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Civil Rights in Black and Green: Towards a Transatlantic Understanding of the Civil Rights Movements in the United States and Northern Ireland

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CIVIL RIGHTS IN BLACK AND GREEN:
TOWARDS A TRANSATLANTIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE CIVIL
RIGHTS MOVEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES AND NORTHERN
IRELAND

AN HONORS THESIS
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TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Due to the lack of recognition for the solidarity between movements for civil rights, little formal scholarship acknowledging the relationship between African Americans and Nationalists in Northern Ireland exists. Nationalists in Northern Ireland, however, have long identified with African American civil rights activists in a cross-cultural quest for equality. From Northern Ireland's very first protests against discrimination, civil rights campaigners firmly aligned themselves with the ideological framework modeled in the United States. In this thesis, I explore the interconnectedness of civil rights struggles in the United States and in Northern Ireland through the use of scholarly, primary, and secondary documents.

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PREFACE

I first traveled to Selma, Alabama, during my first year at Macalester College. It was January Term and I had enrolled in a course entitled the “Civil Rights Movement: History and Consequences” offered by the Higher Education Consortium of Urban Affairs (HECUA). Over the course of the month, we crisscrossed the southern United States asking questions, talking with people, and analyzing the lessons of the civil rights movement and their effects on the contemporary historical moment. While many powerful lessons from this trip continue to inform both my personal and academic pursuits, my time in Selma, Alabama, has remained on my mind for the past four years.

When I first arrived in Selma, Alabama, I had a very basic understanding of the events of Bloody Sunday that had transpired there on March 7, 1965. On this day lawmen attacked civil rights marchers as they attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. What I had not thought of, however, was the ways in which the events of Bloody Sunday were perceived around the world.

One of my assignments that January was to look critically at the ways in which particular events were covered in the mainstream US press, the “Negro” press, and the international press. While I was not assigned the topic of comparing and contrasting Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama, USA, and Bloody Sunday in Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland, I was nonetheless attracted to the topic: the seeds of interest had been planted.

That January I began an intellectual journey that has continued for the past four years and will continue to intrigue me for years to come. The Spring semester of my Junior year of college, I could not resist the opportunity to study abroad in Northern Ireland. I arrived on the island with my eyes and ears open to any information I could

absorb about this relationship between the United States and Northern Ireland. Living in Derry/Londonderry, a city located in Northern Ireland near the border of the Republic of Ireland, I began to see imagery that I had traditionally associated with the US civil rights movement. I was particularly taken aback when I saw pictures of civil rights workers in Northern Ireland marching under the banner of “We Shall Overcome” which I had previously, and exclusively, associated with the movement for civil rights in the United States. At this point I knew I wanted to explore the relationship between civil rights movements on both sides of the Atlantic.

For the past four years, I have felt wholly unsatisfied by the limited amount of scholarship that exists surrounding the relationship between Blacks in the United States and Catholics in Northern Ireland. This project is the first step in my exploration of the connections made and sustained between the United States and Northern Ireland throughout the years. In order to understand the contemporary relationships, it is necessary to understand the historical antecedents that have collectively constructed the present. While the ensuing discussion is not exhaustive, my sincere hope is that it will shed more light on a complex history and provide a framework for future investigation into the continuing dialogue between Black America and Catholic Northern Ireland.

1. INTRODUCTION

CIVIL RIGHTS IN BLACK AMERICA AND CATHOLIC NORTHERN IRELAND

THE STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Civil rights activists in Northern Ireland identified in a positive way with the nonviolent struggle for equality across the Atlantic led by Martin Luther King, Jr.¹ Borrowing slogans from the American civil rights movement and self-identifying as ‘Ulster’s White Negroes,’ most, if not all, of Northern Ireland’s key civil rights activists maintained they were influenced and informed by the Black American experience.² From the very first protests against discrimination, Northern Ireland campaigners firmly aligned themselves with the ideological framework of nonviolence modeled in the United States. Various actors and participants in the Northern Ireland civil rights movement empathized with prominent figures in the nonviolent movement in the United States as campaigners expressed “a bit of fellow-feeling for John Lewis” and other vanguard activists and recognizable organizers in the US civil rights movement.³ Northern Ireland

¹ It is important to understand that nonviolence is part of a larger international conversation. Of particular interest for this project are the ways in which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was influenced by the philosophies of nonviolent civil disobedience used by Mahatma Gandhi in India. In his autobiography, King expresses:

The whole concept of *Satyagraha* (*Satya* is truth which equals love, and *agraha* is force; *Satyagraha*, therefore, means truth force or love force) was profoundly significant to me...The intellectual and moral satisfaction that I failed to gain from the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, the revolutionary methods of Marx and Lenin, the social contracts theory of Hobbes, the "back to nature" optimism of Rousseau, the superman philosophy of Nietzsche, I found in the nonviolent resistance philosophy of Gandhi (King 23-24).

Indeed, King drew from Gandhi’s teachings in India and applied them to the movement for civil rights in the US and, similarly, civil rights activists in Northern Ireland looked to King as an exemplar of nonviolence. Simply, the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland drew from a rich tradition of nonviolent ideology spread through global influences.

² Brian Dooley, *Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland and Black America* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1998) 3.

³ Dooley 3.

civil rights leader Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh attempted to encapsulate the sentiments of Northern Ireland's civil rights leaders and non-leadership participants alike as he expressed "Many of us looked to the civil rights struggles in America for our inspiration. We compared ourselves to the poor Blacks of the US ghettos..."⁴

Building on the legacy between the two struggles, the reciprocal relationship uniting African Americans and Northern Irish Catholics can be seen most poignantly in the nonviolent movement for civil rights in each context. To be sure, the nonviolent civil rights campaigns in the United States and Northern Ireland during the 1960s present a foundation on which to evaluate not only the nonviolent methods of struggle employed in both settings, but also the tools to explore the similar challenges the two movements faced, both grappling with the limits of nonviolence.

Whatever the level of knowledge made generally available to the public regarding the American civil rights movement, little doubt remains that it provided an important guide for Northern Ireland activists. What remains unknown about this historical alignment and transatlantic relationship, however, is the extent to which Northern Ireland campaigners for civil rights were influenced by their American counterparts and the importance ascribed to this relationship; no critical comparisons exist that analyze the similarities and differences between each nonviolent movement and no scholarship analyzes the specific and tangible ways in which one movement influenced or inspired the other. Current cursory acknowledgements of the identifications cultivated by campaigners in Northern Ireland in regard to their US counterparts simply leave critical questions unanswered, namely, how did traditionally marginalized communities in

⁴ Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh, Ulster's White Negroes: From Civil Rights to Insurrection (London: AK Press, 1994) 14.

Anglophone countries shape each other's movements for civil rights during the twentieth century?

THE STUDY AT HAND

Catholics in Northern Ireland saw themselves in similar situations to many African Americans who were effectively disenfranchised and living under the confines of *de facto* discrimination. Unfortunately, many written analyses overlook the importance of solidarity both within and between each struggle as they continue to understand each movement as a separate contribution, esteeming each to be wholly disparate experiences. None of the available research on the Northern Irish civil rights movement looks critically at the influences of the United States civil rights movement or unpacks the differences in outcome between the two movements and their lasting legacies. Nor does any existing scholarship focus on the experiences of Northern Irish civil rights campaigners themselves.

A closer look into the history and personal accounts of each movement, however, reveals a deeply intertwined relationship. In their own words, most, if not all, civil rights activists in Northern Ireland, from grassroots community activists to organizer Eamonn McCann and other influential leaders, strongly identified with and credited the nonviolent civil rights struggle in the United States as their model for social activism.⁵ Not only was the movement for civil rights in Northern Ireland greatly influenced by the strategic and tactical guidance of the civil rights movement in the United States, but it also disbanded in a manner similar to the American campaign. Given such self-identifications and

⁵ Dooley 52.

ideological alignments, these campaigns clearly cannot be viewed in isolation. One cannot take for granted the importance of solidarity and the continuing dialogue between equality agendas in the United States and Northern Ireland.

Simply stated, my study, in exploring the relationship between nonviolent movements for civil rights in Northern Ireland and the United States, ultimately presents implications for current sociopolitical challenges concerning equality, representation, and nonviolent resistance. To this caveat I also want to stress the fact that no two political, economic, cultural, and social systems are identical. Hence, when parallels, or, more importantly, comparisons are made throughout this work between elements and events in the countries under review, they are not intended to be absolute. However, because parallels exist, often bilaterally, this examination seems justified and, in turn, contributes toward a better and wider understanding of modern phenomenon of politically motivated violence and social movement.

Because solidarity between the two movements is not recognized, little formal information acknowledging the relationship between African Americans and Catholics in Northern Ireland exists. Indeed, the absence of focused analyses with regard to the interconnectedness of nonviolent civil rights struggles in the United States and in Northern Ireland indicates that their reciprocal relationship remains widely unknown. There is, quite simply, far too little appreciation for the parallels between movements in their individual realms of influence. In order to fully grasp the inspirations of social movements and the outcomes of the approaches champion in both the United States and Northern as separate entities, it is imperative to first appreciate the interrelated themes,

exchanges of ideas and methodologies, and dynamic relationships that have been forged on an international scale.

SIGNIFICANCE

This year marks the forty-first anniversary of what is widely considered to be the end of the modern civil rights movement in the United States stemming from the events of Bloody Sunday; in addition, it is the thirty-fourth year since the Northern Irish civil rights movement effectively dissolved following the country's own experience of Bloody Sunday. Though each movement and instance of Bloody Sunday occurred at separate historical moments, represented the quest for equality for African Americans in the United States and for Catholics in Northern Ireland, and evolved within distinctive sociopolitical contexts, the enduring legacies of the civil rights movement in the United States and the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland continue to remain at the forefront of their respective present-day societies. This sustained social and political presence of each movement is illustrated by the case of Edgar Ray Killen who was recently convicted of manslaughter forty-one years after killing three civil rights workers in Mississippi; and the purported commitment of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the paramilitary wing of Northern Ireland's largest nationalist party, Sinn Féin, to decommission its weaponry and pursue a purely political agenda. Simply stated, the influence of the civil rights movement in the United States is not restricted to the 1950s or 1960s, just as the influence of the movement for civil rights in Northern Ireland is not limited to the 1960s and 1970s: both movements continue to inform to the ongoing struggles for equality in the United States and in Northern Ireland.

To be sure, the nonviolent civil rights movement in the United States has shaped the nation's subsequent history, and the Northern Irish civil rights movement has forever changed the national landscape of the country; each movement, however, continues to be scholarly regarded as just that, separate campaigns with disparate methodological and structural organizations and effects. In reality, however, those involved in Northern Ireland's movement for civil rights directly trace their inspiration and attribute their methodology and adherence to the principle of nonviolence to what they had seen modeled previously in the United States⁶, as can be seen in a variety of personal accounts of the movement.

The influence of the nonviolent civil rights movement in the United States on the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland presents an important and fascinating case study that directly relates to the interconnectedness of the movements and methods and implementations of nonviolent direct action. Although social movement theorists and scholars of 'the Troubles,'⁷ the period of Northern Irish history marked by increased violence and political turbulence between the years of 1968 and 1994, have examined several interesting and important facets of the relationship between African Americans and Northern Irish Catholics⁸, these studies have been predominantly focused on static and incomplete analyses of the events themselves, not the context and content of the

⁶ Dooley 28-31.

⁷ "The Troubles" is a popular term used to refer to the period of Irish history commencing in 1968 with the campaign for civil rights in Northern Ireland and ending in 1994 with the Provisional IRA's declaration of a cease-fire.

⁸ Dooley 1+.

Bob Purdie, Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland (Belfast, Northern Ireland: Blackstaff Press, 1990) 1+.

ideological motivations, perspectives, and overarching goals of the people actually involved in the movements.

Looking at what they viewed as the successes of the nonviolent movement for civil rights in the United States, the members of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland departed drastically from the country's history of entrenched violence: drawing from the nonviolent movement in the US, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) renounced the use of violence and instead campaigned for political power and social equality through nonviolent protests, marches, and sit-ins. Though the end of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland on Bloody Sunday marked the beginning of increased paramilitary membership, violence, and deaths, stating that the nonviolent campaign in Northern Ireland did not achieve its goals or was not 'successful' obscures the poignant fact that Northern Irish movement drew from US in attempt to depart from a history of violence. Analyzing the nonviolent civil rights movement Northern Ireland is significant precisely because it underscores the achievements of the US nonviolent civil rights movement and the unprecedented shift away from violence Northern Ireland.

As violence continues to plague Northern Ireland and the civil rights movement in the United States remains alive and well in the collective national memory, now is the time to reconcile key questions about the nature of civic unrest, nonviolent resistance, and the influences and models informing movements for civil rights in a comparative and global context. Without understanding the frameworks of unrest and the interconnectivity of resistance, we cannot fully appreciate or understand the meanings of each movement nor the enduring legacies that each movement for civil rights has left on their respective societies and governments. My research provides a venue through which

both scholarly and lay communities can explore and better understand transatlantic movements for equality. Simply, my research creates an opportunity for individuals concerned with the democratic promise of equality to explore the existence and meaning of having a responsive and representative government.

We must begin to critically explore the sociopolitical legacies shaping society in both the United States and Northern Ireland and examine the historical antecedents that continue to inform equality agendas on an international scale. Only then will we be able to understand the roots of nonviolent collective action and discern the conditions conducive to violent agitation with an eye toward prevention.

A FEW WORDS ON TERMINOLOGY

The terminology dealing with many aspects of life and identity in Northern Ireland are heavily charged with partisan inflections. I will use such terminology only to identify the region, its structures, and its inhabitants, and not to judge the positions implied. Thus, Northern Ireland is a reference to that area of northeastern Ireland, divided into six counties, and forming a political unit in the United Kingdom (although it is also claimed by the Republic of Ireland).

Due to the peculiar history of Northern Ireland, it has been common practice to equivocally associate Catholic with Nationalist and Protestant with Unionist. While exceptions to this convention certainly exist, religious identification and political allegiance often go hand-in-hand in Northern Ireland. Despite the inherent shortcomings and omissions of collective classification, the analysis that follows would be nearly impossible without accepting this convention. Scholars have frequently divided Northern

Ireland into categories of Nationalists and Unionists, while others have drawn the line of comparison between Catholics and Protestants, and others have employed these communal descriptions interchangeably. While there is no ‘correct’ method of categorizing identity, this discussion presumes that, *as a population*, Catholics are Nationalists, and Protestants, *as a group*, are Unionists for the simple reason that convention necessitates it.

Throughout my discussion of the United States, I use Black and African American interchangeably. I capitalize Black given the specific historical experience, diverse and varied as it is, of African Americans in the United States. Black constitutes a proper noun as it refers to a specific cultural group and my choice of capitalization reflects this consideration.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing topical scholarship and literature surrounding each movement for civil rights can shed light on the question at hand. Two primary bodies of text speak to the overarching topic: scholarly literature and autobiographical accounts.

Academic discussions of both the nonviolent civil rights movement in the United States and the nonviolent civil rights movement in Northern Ireland treat each movement as either separate entities or provide only cursory exploration and analysis of the relationship between movements. Representative of the first approach to the topic is Bob Purdie's Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland. Purdie concludes:

Although the black civil rights movement in the US has been an inspiration, strictly speaking it was not a model. There is no evidence that any of the founders or leaders of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement ever visited the Southern United States, consulted with any of the Black civil rights organizations, or even undertook a thorough study of the movement.⁹

A closer look into the history and personal accounts of each movement, however, challenges the limited and incomplete analysis advanced in the work of Purdie and his contemporaries by revealing a deeply intertwined relationship.

A second primary scholar working on the topic of comparative civil rights movements in the United States and in Northern Ireland is Brian Dooley. Dooley's core study, Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland and Black America, examines how the struggle for Black civil rights in the United States helped influence the movement for civil rights in Northern Ireland. Together these associations suggest that the appropriation of ideas from the US civil rights movement reflected a

⁹ Purdie 244.

mixture of strategic considerations and sincere beliefs in the parallels between the marginalization of African Americans and the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, given the expansive scope and ambitious timeframe of the book, Dooley does not offer an in-depth account or offer any effective answer as to *how* and to *what extent* the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland was shaped by the movement for civil rights in the United States: Dooley provides a framework that recognizes the two nonviolent movements as interconnected, but he does not explore the interrelated themes, exchanges of ideas and methodologies, and methods of mobilization that have been translated on an international scale.

The second strain of analysis addressing the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland in relation to the nonviolent civil rights movement in the United States is in the form of autobiographical accounts. Various first-hand and autobiographical accounts of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement speak to the strategies, goals, and ideological influences informing the Northern Ireland civil rights campaign (Grimaldi,¹⁰ Mullan,¹¹ Kerr,¹² Ó Dochartaigh.¹³) The first-hand accounts, while contributing to the broader understanding of those involved in the movement, neither analytically explain the extent to which these individuals were tactically and methodologically influenced by the US civil rights movement nor explicitly provide a critical context in which to situate the broader civil rights movement. While these accounts both help establish parallels

¹⁰ Fulvio Grimaldi, Blood in the Street (Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland: Guildhall Press, 1972).

¹¹ Don Mullan, ed., Bloody Sunday: Massacre in Northern Ireland: The Eyewitness Accounts (Niwot, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997).

¹² Adrian Kerr, ed., Perceptions: Cultures in Conflict (Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland: Guildhall Press, 1996).

¹³ Ó Dochartaigh 14.

between the formal demands of each movement (including equal opportunity in employment, access to public facilities, and the right to vote) and also show the ways in which the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland drew upon nonviolent ideologies modeled in the United States, they lack discussions of meaning ascribed to the transatlantic relationship and, as individual works, do not speak to the diversity of experiences surrounding the campaign for civil rights: no critical comparative frameworks exist in which to discuss and analyze these first-hand accounts in order to arrive at a more conclusive understanding of the complex transatlantic relationship between movements for civil rights.

Another essential exploration of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland is Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh's Ulster's White Negroes: From Civil Rights to Insurrection. This first-hand account of the evolution of the Northern Irish civil rights movement uncovers the personal and organizational associations that Catholics in Northern Ireland forged with African Americans due to what they saw as a similar inequality of condition. While Ó Dochartaigh effectively uncovers the similar inequalities faced by both Catholics in Northern Ireland and Blacks in the United States, he devotes no attention to the context in which each movement was occurring and fails to address the outcomes experienced by the movements both in the United States and in Northern Ireland, each grappling with the limits of nonviolence. Simply, there is no exploration of what the actual means of nonviolence were, how they compared in two different contexts, and why the movements yielded radically dissimilar conclusions.

Despite their individual shortcomings, these autobiographical accounts offer insights into the very motivations, ideologies, identities, and methodologies shaping the

civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. Given these self-identifications and ideological alignments, nonviolent civil rights campaigns clearly cannot be viewed in isolation: one cannot take for granted the importance of solidarity and the continuing dialogue between equality agendas in the United States and Northern Ireland. To further shed light on this important connection and the influence of the United States on Northern Ireland, it is necessary to cultivate a richer and more inclusive understanding of the systems and ideologies shaping each movement. Situating the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland and the civil rights movement in the United States in a comparative framework sheds light on the overall effectiveness, the ideologies maintained, the tactics employed, and the sociopolitical factors surrounding each movement.

In sum, previous research and autobiographical accounts show that individuals involved in the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland were shaped, to at least some extent, by their counterparts in the United States. While it is clear that both leaders and marchers in the civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland took cues from what they knew of the movement in the United States, the extent to which Northern Irish civil rights activists were influenced by the United States, the impact that social and political contexts had on shaping each movement, and the undergirding reasons why each movement disbanded in the manners they did remain ambiguous. The opportunities for new and original research in the contexts mentioned above signify that this comparative study will be a unique and necessary contribution to both the historiography and contemporary analysis of both the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland and the movement for civil rights in the United States.

The reciprocal influences between movements of nonviolence in the United States and Northern Ireland warrant further exploration. Given the underpinning relationship and interconnectedness between each movement, there is a plethora of work to be done in order to examine the solidarity and lessons imparted by these two complementary quests for equality. With the active and violent conflict escalating following the events of Bloody Sunday and continuing to plague Northern Ireland to date and the legacy of the US civil rights movement and its brutal end on Bloody Sunday remaining at the forefront of the nation's collective memory, it is imperative that we begin to critically explore the sociopolitical factors shaping each country and movement and understand the alliances forged on an international scale. Only then will we be better equipped to understand the roots of nonviolent collective action and discern the conditions conducive to violent agitation with an eye toward prevention. In the end, the civil rights movements in the United States and Northern Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s present a foundation on which to evaluate not only the nonviolent ideologies and methods of struggle employed in both settings, but also the tools to explore the similar challenges the two campaigns faced, both struggling with the boundaries of nonviolence as displayed in each context on Bloody Sunday.

3. METHODS

REVISITING THE VERDICTS OF HISTORY

Northern Ireland is in somewhat of a sociopolitical conundrum and is currently situated at a critical historical moment. Drawing on US history as a frame of reference, analysis of a movement or historical occurrence cannot immediately follow the event itself. Today, in 2006, past social injustices and inequalities are, at least to some extent, acknowledged. Past wrongs are deemed 'safe' as there is a measure of social and political distance between the events and the people and sociopolitical moment in which they occurred: blame is not directly assigned, and there is no pressing danger to those involved or implicated.

To date, barely thirty-five years have passed since the civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland dissolved.¹⁴ In the wake of Bloody Sunday, both traditions of society in Northern Ireland, Protestant and Catholic, remained in a fragile and uneasy position. Bloody Sunday occurred on Sunday, January 20, 1972, when British soldiers killed thirteen civilians in the streets. The victims were participating in a civil rights march in Derry/Londonderry. The days following Bloody Sunday witnessed an unprecedented increase in Irish Republican Army (IRA) and republican paramilitary membership and violence, a considerable feat, given the Island's particular history of violence. The poisonous aftermath of Bloody Sunday spread to Dublin in the Republic of Ireland where the British Embassy was burned to the ground in retaliation against the British.

Following the ghastly events of Bloody Sunday, the British government appointed Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery, to investigate the events of the day. This report was published in April of 1972, yet many saw it as wholly inadequate, even false, further entrenching the already deep communal divides in Northern Ireland. Lord Widegey's

¹⁴ Dooley 117.

report has been widely criticized: according to Don Mullan's account in Bloody Sunday:

Massacre in Northern Ireland:

In particular, the report contained many internal inconsistencies; it failed to resolve the conflicting evidence and to give to the evidence its due and proper weight; it failed to recognise the completely unreliability of the forensic evidence; it incorrectly applied the law on lethal force; and it failed to reach conclusions that were justified by the facts.¹⁵

Lord Widgery's report ultimately reawakened and fueled outrage from the

Nationalist community:

A fresh wave of nationalist indignation followed publication of the report into Bloody Sunday carried out by the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery. His conclusion that the firing of some paratroopers had 'bordered on the reckless' brought a deluge of criticism and allegations that it was a 'whitewash' and a cover-up rather than an honest attempt to find out how fourteen people came to be shot by the soldiers.¹⁶

Indeed, to Nationalists, the Widgery Report was seen as an entirely

unacceptable and false representation of the events of Bloody Sunday.

QUALITATIVE DATA: ORAL HISTORY AS EVIDENCE

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz argues that societies have a characteristic order, but that this organization is incomplete, incongruous, and vague. It is at these conflicting sites where, according to Geertz, "human life takes shape within a moving and diversified frame of socially constructed meanings."¹⁷ These sites that "generate and regenerate the

¹⁵ Mullan 26-27.

¹⁶ David McKittrick and David McVea, Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland (Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2002) 78.

¹⁷ Clifford Geertz, "Culture and Social Change: The Indonesian Case," *Man*, 19.4 (Dec. 1984): 513.

very subjectivity they pretend only to display”¹⁸ provide audiences with considerable opportunities to ‘read’ a society and truly explore its complexities. Geertz illustrates, for instance, in the case of the Balinese cockfight, how daily rituals and activities provide significant insights into much larger social, political, and cultural themes. According to Geertz, gender dynamics, power relations, and status hierarchies can all be ‘read’ from seemingly commonplace activities such as the cockfight. However, given that society’s underpinning structures and social mores are deeply embedded in “words, things, and conventionalized behavior,” which cannot always be uncovered or explained by qualitative methodologies alone, we must seek alternative sites in which unpack and draw meaning from these structures.

Geertz encourages his audiences to appreciate that social actions are larger than themselves, because “they are made to.”¹⁹ “It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers.”²⁰ Similarly, in this project I seek to converse with themes and individuals in foreign cultures and gain access to their conceptual world. I appreciate that thick description “grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions... [T]he essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to

¹⁸ Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 237.

¹⁹ Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973) 23.

²⁰ Geertz, Interpretations 16.

generalize within them.”²¹

My overarching task is to uncover the conceptual structures that informed the beliefs and actions of nonviolent civil rights activists in Northern Ireland. This paper’s use of comparative nonviolent social movements seeks to explore, in both the historical alignments and actions of everyday people, the complexities of identity construction and alignment in the United States and in Northern Ireland. Instead of focusing on outcomes or evaluating the ‘success’ of movements, this project attempts to unpack the intents and the production of meaning between traditionally marginalized communities in the United States and Northern Ireland.

THE STUDY AT HAND

In order to uncover the transnational influence of the nonviolent streams of the US civil rights movement on the nonviolent movement for civil rights in Northern Ireland, I rely on qualitative data and existing topical texts describing each movement and the conditions surrounding them. An analysis of the existing primary and autobiographical documents existing in the context of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland will reveal whether or not the movement in Northern Ireland and/or its campaigners identified with the US experience and nonviolent campaign for civil rights. I will be able to show, through an exploration of topical literature, that the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland drew its inspiration from the particular branches of the nonviolent movement in the United States and that campaigners in Northern Ireland modeled their movement off of what they had seen displayed in the United States.

²¹ Geertz, Interpretations 25-26.

In order to conduct my analysis and test my expectations, I first assemble topical documentation and identify the samples of materials. I draw documentation from three sources: primary and secondary documents from, and scholarly works on, the Northern Ireland civil rights movement, previously conducted and published interviews with campaigners for civil rights in Northern Ireland, and autobiographical materials written by those involved in the Northern Ireland campaign.

I look at autobiographies produced by campaigners in the Northern Ireland movement, as it is not feasible for me to conduct interviews or surveys or make direct observations so long after the events themselves. I use published interviews with leaders and members of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement during the height of the campaign, between 1964 and 1972. Three principal compilations of interviews include: 1) Adrian Kerr's Perceptions: Cultures in Conflict, 2) Don Mullan's Bloody Sunday: Massacre in Northern Ireland: The Eyewitness Accounts, and 3) Fulvio Grimaldi's Blood in the Street.

Additionally, I use autobiographical texts published by individuals involved in the movement for civil rights in Northern Ireland. The number of topical autobiographical texts available is manageable and, therefore, I utilize all sources I am able to obtain. Both forms of text can be easily located at public and academic libraries within the United States. For the purposes of my study, given the limited availability of historical documents, these texts will collaboratively be understood as representing existing literature about the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland.

For my analysis, I use autobiographical and scholarly documents published for public consumption. Where possible, I will rely on the words and sentiments of those

involved and affected by each movement and the events surrounding them. The advantage of relying on textual analysis and secondary sources of oral history is that it affords me access to firsthand knowledge of life around and shaped by the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. It affords political agency and the ability to speak of those individuals who have been previously silenced in history.²²

²² I take this opportunity to clarify and justify my methodological approach and decision to not rely solely on primary sources including newspapers, letters, and interviews. Using primary documents, such as newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, in my research would potentially solidify the sentiments and motivations of individuals involved in the struggle for civil rights in Northern Ireland. The time and geographical limitations I am operating under, however, have made this approach simply unfeasible for this project. Furthermore, I feel it necessary to clarify that primary sources in Northern Ireland pose particular concerns. In Northern Ireland, as was my experience while studying there, academic experts and community members alike were guarded in their written and spoken statements. Given the very real concerns many individuals in Northern Ireland have about their personal well-being and anonymity within their community, I do not feel the use of primary documents alone would necessarily guarantee the authenticity of statements or beliefs.

4. MODELING NONVIOLENCE: THE BASIS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

MANY VOICES: THE CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Spanning the course of US history, Black Americans have resisted the subordinate statuses forced upon them via institutionalized racism and systems of exploitation. The US civil rights movement fits squarely into this rich tradition of resistance. Similar to exhibitions of slave agency and resistance²³ and the Garvey “Back-To-Africa” movement,²⁴ the civil rights movement was a highly structured exhibition of resistance and agency.

Though past expressions of resistance and agency informed the civil rights movement, the movement, broadly defined, departed from past protest traditions. As Aldon D. Morris poignantly articulates:

The modern civil rights movement broke from the protest tradition of the past in at least two crucial ways. One, it was the first time that large masses of blacks directly confronted and effectively disrupted the normal functioning of groups and institutions thought to be responsible for their oppression. The hallmark of the modern civil rights movement is that these mass confrontations were widespread and sustained over a long period of time in the face of heavy repression. Two, this was the first time in American history that blacks adopted nonviolent tactics as a mass technique for bringing about social change. For these reasons the modern civil rights movement demands attention on its own terms.²⁵

Indeed, the civil rights movement’s departure from the past warrants exploration. The movement’s attempt to capture the prevailing ideological theme of nonviolence, as well as major personalities and events, of the civil rights movement in the United States

²³ For further discussion of slave agency, see Walter Johnson’s Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999).

²⁴ See Tony Martin’s Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (Dover, Mass., The Majority Press, 1976.)

²⁵ Aldon D. Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change (New York: The Free Press, 1984) xi.

in the 1950s and 1960s, however, it is by no means exhaustive. Rather, particular nonviolent components of the civil rights movement are explored here in order to construct a general framework on which readers will be able to situate the ensuing discussion of the ways in which civil rights activists in Northern Ireland drew from the nonviolent movement modeled in the United States.²⁶ Spanning the years ranging from 1954, the year of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, through 1965, the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the civil rights movement marked a defining historical moment in the United States, an impact that would soon be felt abroad.

Looking first to the 1950s, two particular incidents advanced civil rights into the national spotlight. On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that *de jure* segregation in public educational facilities is unconstitutional. The 9-0 decision handed down by Chief Justice Earl Warren established, in no uncertain terms, that “separate education facilities are inherently unequal.” In the decision Warren articulated:

Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater

²⁶ In this project, I focus on the nonviolent branches and leaders of the US civil rights movement. Much of my discussion of nonviolence in the US civil rights movement draws on the leadership, ideology, and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I certainly recognize that Dr. King and his followers do not encompass or represent the diversity of thought and action held by leaders and participants in the civil rights movement. Dr. King is nevertheless used as my foundation for discussing a particular stream of involvement in the US civil rights movement as his leadership was what many members of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement saw of the movement in the US. It is equally important to note that the movement for civil rights in Northern Ireland was not homogeneous as many members did not adhere to the ideologies and practices of nonviolence. Simply, this study is drawing from a particular brand of activism in the United States and a specific approach to campaigning for civil rights in Northern Ireland. Once the relationship between these two streams is established, further study would be able to look at different ideologies in both the US and Northern Ireland in order to find meaning between various factions of each movement.

when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation, with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to inhibit the educational and mental development of Negro children and deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system.²⁷

In nullifying the doctrine of “separate but equal,” the Supreme Court dealt an unmistakable blow to segregation. Despite the legal provisions set forth by *Brown v. Board*, however, many entrenched practices of segregation and institutionalized racism remained.

A second event that heighten public awareness of the civil rights movement transpired in December 1955 when Rosa Parks, Secretary of the Montgomery, Alabama, chapter of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), refused to yield her bus seat to a white passenger in an premeditated and organized display of civil disobedience. In the wake of Parks’ subsequent arrest and trial, the Montgomery bus boycott was launched.

In protest, the Black community launched a one-day local boycott of Montgomery’s public bus system. As support for Parks burgeoned, the movement gained momentum and Martin Luther King Jr., then relatively unknown, was enlisted to help organize a massive resistance movement in the city of Montgomery. Four days after Parks’ arrest, the citywide Montgomery bus boycott began, but it did not cease until more than a year later.²⁸ Despite difficulties with mobility and harassment from the white community, the boycotters persevered until the federal courts intervened and

²⁷ Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle, 1954-1990 (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) 72.

²⁸ Bennett 378-379.

desegregated the buses on December 21, 1956. In the end, The Montgomery bus boycott served to not only challenge the city's policy of racial segregation on public transportation but also demonstrated that the Black community could effectively unite to oppose systems of segregation and oppression.

Throughout the 1950s, the NAACP continued to confront the underpinnings of segregation, as well as a number of new organizations that were established to advance the agenda of civil rights throughout the United States. Among such organizations, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a Christian-based organization founded on beliefs of nonviolence in 1957 and headed by Martin Luther King, quickly became a central force in organizing the growing civil rights movement.

In addition to the SCLC, other organizations exposed the numerous civil rights abuses that continued to plague the nation. One of the central foundations of the civil rights movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), garnered national attention through organizing sit-ins at segregated lunch counters throughout the United States. Not only was the nonviolent sit-in technique mobilized to desegregate public establishments, but it also allowed of Black youth an opportunity to participate in the movement. As scores of young African Americans stepped forward to participate in public demonstrations, demonstrations and rallies, the movement brought the demands of the movement into the public spotlight as never before. While these organizations are by no means an exhaustive representation of those involved in the civil rights movement, they serve to illustrate the point that the movement served as strong message that Blacks were not going to be controlled economically, politically, or personally.

In response to these organizations and their actions, Martin Luther King Jr. in addition to other key civil rights leaders, including A. Philip Randolph, organized a mass

gathering in Washington.²⁹ More than two hundred and fifty thousand Americans, about sixty thousand of them white, participated in the August 28, 1963, exhibition in Washington, D.C. They gathered from all points of America, from all different backgrounds, and from all walks of life. This massive congregation assembled on the green, grassy slopes of the Washington Monument and progressed to the Lincoln Monument, where they eloquently expressed with their bodies that Blacks had been waiting 100 years and 240 days for the actual realization of the Emancipation Proclamation, and that they were still not free: quite plainly, 100 years and 241 days was too long to wait.

King, one of the most popular and influential of all the civil rights leaders at the time, delivered a speech that would be heard on television stations, read in history books, and referenced in contemporary struggles across the world from 1963 to today. In rousing words, King described a world of racial harmony and equality:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

²⁹ The roots of the 1963 March on Washington extend back to a 1941 initiative by A. Philip Randolph, the trailblazing president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Randolph, a leading voice in the Black community, explicitly threatened then President Franklin D. Roosevelt and called for one hundred thousand African-Americans to march on the White House unless Roosevelt abolished the blatant inequities occurring in the defense plants, and thus enacted Executive Order 8802 to guarantee jobs for Black men and women in the wartime armament industries. The 1941 march was canceled at the last moment when Roosevelt ceded to the demands and issued the first executive order protecting African American rights since the Emancipation Proclamation (Williams 45). However, Randolph's political and mobilizing clout had been exposed, setting the stage for future movements, namely the 1963 march.

For more information, see Lea E. Williams, Servants of the People: The 1960s Legacy of African American Leadership (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today!³⁰

It was a speech of hope and determination, epitomizing the day's message of racial harmony, love, and a belief that Blacks and whites could live together in peace. Known as the 'I have a dream' speech, King's expression that day is currently considered one of the greatest and most influential speeches ever. King's speech truly immortalized the event.

The March on Washington generated high hopes that Blacks would soon fully realize the American dream as articulated by King. During the sixties, to be sure, civil rights leaders acquainted Washington policy makers with a policy wish list and public policy desires. More precisely, the demands stemming from the March on Washington as reported by U.S. News & World Report September 9, 1963, included:

1. Passage of "meaningful" civil-rights legislation at this session of Congress- no filibustering.
2. Immediate elimination of all racial segregation in public schools throughout the nation.
3. A big program of public works to provide jobs for the entire nation's unemployed, including job training and a placement program.
4. A federal law prohibiting racial discrimination in hiring workmen either public or private.
5. \$2-an-hour minimum wage, across the board, nationwide.
6. Withholding of federal funds from programs in which discrimination exists.
7. Enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment, reducing congressional representation of states where citizens are disenfranchised.

³⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr. with Clayborne Carson, ed., The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: Warner Books, 1998) 226.

8. A broadened Fair Labor Standards Act to include currently excluded employment areas.
9. Authority for the Attorney General to institute injunctive suits when any constitutional right is violated.³¹

This list of demands emerged once the rallies and protest marches had successfully secured the public's awareness and concern. With the public at a heightened state of interest, the perfect opportunity presented itself for the President to realign his political and legislative priorities to better encompass the sentiments of the electorate. Quite simply, the goal at this point in the movement was to generate marches, protests, and demonstrations that would attract the nation's attention, and thereby the attention of their representative federal officials.³²

Optimism generated by the March on Washington, however, was soon tempered by political realities.³³ Nevertheless, in the years following the March on Washington and

³¹ U.S. News and World Report, 9 September 1963.

³² Walton 17.

³³ An instrumental dynamic contributing to the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1963 centered on the methodologies and bureaucratic strategies mobilized by the liberally oriented contingencies in both the House and Senate. Previously, numerous engrained and firmly established institutional hurdles in the legislative process had averted civil rights legislation. Several of the principal obstacles include the House Rules Committee, the legislative seniority system, the usage of the Senate filibuster, and the historically potent alliances of Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans (Lytle 285). The subsequent undertaking and, to be sure, ultimate test, having awakened America to the reality that discrimination was by no stretch of the imagination an exceptional and rare occurrence through the March on Washington, was to permeate these legislative obstructions. History, however, remained a strong testament to the fact that this would by no means be a simple undertaking.

The House, in contrast to the Senate, did not directly reject and mobilize institutional barriers against the enactment of legislation in the form of an outwardly hostile committee chairman. The chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Emmanuel Celler, a Democrat representing New York, had established a commendable reputation in regards to his stance and promotion of civil rights legislation. Given his political priorities, Celler assigned the civil rights bill to a subcommittee that he knew had an

after much political maneuvering, President Lyndon B. Johnson won congressional approval to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. The legislation outlawed segregation in public facilities and discrimination in employment and education.

While civil rights legislation was being debated in Washington, D.C., members of SNCC were busy cultivating a widespread campaign to advance voting rights by registering Blacks to vote in the South, primarily Mississippi. During the summer of 1964, Freedom Summer, as it became known, was marked by episodes of extreme white terrorism. One of the most heinous examples involved three young civil rights workers, two whites, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, and one Black, James Cheney who were arrested and murdered by the Ku Klux Klan for their efforts to register Black voters.³⁴

By 1965 the voting campaign had shifted to Selma, Alabama, where, under the leadership of King, thousands of demonstrators began a fifty-mile trek to Montgomery. As the peaceful demonstrators approached the Edmund Pettis Bridge, however, Alabama state troopers forcefully stopped the movement. Following the events of “Bloody Sunday,” scores of people who were involved in the original march were joined by outraged Americans who had witnessed the day’s events unravel on national television to continue the march from Selma-to-Montgomery.³⁵ On August 6, 1965, shortly after the

influential bi-partisan coalition of Republicans and Democrats who supported the passage of a solid comprehensive bill (Lytle 286).

³⁴ "Ku Klux Klan" is the name given to a number of past and present organizations that are committed to white supremacy and anti-Semitism.

³⁵ For a more detailed discussion see (1) George B. Leonard’s “Midnight Plane to Alabama: Journey of Conscience” in Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine’s, eds., The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle, 1954-1990 (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) 213-217. Also see (2) John

highly publicized events in Selma, President Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act, which, for the first time since Reconstruction, effectively opened up the polls to southern Black Americans.

By the early to mid-1960s, Black Americans who had focused on the moral demands and nonviolent protest efforts of King began to lose faith in a movement and express discontent with the performance and orientation of nonviolence in civil rights movement. Although the combined actions and leaders of the civil rights movement cultivated feelings of self-respect and realized political advancements, many Black Americans viewed the core strategies of nonviolence, including boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, and voter registration drives, to be insufficient and ultimately unsuccessful.³⁶ As a response to growing discontent, the Black Power movement gained momentum.

African Americans were indeed growing more and more unwilling to tolerate the unequal conditions that remained unchanged by nonviolent direct action and, as a result, were awakening to new approaches of militancy. Blacks were beginning to more seriously question the effectiveness of nonviolent direct action as sociopolitical inequalities remained glaring realities of daily life. As an alternative to nonviolence, the Black Power movement offered a new approach. Emphasizing the necessity of self-reliance and force, Black nationalist Malcolm X poignantly warned against what he saw as the pitfalls and inadequacies of nonviolence:

Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery. That's a good religion. In fact that's old-time religion.... Preserve your life, it's the best thing you've got. And if you've got to give up, let it be even-steven.³⁷

Lewis' Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

³⁶ Lawson 113.

³⁷ George Breitman, ed., Malcolm X Speaks (New York: Grove Press, 1965) 12-13.

By articulating this stance, Malcolm X and his contemporaries rejected the utility and efficacy of nonviolence. In doing so, the Black Power movement further set itself apart from the civil rights movement by their approval of violent resistance as a response to societal mistreatments and injustices.

Nevertheless, despite its decline and ideological and methodological shift away from nonviolence, the civil rights movement, during its formative years of the 1950s and 1960s, made important historical contributions. Though not seamless, landmark Supreme Court cases, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, along with legislative landmarks, such as the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, finally provided the solid legal framework for protecting Blacks' rights in the face of decades of discrimination.

5. MODELING MOVEMENT:

THE CASE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DUAL DISPARITIES

Before proceeding with a history and analysis of both the nonviolent civil rights movement in the United States and the nonviolent movement for civil rights in Northern Ireland, it is important to outline the grievances articulated by so many reform-minded people and groups in both countries. Minority communities on both sides of the Atlantic, African Americans in the United States and Nationalists in Northern Ireland, had historically and recently known the harsh realities of inequality: Blacks in the United States and Catholics in Northern Ireland were simply understood to be second-hand citizens in their respective societies. Generally, the grievances included the restriction of the franchise; gerrymandering of electoral boundaries to maintain power; discrimination by the allocation of employment, by separate and unequal educational opportunities, and by local councils in the allocation of housing; and further economic deprivation resulting primarily from discrimination in employment by private industry and business and a lack of economic investment.

Catholics in Northern Ireland, cognizant of the similarities in conditions that existed between them and African Americans in the United States, saw their lives not wholly unlike those of the Blacks living in the US ghettos.³⁸ Similarities in conditions that set into motion the civil rights movement in the United States and the later movement for equality in Northern Ireland are telling: it is not coincidental that Northern Ireland's Catholics looked toward the US and saw Black Americans as their brethren. Indeed, comparing the conditions present in Northern Ireland prior to the civil rights struggle with those of the United States in the years leading up to the civil rights

³⁸ Ó Dochartaigh 4.

movements is telling. Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh, a central actor in the struggle for civil rights in Derry/Londonderry, poignantly encapsulated the sentiments of the Catholic community when he stated “Indeed we viewed ourselves as Ulster’s white Negroes—a repressed and forgotten dispossessed tribe captured within a bigoted partitionist statelet that no Irish elector has cast a vote to create.”³⁹

While the societal malcontents of Northern Ireland were not new phenomenon confined to the 1900s, I have chosen to focus on contemporary history in my analysis. The United States and Northern Ireland each are certainly no strangers to disparities, grievances, governmental struggle, etc, and I would be remiss in pretending that these difficulties are confined to the twentieth century experience. In the interest of providing a workable framework of analysis, my study will focus primarily on the conditions and events of the 1900s, as they comprise the years surrounding the movements for civil rights in both the United States and Northern Ireland. While it is not possible to exhaustively explore the conditions of one society, much less two, I will discuss the social contexts of the United States and Northern Ireland in a comparative framework using four overarching categories of analysis: voting and political representation, housing, education, and employment.

DEFEAT, DESPAIR, AND THE DOLE

During the nineteenth century, slavery flourished as a system of endorsed bondage and systematic deprivation in which immorality and brutality were institutionalized in the United States. Africans and African Americans were callously

³⁹ Ó Dochartaigh 14.

bought, sold, and regarded as commodities in a system structured to ensure their racialized ‘inferiority’ as slaves. Though the institution of slavery was formally abolished in 1865, *de facto* discrimination drawn along the color line continued to thrive.

In the years between the 1880s and the 1960s, a majority of American states reinforced the ideals of racial hierarchy and maintained systems of segregation through the application of ‘Jim Crow’⁴⁰ laws. With the abolition of slavery, even if in name only, African Americans were not seen to pose a threat to the political and economic superiority and control of whites. Slaves were understood as striding toward citizenship, chipping away at the institution of slavery and the foundations of racial order in the process, and demands were soon made and arrangements enforced that would “keep them [Blacks] in their places.”⁴¹

The Ku Klux Klan vocalized the radical sentiments of maintaining white racial superiority at all costs as they assert:

We must keep this a White Man’s country. Only by doing this can we be faithful to the foundations laid by our forefathers. This Republic was established by White Men. It was established for White Men. Our forefathers never intended that it should fall into the hands of an inferior race. Every effort to wrest from White man the management of its affairs in order to transfer it to the control of Blacks or any other color, or to permit them to share in its control, is an invasion of our sacred Constitutional prerogatives and violation of divinely established laws.

We would not rob the colored population of their rights, but we demand that they respect the rights of the White Race in whose country they are permitted to reside. When it comes to the point that

⁴⁰ Jim Crow refers to practices, institutions, or laws that support segregation of Blacks from whites. The term came into common use in the 1880’s, when racial segregation was made legal in many parts of the Southern United States. The term originally referred to a Black character in a popular song composed in the 1830’s.

⁴¹ Lerone Bennett, Jr., Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) 259.

they cannot and will not recognize and respect those rights, they must be reminded that this is a White Man's country.⁴²

Just as Blacks in the United States were forcibly separated from whites in public transportation, sports, hospitals, orphanages, prisons, asylums, funeral homes, morgues, and cemeteries in order to preserve "rights of the White Race,"⁴³ Catholics in Northern Ireland were greatly restricted in their sociopolitical and communal roles. In March of 1969 a commission of inquiry was appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland to investigate the "causes and nature of the violence and civil disturbance in Northern Ireland on and since 5th October 1968..."⁴⁴ The results of the inquiry were published in September 1969 and have come to be known as the Cameron Report, named after the chairman of the inquiry, Lord Cameron. As part of their inquiry, the commission concluded that the violence associated with the civil rights movement was in large part rooted in a "sense of resentment and frustration at the failure of representations for the remedy of social, economic and political grievances."⁴⁵ The Report goes on to express the need they felt to determine to what extent the sense of grievances was "artificially engendered or stimulated, and also the degree to which it appears to have a substantial basis."⁴⁶ Following is a summary of their general findings:

The weight and extent of the evidence that was presented to us concerned with social and economic grievances or abuses of political power was such that we are compelled to conclude that they had substantial foundation in fact and were in a very real sense and

⁴² Stetson Kennedy, Jim Crow Guide: The Way It Was (Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University Press, 1990) 26.

⁴³ Bennett 268.

⁴⁴ Cameron Report, Disturbances in Northern Ireland (Cmnd 532, Belfast: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1969) 2.

⁴⁵ Cameron Report 55.

⁴⁶ Cameron Report 55.

immediate and operative cause of the demonstrations and consequent disorders....⁴⁷

The Cameron Report, attempting to determine the motivations of the civil rights activists, drew a parallel between the growing Catholic middle class and increased agitation for reform:

A much larger Catholic middle-class has emerged, which is less ready to acquiesce in the acceptance of a situation of assumed... inferiority and discrimination than was the case in the past. This is, we think, an important and new element in the political and social climate of Northern Ireland.⁴⁸

THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

One particularly devastating means of suppressing both Northern Irish Catholics and African Americans was the restriction of their constitutional rights. In the United States, perhaps one of the most devastating forms of discrimination, political disenfranchisement systematically excluded Black males from voting. The device and design of disenfranchisement drawn along the racial line had several key characteristics. The State of Mississippi, during its constitutional convention held in 1890, engineered methods of constitutionally denying Blacks the vote. The widely implemented and extrapolated procedures that grew out of the Mississippi convention are as follows:

Residence. A residence requirement of two years in the state and one year in the election district or in the incorporated city or town.

Poll tax. A cumulative poll tax as a prerequisite for voting. The rate was fixed at \$2 per year for state purposes, and county authorities could levy up to \$1 additional. Persons offering to vote were required to produce satisfactory evidence that they had paid "all taxes" legally required of them "for the two preceding years." The poll tax in itself

⁴⁷ Cameron Report 55

⁴⁸ Cameron Report 15.

was calculated to discourage Negro voting; the requirement that evidence of payment be presented to election officials presumably discriminated by reason of absence among Negroes of a predilection for the preservation of records.

Literacy and the alternative of “understanding.” The crowning achievement of the convention was the “understanding” clause. The new constitution required that every elector shall “be able to read any section of the Constitution of this State; or he shall be able to understand the same when read to him, or give a reasonable interpretation thereof.” By this clause the fears of illiterate whites were to be quieted. If a white man could not read, he could certainly “understand” or give a “reasonable interpretation” of a section of the constitution to a white registration official, whereas it was not expected that sophistication of constitutional matters would be general among Negroes.

Registration. Registration four months before an election was made a necessary qualification to vote.

Disqualification. Conviction for certain crimes operated as a disqualification. They were: bribery, burglary, theft, arson, obtaining money or goods under false pretenses, perjury, forgery, embezzlement or bigamy. The list was not so long as that adopted in other states, and this method undoubtedly occupied a relatively insignificant place in the calculations of the constitution framers.⁴⁹

Though originally devised in Mississippi, disenfranchisement by property and literacy qualifications for voting quickly spread throughout the south. While literacy and lack of property prevented Blacks from voting, however, racial loopholes provided exemptions, by means of grandfather clauses, for whites who were equally unable to read or did not own property. If one’s family never owned property, and they were prevented from doing so, they could not vote. If one was Black and had been restricted from accessing literacy, then odds were that they were unable to vote as well. This scheme of restricting the franchise to the property-owning and literate citizens of the south, with the

⁴⁹ V. O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics in State and Nation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949) 537-538.

exception of whites regardless of education or property, was adopted into the constitutions of numerous states, including South Carolina (1895), Louisiana (1898), North Carolina (1900), Alabama (1901), Virginia (1902), Georgia (1908), and Oklahoma (1910).⁵⁰

Beyond restricting the franchise through literacy tests and proof property-ownership, these states, in addition to four more, including Florida, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Texas, adopted poll taxes.⁵¹ Requiring often-unattainable payments, the poll tax effectively served to further prevent African Americans from voting.

Even if the prerequisite conditions of literacy, property-ownership, and payment could be met, Blacks were still not guaranteed the right to vote as the white primary election served as an additional barrier designed to prevent Black voter participation.⁵² According to Woodward, “The effectiveness of disenfranchisement is suggested by a comparison of the number of registered Negro voters in Louisiana in 1896, when there were between 130,344 and in 1904, when there were 1,342. Between the two dates the literacy, property, and poll tax qualifications were adopted. In 1896 Negro registrants were in a majority in twenty-six parishes—by 1904 in none.”⁵³

Just as legal and sociopolitical measures were institutionalized and maintained to restrict the political involvement of Blacks in the United States, so too were Catholics in Northern Ireland politically restricted and denied the rights afforded to other citizens. Politics in Northern Ireland historically had been marked by Protestant control of

⁵⁰ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997) 83-84.

⁵¹ Woodward 83-84.

⁵² Woodward 84.

⁵³ Woodward 85.

government and its processes. In 1921 the island of Ireland was partitioned into separate political entities: the southern twenty-six counties became the Republic of Ireland and gained independence from Britain while the northern six counties of Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom. The newly carved out state of Northern Ireland included a built-in Protestant majority: at the time of partition, the population of Northern Ireland was roughly sixty-five percent Protestant and thirty-five percent Catholic.⁵⁴

Coupled with the disadvantages tied to being an electoral minority, Catholics experienced economic disparities that ensured Protestant governmental domination in Northern Ireland. To vote in Northern Ireland elections, one had to be a ‘ratepayer,’ or a primary occupant of a household as either a tenant or owner. As only two people per house were allowed to vote, the ratepayer category effectively excluded lodgers or adult children living at home.⁵⁵ This restriction had the effect of disenfranchising a quarter of the adult population— and hit Catholics disproportionately hard, as they were poorer, tended to have larger families, and were less likely to have tenancies.⁵⁶

Furthermore, there was a system in which businesses could qualify for up to six additional votes, depending on the size and location of the business.⁵⁷ Most of these votes, in the hands of primarily Protestant businessmen, were naturally cast in favor of Unionists. The official justification for connecting ratepayer standing with the political franchise, and for allocating added votes to industry, was simply that only those who

⁵⁴ McKittrick and McVea 5.

⁵⁵ Bob Rowthorn and Naomi Wayne, The Political Economy of Northern Ireland (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1988) 30.

⁵⁶ Rowthorn and Wayne 30.

⁵⁷ Martin Wallace, Northern Ireland: 50 Years of Self-Government (Newton, Devon: David and Charles, 1971) 29.

were financially supporting local government should be able to influence local government and its expenditures.

In addition to Catholic grievances with regard to the restricted franchise, accusations of gerrymandering of local ward boundaries were leveled against Unionist controlled councils in Catholic majority areas. These mechanisms of discrimination were so blatant that the Cameron Commission of 1968 issued a report critical of the local electoral system. The findings revealed, for example, that Derry/Londonderry's Catholics, although comprising roughly sixty-nine percent of the population, were able to secure only eight Nationalist council seats, compared with the Unionists' twelve.⁵⁸ This is only one example among many in which the gerrymandering of districts produced Unionist majorities on local councils in communities that were predominantly Catholic. The following chart further illustrates the effects of the gerrymander on Londonderry County Borough in 1967:

Londonderry County borough 1967 (Percentages)			
	Catholic Voters	Other Voters	Total Seats
North Ward	2,530 (39.07)	3,946 (60.93)	8 Unionist
Waterside Ward	1,852 (33.38)	3,697 (66.62)	4 Unionist
South Ward	10,047 (89.83)	1,138 (10.17)	8 Non-Unionist
Total	14,429 (62.17)	8,781 (37.83)	20

See Footnote⁵⁹

Statistics can help explain the conditions of Northern Ireland in the 1960s, yet they alone do not even take into account or show the number of disenfranchised voters, whose inclusion would indicate an even wider gulf between the percentage of Catholics

⁵⁸ John J. Kane, "Civil Rights in Northern Ireland," *The Review of Politics* 33.1: 59.

⁵⁹ Paul Arthur, *Political Realities: Government and Politics of Northern Ireland* (Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1984) 101.

in the population and the percentage of that population's representatives.

Derry/Londonderry, of course, is the prime and most often cited example of gerrymandering and its undemocratic results, but Armagh, Amagh, Strabane, Lisnaskea, Dungannon and others followed a similar pattern.⁶⁰

That a wide range of grievances were felt on both sides of the Atlantic is clear: African Americans and Catholics were relegated to the status of second-class citizen within their respective societies. Not only were measures implemented and maintained in order to prevent direct political participation, but the restricted franchise also fueled blatant inequalities of condition in education, employment, and housing for minority communities both in the United States and Northern Ireland. In the politics of the United States and Northern Ireland, political participation was denied to the minority via the control of majority rule and opportunities for social and economic progress were severely curtailed: the underpinnings of discontent had set the stage for action.

⁶⁰ See for example Arthur 1984, Hastings 1971, and Kane 1971.

6. BEYOND THE SOUND OF SILENCE

DEMONSTRATIONS FOR CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE US AND IN NORTHERN IRELAND

MOVEMENTS IN COMPARISON

Looking back at the tactics employed and the legacies sustained by the nonviolent strands of the civil rights movement in the United States and in Northern Ireland, both campaigns ultimately aspired to promote the dignity of traditionally marginalized communities. The widely held sentiments in Catholic communities of Northern Ireland were similar to those of African Americans as both felt that the majority communities saw them as inferior creatures and unjustly treated them as ‘second-class citizens’.⁶¹ Just as African Americans had to prove that they were worthy of their constitutional rights as American citizens, Catholics in Northern Ireland set out to establish their position in society as equals worthy of the same rights and benefits granted to others. That a wide range of grievances were felt has been made clear, and the evidence seems to suggest that the grievances were based in fact, especially in terms of discrimination against Catholics at the local government level. According to the *New Statesman*:

The privileged position enjoyed by the Protestant majority has no statutory authority. The question is what happens in practice- and here the Civil Rights leaders are surely justified when they argue that nearly 50 years’ experience has proved that discrimination and the existence of the Stormont regime are inseparable.⁶²

In order to further recognize the influence of the American civil rights movement on Northern Ireland, it is first necessary to understand the framework of nonviolent activism in the United States.

Founded on the basis of fighting institutional and individual segregation, the roots of the nonviolent civil rights movement in the United States extend back to the enduring struggle for African Americans to achieve genuine and lasting equality. At the heart of

⁶¹ Conn McCluskey, Up Off Their Knees: A Commentary on the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland (Galway, Ireland: Conn McCluskey and Associates, 1989) 9.

⁶² “Ulster’s Probation Officer,” New Statesman 20 August 1969: 229.

the movement's demands were equal opportunity in employment, housing, and education, as well as the right to vote, the right of equal access to public facilities, and the right to be free of racial discrimination. In order to achieve these central goals, civil rights workers adopted an agenda of nonviolent protest and agitation.

Partnering the techniques of mass demonstration with the principles of nonviolence proved to be successful in captivating attention and inspiring mass movement on a national scale. To be sure, success in securing equality depended not only on the support of the African American population but also on the active participation of the greater society. This goal proved to be far more than attainable as civil rights campaigns in the United States not only set the tone for future peaceful civil rights protests in the United States, but also for oppressed audiences abroad looking to export nonviolent movements for justice and equality to their own social contexts.

In the 1960s the US civil rights movement spread the norm that second-class citizenship was unacceptable; this action helped to motivate Catholics, after decades of compliance, to challenge the Stormont regime. There was nothing new in the 1960s about Northern Irish Catholic complaints of discrimination, but within the Catholic community itself, liberalizing developments were evolving. Openings made for Catholics in the 1950s, through the impact of the Education Act (1944) and economic diversification, had by the mid-sixties created a much-strengthened Catholic middle class, who looked beyond the traditional role of serving their own community. They also seemed to want to liberalize and modernize traditional nationalist politics in order to participate not only in the economic and social life of Northern Ireland but in its political life also. For these

groups, the Republican movement and the IRA did not offer a promising policy.⁶³ The events transpiring across the Atlantic in the United States, however, provided an appealing alternative.

While exact beginning points can be difficult to assign to historical movements, it is possible to date the northern Ireland campaign from January 29, 1967, the day when the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was formally proposed: its official inception was on April 9 when its constitution was accepted.⁶⁴ Early meetings produced an outline of five objectives, consisting of demands for guaranteed basic freedoms and rights, the promulgation of such to the public, and the “highlighting” of abuses of power.⁶⁵

With the aims of rectifying social injustices in a similar manner to that which many had come to see as successful in the United States, the nonviolent campaign for civil rights in Northern Ireland began in the mid-1960s.⁶⁶ Similar to the multiplicity of civil rights organizations in the United States, the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland was not so much a single party or identity, but rather a parent organization extensive enough to conceivably embrace and captivate the imaginations of every anti-Unionist interest within the country. Given their broad-based appeal, the civil rights

⁶³ Thomas Hennessey, A History of Northern Ireland, 1920-1996 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 127.

⁶⁴ This is not to suggest that the nonviolent campaign for civil rights in Northern Ireland simply materialized spontaneously or emerged fully-established on April 9. Rather, it serves as a recognition that NICRA derived many of its ideas and even personnel from several existing organizations including the Campaign for Social Justice and the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster, among others.

⁶⁵ NICRA. n.d., “We Shall Overcome...” : The History of the Struggle for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland, 1968-1978 (Belfast: Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association) 8.

⁶⁶ Dooley 4.

movement attracted supporters from Nationalist parties, members and supporters of the IRA, liberals, trade unionists, energetic students, and middle-class professionals all united in a fluid coalition for social change.⁶⁷ It would be a mistake, however, to view the campaign in Northern Ireland as exclusively comprised of Catholics, and it would be equally inaccurate to believe that the civil rights movement in the United States was solely an African American experience. Neither movement was interested in the politics of exclusion given their unyielding convictions of equality for all.

Just as the membership of civil rights organizations in Northern Ireland mirrored the American experience, so too did the American civil rights movement clearly provide the strategic exemplar for Northern Ireland. Catholics chanted the same slogans, ‘One man, one vote’ and ‘The world is watching’, and they sang the same song, ‘We shall overcome’, as their counterparts in the United States.⁶⁸ Even more significant and telling than the use of language, many in Northern Ireland employed the same tactics: civil disobedience and peaceful protest marches. Leading nonviolent civil rights advocates in Northern Ireland studied the writings of American organizers, embraced many of their approaches to social activism, and forged lasting relationships with key African American leaders.⁶⁹

The evidence of the ideological and methodological exchanges between the United States and Northern Ireland is nowhere more clear than in the stated goals of each movement. A simple comparison of the declared and uncompromising aims of both

⁶⁷ McKittrick and McVea 38-39.

⁶⁸ John McGarry (ed.), Northern Ireland and the Divided World: The Northern Ireland Conflict and the Good Friday Agreement in Comparative Perspective (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 4.

⁶⁹ Dooley 49.

campaigns underscores the similar, if not identical, nature of their objectives. The five main principles that comprised the rallying points for nonviolent civil rights agitators and workers in the United States included:

Equal voting rights in every section.
Equal access to places of public accommodation.
Equal opportunity in employment.
Equal and unsegregated education.
Equal opportunity to make a home anywhere within one's means.⁷⁰

Analogous to the goals presented in the United States, the outlined list of demands and rallying cries used by the nonviolent Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association concentrated on acting:

To defend the basic freedoms of all citizens.
To protect the rights of the individual.
To highlight all possible abuses of power.
To demand guarantees for freedom of speech, assembly and association.
To inform the public their lawful rights.⁷¹

Mobilizing their objectives into action, NICRA's activities for the first year were predominantly devoted to a letter-writing campaign directed to Stormont officials and complaining about political, social, and economic discrimination felt by Northern Ireland's Catholics. The abuses and grievances at the local level were central to the development of the civil rights movement; these were the injustices that incited the early members of NICRA to action. It was the action taken by a Nationalist Party MP (Stormont), Austin Currie, in June 1968, which ultimately sparked the Association and its

⁷⁰ Benjamin Muse, The American Negro Revolution: From Nonviolence to Black Power 1963-1967 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968) 54.

⁷¹ NICRA 10.

members to take to the streets.⁷² Currie had squatted in a house, which had been allocated to a young single Protestant girl despite the fact that a large number of needier Catholic families were also waiting for council housing but had been denied.⁷³ The publicity that was generated was not enough to prevent Currie's eventual ejection. Without any means of appealing the decision through the system, the protest took the form of direct action: the first civil rights march took place on August 24, 1968, between the towns of Coalisland and Dungannon, County Tyrone.⁷⁴

In and of itself, the Coalisland-to-Dungannon march was not of any great importance. It is discussed here, however, because it represents the first major and organized public demonstration by Ulster Catholics demanding their civil rights. Of this march and the surrounding sentiments of the Catholic community, Max Hastings asserts:

The Catholics of central Ulster greeted the news of the march with a mixture of bewilderment and excitement. Northern Ireland had seen many religious processions and get-togethers, but a serious political demonstration was a bizarre experience. It was customarily the Protestants who did the marching... But for Catholics, Dungannon promised unusual excitement. Plans went ahead in a carnival spirit, and nobody knew quite what to expect.⁷⁵

Truly, organizations in Northern Ireland were deeply influenced by the model of nonviolent agitation exercised in the United States. The Coalisland-to-Dungannon march was just the start. Six weeks later came the next major demonstration, this time a protest march within the City of Derry along a route traversing some wholly Protestant districts

⁷² This refers to NICRA's first street march for civil rights. There had, however, been rallies for civil rights held earlier in 1968.

⁷³ Council housing was a frequently used means of spreading and maintaining the status quo of electoral outcomes in local voting districts. Under this form of control, Unionist officials manipulated the population in electoral wards.

⁷⁴ Dominick J. Coyle, Minorities in Revolt: Political Violence in Ireland, Italy, and Cyprus (East Brunswick, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983) 51.

⁷⁵ Max Hastings, Barricades in Belfast: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland (New York: Taplinger Publishing, 1970) 44.

and terminating inside the city's ancient walls, where Protestant defenders had held out against the Catholic King James in the famous Siege of Derry about 270 years earlier.⁷⁶

Clearly in emulation of the nonviolent techniques of the US civil rights movement, the January 1969 march from Belfast to Derry/Londonderry was directly modeled on the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. In addition, at the end of meetings and marches, crowds in Northern Ireland would sing the American civil rights anthem 'We Shall Overcome' as an expression of solidarity with their African American counterparts.⁷⁷ For the first time in the island's turbulent history, Northern Ireland had cultivated a major movement that eschewed the legacy of violent revolution and, in its place, championed the practices of nonviolent direct action.⁷⁸

Bernadette McAliskey (formerly Bernadette Devlin), a prominent leader and organizer in the Northern civil rights movement, described the beginning of Northern Ireland's first large civil rights demonstration: "At Coalisland there were masses of people milling around, selling civil rights rosettes, eating oranges, and generally behaving as if they were at a carnival."⁷⁹ Despite a counter-demonstration by Paisleyites and a brief scuffle when Young Socialists tried to break through a police barrier that had been erected to prevent entry into Dungannon's Market Square, the demonstration passed off peacefully.

In the end, the campaign for civil rights in the United States was an integral part of the movement in Northern Ireland. The broader civil rights agenda of nonviolence in each context indeed aspired to underscore the abuses and discriminatory practices in the

⁷⁶ Coyle 53.

⁷⁷ McCluskey 109.

⁷⁸ Paul Arthur, The People's Democracy 1968-1973 (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974) 19.

⁷⁹ Bernadette Devlin, The Price of My Soul (London: Andre Deutsch, 1969) 92.

areas of housing, employment, and electoral structures through campaigns of lobbying, documentation, organized marches, and overall publicity.⁸⁰ Though there are certainly discrepancies between each nonviolent movement in how they attained these goals, their similarities and historical influences on one another become more pronounced when looking at their origins, tactics, and, to be sure, impacts. The birth of the Northern Irish civil rights movement essentially gave heart to a disenfranchised minority community just as it had done in the American context, further forging the foundations of solidarity in pursuit of equality.

CONCLUSION

NICRA set out to right wrongs through the dissemination of information, street protests, and later the use of civil disobedience campaigns aimed at changing the discriminatory practices and policies of the Unionist government. Centered around equalizing the political and continued economic disparity between Catholics and Protestants, NICRA's demands called for universal suffrage and the repeal of the Special Powers Act; the disbanding of the B Specials; the re-drawing of electoral boundaries; and the imposition of laws designed to end discrimination in public employment and public housing. NICRA, unlike the IRA and its disciples, had decided to take a stand in the existing political formation and demanded certain changes so that their participation could proceed on an equal and fair level. Rather than attacking the legitimacy of the state or opting out, members of NICRA saw their future as part of Northern Ireland's state, and they were therefore willing to take steps to integrate more fully into the existing system.

⁸⁰ Dooley 29-32.

The Civil Rights Association did not try to end partition; it was simply working to help Catholics gain their rights as citizens. The civil rights movement lost ground to more violent groups, the most important of which was the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

7. THE END OF AN ERA

THE CHALLENGE TO NONVIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN NORTHERN IRELAND

In order to unpack nonviolent civil rights movement in comparison, one must understand the events surrounding Bloody Sunday in the United States and, similarly, Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland. In the context of the United States, Bloody Sunday transpired on March 7, 1965, as the followers of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, began a Selma-to-Montgomery march founded on the principles of nonviolent action. The ideals

of nonviolence practiced by the five hundred marchers, however, were soon challenged as two hundred Alabama state troopers and local law enforcement officials struck marchers with billy clubs and fired containers of tear gas at the crowd as people crossed Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge.⁸¹ The graphic and gruesome display of violence, captured on video and reproduced for millions of television viewers across the nation, outraged the public and motivated supporters from all walks of life to travel to Selma and join the struggle.⁸²

Following this display of violence that transpired on Bloody Sunday, the United States civil rights movement reached the end of an era. As leader John Lewis so poignantly recalls in his autobiography, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement, not only did the show of police brutality incite outrage and political change throughout the nation, but it also altered the cohesion and strategies of the civil rights movement: following Bloody Sunday, the road of nonviolence had essentially come to an end.⁸³

Though the civil rights movement in the United States had effectively disbanded on March 7, 1965, the ideologies and methodologies that had been employed nevertheless influenced campaigners for civil rights in Northern Ireland. From Northern Ireland's very first protests against discrimination, nonviolent civil rights campaigners firmly aligned themselves with the ideological and methodological frameworks they had seen modeled in the United States in previous years.⁸⁴ In 1972, seven years after Bloody Sunday in

⁸¹ Bennett 413.

⁸² Bennett 413.

⁸³ John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998) 314-315.

⁸⁴ Dooley 28-31.

Selma, Alabama, the Northern Ireland civil rights campaign came to an end on what is now known as Bloody Sunday.

On the day that would soon be known worldwide as Bloody Sunday, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) led a march through the city of Derry/Londonderry that had been organized to protest the continuation of institutionalized discrimination and internment without trial.⁸⁵ An estimated twenty thousand men, women and children took part in the march's 'carnival atmosphere'. Members of the British Army, however, effectively destroyed the tone of the day as they prevented the march from entering the city center. After this diversion, the main body of the march then moved to 'Free Derry Corner' to attend a rally. Soldiers of the Parachute Regiment, an elite regiment of the British Army, then moved in toward the crowd in an arrest operation. During the next thirty minutes the soldiers shot and killed thirteen men, mainly by single shots to the head and trunk.⁸⁶

A NEW BRAND OF REVOLUTION

No doubt the nonviolent American civil rights movement greatly influenced the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland by providing guidance and influencing key strategies. Though both movements can be seen as having enjoyed at least some degree of success, the tactical reliance on nonviolence would eventually crumble in both the United States and Northern Ireland. To be sure, the trans-Atlantic dialogue between civil rights campaigns extended beyond the practices of nonviolent protest: violent struggle

⁸⁵ Peter Pringle and Philip Jacobson, Those are Real Bullets: Bloody Sunday, Derry, 1972 (New York: Grove Press, 2000) 42.

⁸⁶ Ó Dochartaigh 97.

shook the very foundations of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland just as it had done in the United States.

While each movement eventually disbanded for its own reasons and within its own social contexts, it is imperative to recognize the ways in which the outgrowths of each movement identified with each other. Those who wished to participate in the struggle for equality, and who previously might have been attracted to the ideals of nonviolence championed by each of the civil rights movements, began to look elsewhere.⁸⁷ Indeed, it becomes increasingly easy to see why it has been suggested that the strongest links between civil rights activists in Northern Ireland and the United States were on the radical and more violence-oriented wings of each movement.⁸⁸

Looking first at the American context, while nonviolence was the dominant form of African American protest between the end of World War II and 1965, this strategy began to lose its widespread support base. In the case of the United States, the alternative to nonviolence presented itself in the form of Black Power. Black Power was essentially born out of the growing disillusionment with a system that continued to marginalize African Americans and was often seen as affording only limited victories in the struggle for civil rights. Though the collective engagement of African Americans against widespread inequalities and disenfranchisement through boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, voter registration drives, and other political activities fostered self-respect and a feeling of political efficacy, many saw these actions of nonviolence as simply inadequate and

⁸⁷ Robert Weisbrot, Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement (New York: Plume, 1991) 222.

⁸⁸ Dooley 59.

essentially ineffective.⁸⁹ The Black Power movement garnered mounting support as it became increasingly obvious to African Americans that continued advancement was dependent on a Black show of force. While the Black Power movement meant different things to different people, it vehemently rejected the core principles of nonviolent struggle and, in many ways, signified everything that nonviolence rejected, namely racial hatred, violence, and fanatical self-reliance.

African Americans were indeed growing more and more unwilling to tolerate the unequal conditions that remained unchanged by nonviolent direct action and, as a result, were awakening to new approaches of militancy. There was escalating belief that ‘turning the other cheek,’ as advocated by nonviolence, only served to give their abusers symmetrical targets. Huey Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party which embraced a militant policy of self-determination, summed up these convictions and sense of frustration when he stated, “This sense of despair and futility led us into rebellious attitudes.”⁹⁰ In the end, use of the Black Power slogan began to erode the American civil rights movement.

Nowhere was the Black Power movement’s emphasis on self reliance and the necessity of force more apparent than in the language of the charismatic Black separatist leader Stokeley Carmichael. Led by Carmichael, the Black Power movement hammered at the widely unresolved issues of inequality that continued to plague society by pointedly refusing to endorse the program of nonviolent resistance. In doing so, the Black Power movement further set itself apart from the civil rights movement by their

⁸⁹ Steven F. Lawson, Running For Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941 (New York: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 1997) 113.

⁹⁰ Huey Newton, Revolutionary Suicide (New York: Ballantine, 1973) 19.

approval of violent resistance as a response to societal mistreatments and injustices.

Carmichael unmistakably articulated the widely held mentality of Black Power when he made the point of warning against what he saw as the pitfalls and inadequacies of American society:

Black people have not only been told they are inferior, but the system maintains it. We are faced in this country with whether or not we want to let white people define equality for us on their terms as they've always done and thus lose our blackness or whether we should maintain our identity and still be equal. This is Black Power.⁹¹

Just as the civil rights movement in the United States lost much of its cohesion with the birth of Black Power, so too did the movement in Northern Ireland collapse under the pressure of discontent. The civil rights movement in Northern Ireland was indeed disintegrating under the emerging presence of external options for social change, exhaustion, and widespread frustration. Tension was steadily mounting in Northern Ireland with the political and social structures under increasing stress and becoming increasingly unstable. By early 1972, political momentum began to drain from the civil rights movement toward other organizations within Northern Ireland.⁹²

No official date marks the end of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. It is widely held, however, that the movement made the final step toward disbandment, both ideologically and organizationally, following Bloody Sunday 1972.⁹³ With the victims of Bloody Sunday buried, guns had flooded into the streets to conduct politics by more violent means. Following Bloody Sunday, violence essentially swelled the ranks of

⁹¹ John Meacham, ed., Voices in Our Blood: America's Best on the Civil Rights Movement (New York: Random House, 2001) 7.

⁹² Dooley 68.

⁹³ Dooley 68.

the IRA and signaled the movement away from nonviolent agitation.⁹⁴ Soon it was nearly impossible to differentiate between those involved in the civil rights movement and those in ‘defense organizations.’ In the three years prior to Bloody Sunday, 210 individuals were killed. In the eleven months after Bloody Sunday, 445 people lost their lives.⁹⁵ Clearly, the demands of the Northern Irish civil rights movement had collapsed under the pressure of traditional Republican demands for complete secession of sovereignty from Britain, principles of national self-determination, and objectives of an independent United Irish state.⁹⁶

Not to in any way justify or commend the campaign of violence that was resumed following Bloody Sunday, but is important to note that Northern Ireland was not a stranger to violence, so it was almost instinctive for the movement to revert to these known and established means of struggle. When turbulence plagues society or difficult questions shake the foundations of a movement, it is natural to return to methods that are known and comfortable, as can be seen with the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland effectively fading into the backdrop of violence. Republican violence was seen as justified in the name of forging a United Ireland on the behalf of the people: the return to violent struggle was not so much interpreted as sectarian violence as it was seen to be the justified and self-protective reactions of an oppressed people.

In the end, just as the origins of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland were deeply influenced by the movement modeled in the United States, so too was its collapse. Despite the fact that each movement for civil rights had effectively disbanded

⁹⁴ Dooley 62.

⁹⁵ Reactions to Bloody Sunday. 06/05/2005. Bloody Sunday Trust. <<http://bloodySundayTrust.org/edureaction.htm>>, 1.

⁹⁶ Dooley 130-132.

for their own reasons, African Americans and Catholics in Northern Ireland maintained the flow of ideas and tactical approaches across the Atlantic: the demise of each movement is laden with sentiments of solidarity just as can be seen in their former models of nonviolence. Kathleen Cleaver, a key leader in the Black Panther Party, cemented the solidarity felt between the violence-oriented outgrowths of both civil rights movements when she stated, “All our sympathies were with the IRA—even with the provisionals—because they took such a clear-cut position on armed struggle.”⁹⁷ Even in the absence of nonviolent campaigns, the enduring struggle for equality in Black American and Catholic Northern Ireland preserved the reciprocal exchange of methodologies, sympathies, and, above all, solidarity in the continuing quest for equality.

8. CONCLUSION

INHERITING THE LEGACY

⁹⁷ Dooley 64.

TOWARD A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS

Built on a framework of mutual understanding, the nonviolent civil rights movements in the United States and Northern Ireland ended an era of history and began a new one. While one campaign focused on the plight of African Americans and the other concentrated on sectarian discrimination aimed at the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, each movement ultimately aspired to overcome the confines of social and economic discrimination and further promote the dignity and equality of traditionally marginalized communities. The realms of influence, however, extend beyond the

original adherence to nonviolence, as can be traced through the splintering of civil rights organizations in both the United States and Northern Ireland.

While the nonviolent movement for Black equality has been greatly studied and its resultant impacts are commonly known, neither the campaign for civil rights in Northern Ireland nor its outcomes have attracted this degree of awareness or enormity of response from the international community. What have emerged from each movement's transition from nonviolence to violence, nevertheless, are the connections of solidarity. Indeed, the movement for civil rights in Northern Ireland underscores an unprecedented historical moment where nonviolence was seen as a viable alternative to violent conflict and employed: campaigners for civil rights in Northern Ireland and their use of nonviolence draw attention to their understanding of the accomplishments of the nonviolent campaign in the United States.

To be sure, the origins and outcomes of the nonviolent civil rights movements in both contexts emphasize the influence solidarity has had on both communities and contributed to each group's understanding of social change and how to attain equality. The expressions of solidarity that have effectively traversed cultural and geographical borders in the nonviolent quest for civil rights have ultimately promoted support and provided inspiration equally for Catholics in Northern Ireland and African Americans alike.

Truly, one cannot disregard the importance of solidarity, whether it is in the context of the nonviolent origins of civil rights movements in the United States and Northern Ireland— or in the eventual dissent into violent revolution experienced by each. No doubt the reciprocal influences between movements of nonviolence in the United

States and Northern Ireland warrant further exploration. Given the underpinning relationship and interconnectedness between each nonviolent movement, there is a plethora of work to be done in order to accentuate the solidarity and lessons imparted by these two complementary quests for equality. In the end, the nonviolent movements in the United States and Northern Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s present a foundation on which to evaluate not only the nonviolent methods of struggle employed in both settings— but also the tools to explore the similar challenges the two campaigns faced, both struggling with the boundaries of nonviolence.

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