³⁶

In "Anguish in Ulster: New Crackdown," reporter Geoffrey Godsell described the policies of the IRA, "Their aim is to use the present crisis to force the British to throw their hand in and to bring about by violent means the reunification of the two parts of Ireland."³⁷ With the controversies surrounding Bloody Sunday and internment, it appeared that these IRA policies might succeed. According to Andrew Wilson, in *Irish America* and the

³⁵ "New Internment Camp" *Irish Echo*, January 22, 1972.

³⁶ "The Derry Massacre" *Irish Echo*, February 5, 1972.

³⁷ Geoffrey Godsell, "Anguish in Ulster: New Crackdown" *Christian Science Monitor*, August 10, 1971

Ulster Conflict, "The events between March and mid-July of 1972 marked a watershed in the prestige of the IRA."³⁸ At this time it seemed that the IRA and the republican movement would bring an end to the conflict in their favor. With the improved reputation of the IRA came a rise in the influence enjoyed by Irish American organizations in the United States. Irish Americans became convinced by the events of the early 1970s that the best method to reunify the island was to support the IRA through Irish American groups like the Aid for Northern Ireland or NORAID. In order to take advantage of the increase in Irish American nationalist sentiment, new chapters Irish Republican clubs were formed throughout the United States but especially in traditionally Irish American enclaves of New York, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco. Frank Donovan in the *Washington Post* estimates that in the months following Bloody Sunday about \$60,000 was sent to Northern Ireland per month.³⁹ Between \$1000 and \$5000 was sent from the Boston area per month. Money was collected in bars, churches and local homes. St. Patrick's Day became a forum for the nationalist agenda. Marchers wore pins with "England Get out of Ireland" and protests were demonstrated against internment and the continued presence of British troops in Northern Ireland.⁴⁰ After Bloody Sunday, Irish Americans in New York even participated in a boycott of British owned companies.

³⁸ Wilson, 69.

³⁹ Frank Donovan, "Derry Killings end US Apathy" *Washington Post*, March 16, 1972

⁴⁰ Advertisement in *Irish Echo*, January 22, 1972.

These were all indicators of a rise in Irish American interest and concern about the situation in Northern Ireland.⁴¹

Aid for Northern Ireland or NORAID was the most influential Irish American organization in the 1970s. NORAID was formed in 1968 after the outbreak of the Troubles in Ulster. Native-born Irish dominated the leadership of NORAID. Old republicans who were forced to leave after the Civil War played an important role in the ranks of NORAID. These republicans were lifetime fighters for a reunified Ireland and were extremely dedicated to the cause. According to Wilson, they passed this dedication to their children and grandchildren. Another important faction of NORAID consisted of Catholics forced to leave Northern Ireland because of lack of employment opportunities. These immigrants were especially bitter towards the Unionist government in Northern Ireland because they attributed their departure to unionist discrimination against Catholics. The ranks of NORAID were further augmented with the arrival of new immigrants forced to flee from the Troubles. In order to avoid interment, many republican activists relocated to the United States and continued to aid the republican cause by raising money from Irish Americans. As Denis Clark writes in *Irish Blood*,

The people supporting the activist network in The United States are hard-bitten North Of Ireland types...They are not zany bog men or fatuous American blarney stone lovers. They are mostly people with direct experience with the Northern, steeped in its rancor and gritty as the stones of

⁴¹ "Derry Thirteen are not Forgotten" *Irish Echo* February 12, 1972.

Antrim. They do not shirk from dreadful acts. "'We will never give up! is their motto. ⁴²

These activists focused on raising money for charitable contributions to such in Northern Ireland for the families of the internees and of those who had died during the Troubles. As both Wilson and Holland note, it was a small but voracious group of Irish Americans who became active in the conflict. The majority of Irish Americans, while concerned about the events in Northern Ireland, did not participate in any Irish American nationalist organizations or attempt to alter the situation in Northern Ireland.

The events of the earlier 1970s also sparked the interest of a number of American politicians. The most influential and vocal of these politicians was Senator Edward Kennedy (D, Mass). In the 1960s, Kennedy supported the black civil right movement and the anti-war movement of the new Left. In concurrence with these ideals, Kennedy also supported the Catholic Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland. Kennedy was outraged by internment and Bloody Sunday and he was an outspoken critic of the British government's involvement in Northern Ireland. In a letter written to the *New York Times* in February 1972, Kennedy stated, "The notion that America should be blind to killing and violence and repression and torture anywhere in the world contradicts our basic heritage...America has a role to play in Ulster."⁴³ He demanded that the British government suspend the Ulster

⁴² Clark, 128?

government and that it introduce direct rule from Westminster. He also demanded that the British forces be gradually withdrawn from Northern Ireland. Although Kennedy did not intend to provide support for militants in Northern Ireland, this is in fact what he did. According to Wilson, Kennedy's rhetoric often echoed that of the militant Irish American republicans. Irish American publications endorsed Kennedy's views.⁴⁴ Irish Americans did not separate Kennedy's position from that of such as groups as the NORAID. Wilson writes, "Although Kennedy did not necessarily wish to promote republicanism in the United States, many Irish Americans could not perceive a difference between his statements and the policy positions issued by NORAID."⁴⁵ Because of this, the republican movement in the United States received a boost from Kennedy's condemnation of the British government's involvement in Northern Ireland.

The popularity of the republican movement in the early 1970s was short-lived. As Jack Holland writes, in the *American Connection*, "It was clear that the worse things were for Northern Ireland's Catholics, the better it was for NORAID's fundraising efforts."⁴⁶ During the late 1970s, NORAID was no longer able to raise as much money for Northern Irish republicans. This was largely due to the targeting of civilian "commercial targets" by the IRA. Hoping to force the British to withdraw from Northern Ireland, the IRA drastically stepped up its military campaign. On

⁴³ Kennedy Edward, "U.S Role in Ulster," *New York Times*, February 5, 1972.

⁴⁴ "Kennedy Urges British Leave; ACJU delegates Lobby Congress," *Irish Echo*, February 5, 1972.

⁴⁵ Wilson, 78?

July 21, 1972, the provisional IRA set off twenty-two bombs throughout Belfast resulting in nine deaths and many injuries. This was just the beginning of IRA violence. They planted more bombs in pubs, hotels and Protestant neighborhoods. These violent tactics resulted in vehement criticism from the American media. Newspapers that had previously been sympathetic to the republican plight in Northern Ireland condemned the violence of the IRA. After one bombing incident, *The Chicago Tribune* castigated the IRA "What possible justification could anyone claim for this cruelty? What patriotic or political goal is achieved by so mutilating an innocent person?" The attacks even stretched to the other side of the Atlantic. In August 1973, a letter bomb was delivered to the British embassy where a secretary opened it. When it exploded, her left hand was blown off. Senseless and tragic attacks like these disgusted the American public and the American media. Irish American activists worried about the effect of the IRA's violent campaign on Irish American moderates and the negative press it caused. Activists correctly feared that they would be seriously hampered in their ability to garner support for the movement in the United States. Wilson writes that the bombing "atrocities alienated potential sympathizers in the Irish-American community and undermined the fervor for republicanism that had grown after Bloody Sunday. Jack Holland reports that after the IRA began targeting civilian targets, funds raised by NORAID drastically declined. After 1972 NORAID

⁴⁶ Holland, 87

was bringing in over \$200,000, but by 1976 the reported earnings were only \$119,000. Clearly, the IRA's campaign against civilians weakened its position amongst Irish Americans.

The IRA campaign of terror continued throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. The IRA extended its attacks beyond the state of Northern Ireland to the British mainland. On September 29, 1975 a team of IRA members planted a bomb in the Mayfair District of London, one of the chief financial areas of the city. This bomb injured many tourists and increased the amount of anti-republican press in the United States. The incident that even more severely hurt the republican movement involved another bomb in London. This one, detonated in 1976, almost killed Caroline Kennedy, daughter of President Kennedy. This attacked especially angered moderate Irish Americans who felt betrayed one of the most famous of their group was almost killed by IRA terrorists. No matter how much they supported the idea of a reunified Ireland, the majority of Irish Americans could not support these kinds of IRA tactics. As before, the American media recorded this change in sentiment within Irish America. Newspapers that had previously been sympathetic to the IRA, now urged Irish Americans to stop contributing money to any republican groups, especially NORAID. On December 10, 1975, an editorial in the Chicago Tribune stated, "Irish American who don't want to be part of this shabby act should resist whatever temptation there is to contribute to Irish organization that may be fronts for the terrorists." Through this campaign of targeting civilian areas, the IRA and, consequently

the republican movement, seriously weakened its position in the United States.

Another reason for the transformation in Irish American sentiment concerning the conflict in Northern Ireland was the creation of the Social Democratic Labor Party in 1969. Like Sinn Fein and the IRA, SDLP advocated the reunification of the entire island, but they also expunged violence as a means to achieve this end.

The late 1960's in Ireland was a period of intense turmoil. Like other groups such as African Americans in the United States, Catholics in Northern Ireland would no longer accept systematic discrimination. They were not treated equally in education, employment, housing or social services. They were seriously limited politically in 1922 when the first Northern Irish Prime Minister Sir James Craig ended the policy of proportional representation. PR or awarding the number of seats in an election according to amount votes received proportionally, helps insure that the minority has a substantial voice in governing. Craig is notorious for promising a "Protestant parliament for a Protestant people." This state sponsored form of discrimination against Catholics continued largely unchallenged until the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. In 1968 Londonderry was comprised of nearly two-thirds Catholic but they elect seats to the City Council while Unionists hold twelve. One Irish American editorial called this a "mockery of democracy."

The rise of the Civil Rights movement was a direct result of a new phenomenon in the Northern Irish Catholic population--the growth of a middle class. This growth was a direct result of increase in the amount of Catholics attending universities in Northern Ireland. Although the availability of social services was limited to Catholics, they did improve the lives of some. This resulted in the demand for more improvements and the end of discrimination. The Northern Irish Civil Rights Association was formed in 1968. The main function of the NICRA was to stage civil disobedience demonstrations to highlight discrimination in Northern Ireland. These demonstrations energized the Catholic population. As Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson note in Northern Ireland 1921-1996, "Almost the entire Catholic population became a united militant political force, at least for a short time in 1968-69." This "political force" participated in intense demonstrations that often led to violence throughout Northern Ireland. Bloody Sunday was an example of one of the NICRA demonstrations. The energy of the NICRA was channeled into a new political party in 1970--the Social and Democratic Labor party or SDLP.

SDLP was a distinctly new development and transformed both Northern Ireland and Irish America. Like Sinn Fein, the political arm of the IRA, SDLP advocated a reunited Ireland, but this was secondary to ending Catholic discrimination. The most important contrast between the SDLP and Sinn Fein was SDLP that rejected of violence as a method to achieve reunification. As a

constitutional nationalist party, the leadership of SDLP contended that the only legitimate way to reunite the island was through politics and compromises. There could be no end of the Northern Irish state unless the majority of Northern Irish citizens agreed to it. This emphasis on politics in the Catholic populous was unique. Sinn Fein, although often elected to seats in both the Stormont parliament and Westminster, refused to accept these seats since participating in government of Northern Ireland would be recognizing its legitimacy and Sinn Fein vowed never to do that. SDLP chose to work within the political system of Northern Ireland to exact change. The other political party before SDLP was the Northern Irish Labor Party but this party was severely limited because of its unpopular decision to accept partition. the IRA and referred to them as terrorists. Through

The rise of SDLP seriously weakened the position and attraction of the IRA in the United States. On top of their increasing disillusionment with the IRA, the constitutional nationalist movement gave Irish Americans an alternative method for their nationalist desires. They hoped that SDLP could cause the reunification but without the violence associated with the republican movement. The constitutional nationalist method was closer to the American idea of democracy. When one wants to reform the American system, one works within the system using political means. One does not reject the legitimacy of the government and work outside its realm in order to change it.

The leadership of SDLP sought to convince Irish Americans to stop funding NORAIID in order to end the violence in Northern Ireland. The most influential leader in both Northern Ireland and the United States was John Hume. Like republican leaders, Hume also traveled throughout the United States in order to gain support for SDLP. With his reasoned arguments he was able to influence many Irish Americans.⁴⁷ Here again Senator Edward Kennedy reveals much about the changing nature of Irish America. Kennedy's support for the IRA had seriously declined when it had started to target civilian areas. Understanding Kennedy's influence amongst Irish Americans, Hume actively sought to convince him to reject the IRA and to endorse the policies of SDLP.⁴⁸ After meeting with Hume, Kennedy public criticized the tactics of the IRA and referred to them as terrorists. Through his connection with Senator Kennedy, Hume was then able to influence other prominent Irish American politicians. Most importantly were those who came to be known as the Four Horsemen of Irish American politics. The Four Horsemen, including Kennedy, were Speaker of the House Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, Senator Daniel Moynihan, and Governor Hugh Carey of New York. As a direct result of the Four Horsemen's contact with John Hume, they issued an extremely influential statement on St. Patrick's Day in 1977. In the statement they appealed to Irish Americans to "embrace this goal of peace and to renounce any action that promotes the current violence or provides support of encouragement to it."

⁴⁷ Wilson, 114 *John Hume: Statesman of the Troubles* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1984)

organization engaged in violence." This was clear condemnation of the IRA and its violent campaign.⁴⁹ Funding for NORAID declined even further after the issuing of the St. Patrick's statement, which was widely praised by the American media. Clearly the rise of SDLP resulted in the curtailment of the popularity of the republican movement in the United States.

The Agreements

One of the tenets of SDLP was to encourage talks between all the factions involved in the conflict in Northern Ireland. This included nationalists, unionists, and the governments of both Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. These talks resulted in a number of agreements between the various groups such as the Sunningdale Agreement, the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Downing Street Declaration. Although each of these agreement was an important steps in the path to peace, the most important agreement was the Good Friday agreement of 1998. This particular agreement was a direct result of Irish American support of the constitutional nationalist movement in Northern Ireland and a culmination of Irish American involvement in the conflict.

The Sunningdale Agreement between SDLP and the British government in 1972 was the direct result of the policies of SDLP. In March of 1972, Westminster assumed direct rule of Northern Ireland and paroled the Stormont parliament. The Sunningdale agreement was an attempt to restore a local government in Northern Ireland, but this time as a power-sharing executive.

⁴⁹Barry White. John Hume: Statesman of the Troubles (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1984)

Moderate Catholics and republicans thought that the agreement sold out to the Protestants and that it would not result in the end of partition. However, the agreement primarily failed due to angry protests staged by unionists, who felt that it relinquished too much power to Catholics.

The Sunningdale Agreement was also greeted with mixed emotions in the United States. Moderate Irish Americans believed that it was a positive measure that might end the violence between Catholics and Protestants. The American media praised the agreement as a significant step towards peace. Irish Americans Republicans had an entirely different reaction towards the agreement. They recognized it as a triumph for the constitutional nationalists, which seriously weakened the influence of the republican movement in the United States. If Irish Americans believed that constitutional nationalists could achieve reunification, then the funding for republicans would almost surely be diverted to SDLP. For this reason republicans welcomed the failure of the agreement. But despite this failure, the agreement was still huge victory for SDLP in the United States and the party gained more influence since it proved that SDLP could exact nationalist goals in Northern Ireland.

The most significant agreement before the Good Friday Agreement was the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1984. This agreement, signed by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald, was the result of a long series of talks between the

⁴⁹ Wilson, 132

two governments. This agreement was yet another attempt to reintroduce a local government back to Northern Ireland. The most significant and controversial aspect of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was that it would officially involve the Irish Republic in the governing of the Northern State. Like the previous Sunningdale Agreement, the Anglo-Irish Agreement met with both strong support and opposition Northern Ireland and the United States. The constitutional nationalists viewed it as a monumental step in the peace process and one that might eventually lead to reunification of the whole island. Most republicans viewed the agreement with distrust since they feared that it would seriously limited their influence in Northern Ireland and that it was not a drastic enough measure. Republicans inherently distrusted the British government and could not put much faith into any agreements brokered with them. Unionists vehemently opposed the agreement. Like republicans, unionists were not involved in any of the Anglo-Irish negotiations. Also like republicans, they viewed the British as unreliable, albeit allies. Once again the agreement in the end failed to result in a devolved parliament. The failure was due primarily to violent protest from loyalist paramilitaries who would not allow any threat to partition to survive. This inability to reassure Protestants that their identity and way of life would be preserved in a reunified Ireland was the main failure of constitutional nationalists and of SDLP.

Irish American politicians were essential to the process surrounding the Anglo-Irish Agreement. As usual Senator Edward

Kennedy was exceptionally influential. He continued his relationship with SDLP leader John Hume. On St. Patrick's Day 1981 Kennedy and other Irish American politicians formed a new group called the Friends of Ireland, to advocate the constitutional nationalist position in the United States. The first action taken by the new group was to convince President Ronald Reagan to issue a statement that urged Irish Americans to stop donating money to groups involved in terrorism. Reagan's statement further limited the appeal of the IRA in the United States. In 1984 when talks between Thatcher and Fitzgerald were in danger of falling apart, Hume contacted the Friends of Ireland and urged them to get Reagan's support for the continuation of the talks. In a meeting with Thatcher at the end of December, he encouraged her to continue meeting with the Irish Taoiseach and he also offered to increase American action against the republican terrorists in the United States. It was due to this kind of American involvement that the talks were able to continue, leading to the signing of the agreement in 1985.

The Anglo-Irish agreement was greeted with great enthusiasm in the United States amongst moderate Irish Americans. These kinds of negotiations, they thought, would eventually end the conflict and stop the continued violence. The Agreement also proved to them that SDLP could instigate major changes in Northern Ireland through politics. A campaign of violence was not needed in order to end partition. The Anglo-Irish Agreement

revealed that the SDLP could end the conflict by working within the system.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement depicted the constructive role that the United States could play in finding a peaceful end to the conflict in Northern Ireland. The American government had the ability to encourage negotiations and meetings between the parties involved. By avoiding direct involvement in the conflict, the United States can create an environment in which those involved can meet and actually discuss possible solutions. The United States role would be essential in future negotiations.

After the failure of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1986, John Hume and SDLP continued to press for talks to continue. The next major break through in Northern Ireland occurred on December 15, 1993 when the Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds and the British Prime Minister John Major signed the Downing Street Declaration. The Declaration reaffirmed their dedication to not imposing anything on the people of either Ireland or Northern Ireland without their ascent. The intention behind the agreement was to dissuade paramilitaries from continuing their campaigns. In order to dispel the fears of unionists, Reynolds recognized the right of Northern Ireland to self-determination and vowed not to force the area into becoming part of the Republic. Likewise the British government also sought to assuage the doubts of nationalists. The Declaration states that the British government had "no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland."⁵⁰ With this

⁵⁰ Downing Street Declaration

commitment the British government hoped to demonstrate that it did not threaten Northern Ireland. Since the IRA's campaign is based on the perception of Britain as the enemy, this would entail that the campaign of violence was no longer necessary. This initially proved successful when the IRA declared a ceasefire in response to the Declaration so that further peace negotiations could take place. The Downing Street Declaration marked another turning point in the conflict. It was yet another example of the transformation of the discourse in Northern Ireland. It was not simply about military tactics and violence but brokering about a political resolution to the conflict. These kinds of talks and attempts to bring all the parties together for negotiations would lead to a substantial peace process, which would result in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

Conclusion: The Good Friday Agreement of 1998

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 marked not only a breakthrough in the peace process in Northern Ireland but a culmination of Irish American involvement in the conflict. The Good Friday Agreement is a dual triumph of Irish American influence and constitutional nationalist policies. As Irish Americans became more assimilated into the American mainstream, they became increasingly dissatisfied with the radical tactics of the IRA. This dissatisfaction led them to look for an alternate method to achieve the nationalist agenda. They found this alternative in the non-violent democratic policies of constitutional nationalists as represented by SDLP. It was this

interplay of these factors that led to the brokering of the Good Friday Agreement.

One man, Sen. George Mitchell, embodies the transformation of the role of Irish Americans in the conflict in Northern Ireland. Mitchell, a successful Irish American politician, was disgusted by the terrorist tactics of the IRA and wanted to end the violence in Northern Ireland. In his role as chairman of the peace process, he was able to create an environment in which all parties could meet and discuss possible compromises. In this manner, Irish America and the United States played an essential role in the brokering of the Good Friday Agreement. This position could not have been possible with the gradual transformation of the Irish American community from 1960 to 1998.

The Good Friday Agreement was the result of extended talks between all parties involved in Northern Ireland. This was a unique feature of the Good Friday Agreement, one that was not part any of the previous agreements. Unionists, republicans, and the Irish and British governments all met in order to reach this solution.

The United States oversaw the brokering of the agreement. The chairman of the Peace Talks was former United States Senator George Mitchell. In his memoir, *Making Peace*, Mitchell remarks that one of the most difficult aspects of the peace process was convincing all the players to actually meet with one another. Unionist minister Ian Paisley, one of the most vehement anti-nationalist ever, refused to be in the same room as any Sinn Fein

members. In fact Sinn Fein was almost not included in the talks at all. The Unionist and the British government refused to negotiate with anyone involved in terrorism. One of the first issues that the peace process participants had to deal with was decommissioning of IRA weapons. Unionists insisted that the IRA must decommission all of its weapons in order to participate in the talks. Sinn Fein and IRA contended that decommissioning could begin after a settlement was reached. Mitchell led a commission to determine the decommissioning problem. It was determined that decommissioning weapons would be an ongoing process and that Sinn Fein could join the discussions with parallel decommissioning. It was dilemmas like this one that the United States could solve by creating an environment that the participants could reach some sort of compromise. According to Mitchell, the reason that he as an American could orchestrate this agreement was that he, as an Irish American, understood the problem but could also remain impartial as an outsider.

The strength of the Good Friday Agreement was that it included gains and concessions for all the groups involved in the conflict. The Unionists gained assurances that there could be no reunification of the island unless it was voted on by the citizens of Northern Ireland. Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Republic 1936 Constitution, which made a claim on the territory of Northern Ireland, would be altered so that the state of Northern Ireland was officially recognized. But Unionists had to agree to a power-sharing executive that would include Sinn Fein.

Sinn Fein would be able to participate in the executive in Northern Ireland but it would have to convince the IRA to renounce its campaign of violence and to decommission all of its weapons. The agreement states, "All participants accordingly reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organizations." They were given a timeline of two years when all weapons had to be taken out of the hands of the paramilitaries. All republican prisoners would be released from prison at certain intervals. Constitutional nationalists achieved a major goal in that it was their tactics that resulted in the agreement. The agreement created a North-South governing body "with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government, to develop consultation, co-operation and action within the island of Ireland-including through implementation on an all-island and cross-border basis." This was the first time that Unionists agreed to allow the South a say in the governing of the North.

The Good Friday Agreement contained aspects of the previous agreements but because the peace process included all the groups involved in the situation it was a unique development. This was a direct result of the American involvement in the process and a rise of constitutional nationalist policies.

Studying the history Good Friday Agreement reveals much about the changing nature of the Northern Irish conflict and of Irish America. At the height of IRA's popularity in the United States, such an agreement would never have been possible. Britain

would never abandon the unionists because of a campaign of terror. The groups never would have agreed to talk to one another much less agree on any compromises. From 1960 until the signing of the agreement in 1998, Irish America was transformed. Whereas Irish Americans were initially sympathetic to the plight of the IRA and viewed them as freedom fighters or heroic rebels, as the IRA became more radical, Irish Americans began to consider them terrorists and perpetrators of senseless violence. One of the causes of this change was as Irish Americans assimilated into American society they became less inclined to support extremism in Northern Ireland. Considering this tempering of Irish America, it is not surprising that when IRA campaign began to include civilian targets, republicans were condemned as terrorists by Irish America. The rise of constitutional nationalism as a viable alternative to the militant republican movement further transformed Irish American opinion concerning the conflict. Constitutional Nationalists sought a political solution to the conflict that would have to be agreed on in a democratic process by everyone on the island.

It is important to study the history of the Irish American involvement in Northern Ireland because it reveals much about the role of the United States in foreign conflicts. The Irish American experience exemplifies an ethnic group in the United States employing the machines of the U.S government to influence the situation in their country of origin. In the post-Cold War world the role of the United States is to create an environment

in which conflicting groups can negotiate to reach a settlement. We have seen this not only in Northern Ireland, but also in the Middle East and, hopefully, in the Balkans. Although the conflict continues to some extent in Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement represents a wonderful opportunity for the Troubles to cease once and for all. This would not have been possible without the influence of Irish Americans.

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