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When Art Becomes Political: An Analysis of Irish Republican Murals 1981 to 2011

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An Analysis of Irish Republican Murals 1981 to 2011

by
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*For my Mom and Dad, who encouraged
a love of history and showed me what it
means to be Irish-American.*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

For nearly thirty years in the late twentieth century, sectarian violence between Irish Catholics and Ulster Protestants plagued Northern Ireland. Referred to as "the Troubles," the violence officially lasted from 1969, when British troops were deployed to the region, until 1998, when the peace agreement, the Good Friday Agreement, was signed. While religion played an important role in the Troubles, it was also a political struggle as Republicans in Northern Ireland fought to separate from the United Kingdom. Republicans, who tended to be Catholic, believed the six counties that make up Northern Ireland should be a part of the Republic of Ireland and not the United Kingdom. Loyalists, who tended to be Protestant, wanted to maintain the status quo and remain part of the United Kingdom. But, in order to understand the conflict in the twentieth century and peace in the twenty-first, one must understand the story of the English and Protestants in Ireland, which started much earlier. The English had already been in control of Ireland for centuries, but the early 1600s brought a policy that would later influence the fighting between Catholics and Protestants. England began systematically colonizing Ireland, particularly Ulster, the northwest province that today contains Northern Ireland, with English Protestants and Scottish Presbyterians. They were quite successful in their colonization of Ireland; in 1600 roughly two percent of the Ireland's one million people were of English and Scottish descent, but

by 1700, that increased to almost thirty percent.[1] Protestants and Presbyterians were willing to leave their homeland for Ireland because the English Crown granted them land that was confiscated from Irish Catholics. Additionally, the English were so successful at increasing the numbers of Protestants in Ireland because for every one thousand acres of land a Protestant was given by the Crown, he would have to bring ten Protestant families with him.[2] With the start of the eighteenth century, the English introduced new ways to exclude Irish Catholics and favor English Protestants and their descendants. In 1704, they enacted a series of laws known as the Penal Laws, which banned Catholics from joining the army, owning land, inheriting land in the traditional manner, forbade Catholic education, and made Catholics pay an additional tax—the Penal Laws banned Catholics from all aspects of civic life.[3]

The oppression of Irish Catholics would continue in Ireland for centuries. Though many rebellions occurred, the English quelled them and continued to rule over Ireland. It was not until the early-twentieth century that a breakthrough in Irish independence would occur. In 1921, five years after the failed Easter Rising, the Anglo-Irish Treaty ended a war between the Irish and British and created the Irish Free State.[4] The treaty divided the island into a twenty-six county state, the Irish Free State, which would not be independent, but rather, a self-governing nation that was still under the British Empire. The remaining six counties would remain a province in the United Kingdom; these six counties are part of the nine counties that make up Ulster.[5]

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[1] Terry Golway, *For the Cause of Liberty: A Thousand Years of Ireland's Heroes,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 25.

[2] Golway, *Liberty,* 24.

[3] Golway, *Liberty,* 36.

[4] Golway, *Liberty,* 273.

[5] Golway, *Liberty,* 273-274.

Because the treaty was controversial to Irish Republicans, a year-long civil war followed the

signing but in the end, the terms of the treaty remained, and thus Northern Ireland was officially

created in 1922. In 1948, the Irish Free State left the British Empire and became the Republic of

Ireland, but Northern Ireland remained a part of the United Kingdom.[6]

      When Northern Ireland was created, two-thirds of the one million plus population was

Protestant.[7] Just like throughout the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s, the oppression and discrimination

against Catholics in Ulster continued in the twentieth century. For example, gerrymandering ran

rampant, especially in Derry, where nearly half of the city was Catholic. But, because of the

rigged system, almost ninety percent of Derry's Catholics lived in a single ward. Not only did

this make their vote essentially meaningless, but all of the public buildings, including the

hospitals, were located in Protestant wards of Derry.[8] Additionally, Catholics were discriminated

against in employment because the system gave preferential treatment. Harland & Wolff

shipyard, one of the North's largest employers, had over ten thousand workers, but only four

hundred were Catholics.[9] By the late 1960s, Catholics in Northern Ireland decided they had

enough of discrimination in housing, education, employment, and unfair practices like

gerrymandering, and began to mobilize and protest for their civil rights. Demands included an

end to housing discrimination and gerrymandering, disbanding of the Protestant paramilitary

style police force, the "B-Specials," fair employment, and the most well-known demand, and

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[6] Golway, *Liberty,* 278.

[7] Golway, *Liberty*, 279.

[8] Golway, *Liberty,* 280.

[9] Golway, *Liberty,* 284.

slogan of the movement, "one man, one vote," rather than a voting system based on property ownership.[10]

Protests and demonstrations by Catholics became increasingly widespread in the late 1960s and while they made it clear they were protesting for civil rights and not an end to partition, some Protestants believed this to be false and feared these protestors were actually members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which was practically nonexistent in 1968/9. Tensions only continued to rise between Catholics and Protestants as the months wore on, culminating in what is now known as the Battle of the Bogside on August 12, 1969. During a traditional Protestant march, which celebrated the history of Protestants in Ulster and their triumph over Catholics, the parade became deadly when onlookers and marchers found themselves in a "rock-and missile throwing contest" in a Catholic ghetto of Derry known as the Bogside. The police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), responded with tear gas, more stones were hurled by Catholics, the RUC used more tear gas and then fired machine guns at the unarmed protestors. Fighting occurred in the Bogside for three days and led to riots in Catholic areas of West Belfast. In the end, six people died, hundreds were wounded, and hundreds were burned out of their homes. The British government responded by deploying troops to Northern Ireland, as they believed the RUC could not handle the escalating situation. What started as a movement to advance civil liberties became an increasingly hostile and violent situation between Catholics and Protestants and Catholics and the British government and army. The Troubles had begun.[11]

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[10] Bill Rolston, *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (London: Associated University Presses, 1991), 29.
[11] Golway, *Liberty*, 293-295.

Despite the fact that initially many Catholics welcomed the British soldiers because they believed they would protect them from another incident like the Battle of the Bogside and that many of the civil rights they demanded were given, the situation in Northern Ireland only became worse in the early 1970s. The three major players involved in the conflict emerged: state forces (the British Army and RUC), Republican paramilitary groups (mostly the Provisional IRA and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)), and Loyalist paramilitary groups (mostly the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)).[12] In July of 1970, weapons of the Official IRA were discovered and about three thousand British troops entered a working-class Catholic section of Belfast—the Lower Falls. What ensued is known as the Falls Curfew; the army enforced a strict curfew for the area with speakers in helicopters telling residents to stay in their homes and soldiers conducted door-to-door searches.[13] This continued for three days and in the end, four civilians were killed, sixty wounded, sixteen-hundred canisters of teargas fired, and almost sixty accusations of soldiers looting and other misconduct were reported.[14] As resentment towards the soldiers, the British government, and the treatment of Catholics continued to grow, it caused an upsurge in support and membership of the militant Provisional IRA, which had split from the Official IRA.[15]

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[12] Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support 4: Murals and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland* (Beyond the Pale, 2013), i.

[13] Stuart Borthwick, *The Writing on the Wall: A Visual History of Northern Ireland's Troubles* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 2015), 88.

[14] Colin P. Clarke et al, "Northern Ireland, 1969—1999 Case Outcome: COIN Win (Mixed, Favoring COIN)," in *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies,* (RAND Corporation, 2013), 319, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt5hhsjk.38.

[15] Borthwick, *Writing on the Wall,* 86.

If the Falls Curfew did not cause most Catholics to change their view on the British troops in the north of Ireland, the summer of 1971 changed any remaining welcoming feelings. The government decided to introduce the policy of internment—the ability to imprison without due process. This meant that political "suspects"—those thought to be in the IRA mostly—could be jailed without a formal charge of a crime. On the first day alone, almost three hundred and fifty Catholics were arrested.[16] Of those, less than one hundred had any connection to the IRA. By the end of the year, more than fifteen-hundred Catholics has been arrested. Like the Battle of the Bogside, Falls Curfew, and the general treatment of Catholics, internment actually drove people to join the IRA, rather than stopping its membership.[17]

1972, the deadliest year of the Troubles, brought more violence and a major change in the government of Northern Ireland. In January 1972, during an anti-internment march in Derry, the army opened fire on the protestors. Known as Bloody Sunday, in just twenty minutes soldiers fired over one hundred rounds, killing thirteen immediately and injuring eighteen; all of the dead and wounded were unarmed. A few months later, the British government decided to impose direct rule, dissolving Northern Ireland's Parliament, Prime Minister, and ability to govern domestic issues; the Stormont government fell.[18] Mistreatment, shootings, and bombings by all sides continued to occur in Northern Ireland for the rest of the 1970s and would continue into the 1980s and 1990s.

While peace did not officially come until 1998, attempts at peace can be seen as early as the mid-1980s with peace talks among various political and paramilitary groups, calls for

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[16] Golway, *Liberty,* 296.

[17] Clarke et al, "Northern Ireland, 1969—1999," 320.

[18] Golway, *Liberty,* 297-299.

ceasefires, and the urging by the public for an end to violence.[19] Finally, after thirty years of

fighting and many years of peace talks, the Good Friday Agreement (also known as the Belfast

Agreement) officially ended the Troubles in 1998. The agreement created a new model of

government in Northern Ireland and it was signed by four major political parties, Sinn Féin,

Alliance Party, Ulster Unionist Party, and the Social Democratic and Labour Party, as well as the

both the British and Irish Republic's governments. It created a new joint-power government

assembly in Belfast, released political prisoners imprisoned during the Troubles, and enabled

groups like the IRA and the UDA to disarm. Lastly, while the six counties of Northern Ireland

were to remain a part of the United Kingdom, the agreement stated that should a majority of

people in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland vote for a thirty-two county Ireland,

Northern Ireland would leave the United Kingdom and join the Republic.[20] While sporadic

bursts of violence did occur from splinter paramilitary groups who did not agree with the Good

Friday Agreement, in the months and few years after its signing, violence in the north has

dramatically decreased since the early 2000s.

Despite the changes in the government system, two things have not changed in Northern

Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement: the pride both Loyalists and Republicans have in their

cultures and their means to express this: murals. Traditionally a Loyalist practice dating back to

late 1920s, Republican murals did not become widespread in 1981 when a real mural tradition

emerged.[21] This proliferation of Republican murals happened because of the 1981 Hunger Strike

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[19] "Timeline: Northern Ireland's Road to Peace," *BBC News,* Jan. 27, 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4072261.stm.

[20] *The Belfast Agreement*, Northern Ireland Office*,* (Apr. 10, 1998). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf.

[21] Rolston, *Politics,* 21.

led by Bobby Sands in the H-block prison. With renewed vigor in Irish Republicanism combined with anger and sadness over the death of the hunger strikers, artists began to paint many murals in nationalist areas; in the months following Sands' death, over one hundred murals were painted in Belfast alone.[22] For both Republicans and Loyalists, the murals, painted on the sides of businesses and homes throughout cities in Northern Ireland, served as a way to generate and solidify popular support through non-violent means. Muralists from both sides incorporated portrayals of historical events and heroes in their activist artwork—presumably in order to stir pride and renewed commitment among their comrades and to encourage support in their respective causes. Because they are on the opposite sides of the conflict, the murals draw on completely different sources of inspiration and depict different events. For example, a Loyalist may find inspiration in King William of Orange and the Battle of the Boyne, British involvement in World War I, or the paramilitary defense of Ulster.[23] Republican muralists, however, focus on celebrating their Irish identity and rejecting the British; murals depict historical events like the Famine or Easter Rising and memorials to famous Irish Republicans. By looking at the murals one can see the violence, devastation, and ultimately progress that took place in Northern Ireland during the Troubles and after the Good Friday Agreement.

In order to identify the changes in Republican murals, the focus of my research was murals painted throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s/2010s. I then asked questions, including, how do the symbols and styles change between 1981 and 2011 and how could these changes correspond to the current events and political climate of the particular time? By comparing and contrasting the changes in murals and then researching the events of the Troubles, I was able to find significant changes to the Republican mural tradition and style depending on the year it was

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[22] Rolston, *Politics,* 79.
[23] Rolston, *Drawing Support,* vi-vii.

painted. For example, in the 1980s, when Northern Ireland was still in the thick of fighting, the murals are much more belligerent, and sometimes threatening or frightening, than murals painted in 2008, ten years after peace was officially made with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Similarly, in the late 1990s, one can see the promising strides towards peace that politicians were making—something reflected in some murals painted during these years. Not all Republican murals had such drastic changes; some regardless of the decade follow the same general theme. These themes could be a celebration of Irish culture or language, a memorial to those killed in the Troubles, a depiction of an Irish historical event, a tribute to older Irish Republicans, or a telling of an international event. Examples of murals fitting these thematic examples can be found in almost every decade, but that does not mean that they are same; in fact, these murals have many differences despite their common theme. This project demonstrates how hunger strike inspired murals painted in 1981 and 2011, for example, have differences like artistic quality, inclusion of symbols, and use of quotes, even though they are depictions of the same event. Because the political climate and the circumstances of the conflict changed, so did the murals.

Chapter one focuses on the 1980s when the Republican mural movement really began. The bulk of this chapter will focus on the 1981 Hunger Strike because it is so important to both the Troubles and the Republican mural tradition, but other themes and events, like the fighting in Palestine, are discussed. Chapter two examines the 1990s and how while the desire for peace grew, the violence persisted. Murals include a tribute to three IRA volunteers killed in Gibraltar, one for the anniversary of the start of the Irish Famine, and moves towards peace. Lastly, Chapter three is the post-peace chapter; it examines murals painted in the 2000s and 2010s. This chapter is significant because despite the fact that peace was finally achieved in 1998,

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Republican murals, many of which are staunchly nationalist, are still being painted. Murals include the thirtieth anniversary of the 1981 Hunger Strike, a tribute to James Connolly, and a plea for truth and justice for victims. Because of the importance of music to Irish and Irish-American culture, each chapter begins with an excerpt from a song about Northern Ireland. This is not to insinuate the feelings or attitudes of the musicians' towards the Troubles or the Republican cause, but rather to show the impact the violence had—how politics and war affects popular culture in so many ways, including music.

Because so much of this research comes from pictures, a variety of resources were utilized to find images of the murals. These include an online collection of photographs by Tony Crowley consolidated through the Claremont Colleges Digital Library (CCDL), two books by Bill Rolston, one by Stuart Borthwick, and my own photographs taken between August 8th and August 10th when I travelled to Belfast to research this project. Similarly, information about the Troubles has been researched through a variety of textbooks, online databases, books, and my own on-site research. Because of the sheer number of Republican murals that have been created since 1981, it would be impossible to analyze and research all of them, so this is a sampling of murals throughout the decades. While it was difficult to decide which to use, the murals I have chosen are not only representative of the decade they were created in, but also are significant to the Republican struggle in Ireland. Rather than simply reading about the events that took place, by looking at something visual like the murals, one is able to see the evolution of the Republican cause in Northern Ireland. It is my hope that this project will provide a greater insight to the Republican struggle during the Troubles, a war often overlooked and misunderstood by students. Whether still standing or now only existing in photographs, the murals of Northern Ireland are a physical reminder of Ireland's complex history.

CHAPTER ONE

1981-1989: The Hunger Strike, Republican Growth and Resilience

"What have I now?" this proud old woman did say
"I have four green fields, one of them's in bondage
In stranger's hands, that tried to take it from me
But my sons have sons, as brave as were their fathers
My fourth green field will bloom once again" said she.

Final verse of the allegorical song
"Four Green Fields" written by
Tommy Makem.

1980 marked eleven years since the official start of the Troubles and it was clear that Republicans, the British government, and Loyalists continued to stand their ground and the violence persisted. 1981 brought one of the most important events of the Troubles: the hunger strike in the Long Kesh prison and a real start to the Republican mural tradition. Because the hunger strike was such an important event to not only the Troubles in general, but especially to the murals of the 1980s, much of this chapter will focus on exploring two different murals dedicated to the strikers and to the movement as a whole.

In order to understand the 1981 Hunger Strike, one must go back to 1976 when the British government changed the status of IRA and INLA prisoners. Prior to 1976, members of the IRA and INLA who were imprisoned, many in Long Kesh in County Down, Northern Ireland, were granted special category status, giving them certain benefits like wearing their own clothes, no prison work, and the ability to associate with one another.[24] However, this status was

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[24] Golway, *Liberty,* 305.

rescinded in 1976 and the prisoners were no longer treated as political prisoners, but rather like

the average criminal. Republicans resented this change because they saw themselves as political

prisoners or prisoners of war and believed they deserved the special category status because of

this distinction.[25] As a result, prisoners began protesting for the return of their status. First,

prisoners began the blanket protest by refusing to wear the prison uniform and instead wore their

blanket. For some, the blanket protest eventually evolved to include the no-wash protest. As an

attempt to get prisoners off the blanket, prison guards refused to allow them to use the toilet

facilities without wearing the prison uniform. Instead of wearing the uniform, the blanketmen

emptied their chamber pots of excrement onto their cell walls. Just four years later in 1980, more

than 1,300 prisoners were participating in at least the blanket protest.[26] However, the prisoners

were not seeing the results they hoped for and decided to take a more drastic approach and a

hunger strike commenced. In October of 1980, seven blanketmen began a hunger strike that

lasted fifty-three days. While it is unclear exactly why the protest was called off, the strikers

believed they had reached a compromise with the British government, so they ended the strike.[27]

However, it became clear that the prisoners were not going to see the return of the special

category status and in March of 1981, a second hunger strike began.[28]

The 1981 Hunger Strike is much more widely known than the 1980 strike because it

gained more international attention and, in the end, ten men died. They demanded five things: no

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[25] Golway, *Liberty,* 305.

[26] Golway, *Liberty,* 305.

[27] George Sweeney, "Self-Immolative Martyrdom: Explaining the Irish Hungerstrike Tradition," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review,* Vol. 93, No. 371 (Autumn 2004): 343, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30095978.

[28] Rolston, *Politics,* 76.

prison uniform, no prison work, free association, education, and full remission.[29] The leader of

the strike was a twenty-seven year old IRA volunteer, Bobby Sands, who had been in prison

since 1976 after a gun was found in a car he was in.[30] Learning from the 1980 Hunger Strike,

this strike had a different approach and staggered when the prisoners joined the strike; Sands

began it alone and then nine other men periodically joined the strike. During the strike, two of

the strikers, Sands and Kieran Doherty, ran for political office and won. One month before he

died, Sands was elected a Member of British Parliament for Fermanagh/South Tyrone after

receiving thirty-thousand votes.[31] Becoming an MP only made Sands' public profile even more

prolific, bringing more attention to the strike. However, on May 5, 1981, after sixty-six days,

Sands died on hunger strike. Like his strike and election, Sands' funeral, which over one hundred

thousand people attended, gained world-wide attention, but neither the British government, nor

the strikers gave in. From May to late August the strike continued; when one striker died, another

prisoner began the strike in his place, until ten men had died. After the death of the tenth

prisoner, Republicans made the decision to end the hunger strike.[32] Because of the popularity

and importance of Sands and the hunger strike, following his death there was an explosion of

murals in nationalist areas—it was the start of a real Republican mural tradition.[33] These murals

serve as reminders of the hunger strikers' sacrifice and as tools to further the Republican cause.

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[29] Rolston, *Politics*, 77.

[30] Golway, *Liberty,* 308.

[31] Rolston, *Politics*, 77.

[32] Golway, *Liberty*, 309.

[33] Rolston, *Politics,* 79.

One such mural, Figure 1, is from 1981 after Sands' death. While no precise date is given to the mural, it is clear that it is after his death because it includes IRA soldiers giving the final salute, Sands' tri-color flag draped coffin, and his birth and death year. The inspiration for the firing squad and coffin came from a photograph from Sands' funeral that appeared on the front page of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*.[34] This is fitting for a mural painted in the 1980s because the artist recreated a then-current image that had been viewed world-wide, rather than just his portrait alone. Also featured on this mural is a quote from Sands' story "The Lark and the Freedom Fighter" where he compares his imprisonment to a trapped lark. While the entire quote is important, there are key words and phrases that must be focused on. First, Sands writes that he has "the spirit of freedom" and that despite whatever the oppressor—the prison guards, RUC, British soldiers, British government —does or whatever prison conditions he may face, it cannot be stopped. This is a powerful quote to use in a 1981 mural because though Sands died, the strike continued for months. Of course the nine others on strike, could not be invigorated by such a mural because they were confined to Long Kesh, but a quote like this could garner support in the community for the strikers. The hope would then be that more community support could eventually turn into national and world-wide support or sympathy that could turn the tide for the other men still alive on strike and the other prisoners in Long Kesh denied special category status. Rather than talk about how brutal starving oneself is or the horrible prison conditions, this quote expresses how the beliefs motivating the strike are simply too powerful to be stopped.

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[34] Rolston, *Politics,* 84.

Figure 1

A second key component of this quote lies in the vocabulary chosen by Sands. He says

that he can be "murdered." This is especially relevant to 1981 because after his death, there was

debate over the cause of death, which was ruled a suicide by the Northern Ireland Office. British

politicians and Loyalists agreed with this official cause of death, while Republicans rejected it

and often used words like murdered and killed to describe Sands' death.[35] While this belief may

remain today, the word choice is particularly powerful in 1981, as it echoes the current events, in

the same way the recreation of the newspaper image is more powerful in 1981. The last

important element of this quote is significant in both word choice and artistic style. After saying

that while he may be murdered, nothing will change that he is a prisoner of war. Once again, this

word choice is so powerful to a passerby in 1981 because it is reflecting the current political

situation. While the strike was a tactic in the bigger picture of a united Ireland, the immediate

goal of the strike was for return of status for political prisoners. Despite what the British or other

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[35] Rolston. *Politics*, 79.

international governments said about the strikers, Sands is reaffirming his belief that no matter what, he is a prisoner of war and not a criminal. The artistic style is important to this quote because the dash is used in two ways; it finishes the thought and it shows who said it. The viewer of this mural would be able to see that Sands will remain a prisoner of war, but also that this quote was written by a prisoner of war. Despite Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's stance on the hunger strikers and that "a crime is crime, is a crime," both Sands' diary and poetry reflect the notion that he believed he was a prisoner of war.[36] In a diary entry written on March 9, 1981, he remarks, "we wish to be treated 'not as ordinary prisoners' for we are not criminals. We admit no crime unless, that is, the love of one's people and country is a crime."[37] Unlike the British government's view on the hunger strikers and the Republican prisoners, through his writings Sands maintains that he is not a criminal—he is a political prisoner of war and they cannot criminalize a nation's struggle for freedom.

Murals painted in the 1980s in support of the 1981 Hunger Strike often featured Christian symbols. Parallels between the strikers and Jesus, images of angels and the Virgin Mary, and Christian symbols like the crucifix appear in murals of this decade. Because she is the Mother of God, Mary plays an integral part of the Christian tradition. She is seen "as a universal symbol of maternal nature and human sympathy" because of the sorrows she experienced in her life, namely the death of her only son.[38] Because of this, it is common for people to turn to Mary for

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[36] Roseanna Doughty, "The Hunger Strike Terrorists': the British Press and the Hunger Strikes," *Irish Times,* July 5, 2016, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/the-hunger-strike-terrorists-the-british-press-and-the-hunger-strikes-1.2706714.

[37] Bobby Sands, *Skylark Sing Your Lonely Song: an Anthology of the Writings of Bobby Sands* (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1982) 163.

[38] Miri Rubin, "Mary," *History Workshop Journal,* No. 58 (Autumn 2004): 2, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25472751.

comfort and guidance after eruptions of violence or in the aftermath of large struggles.[39] It is not

surprising then the hunger strikers would turn to religion to express their sorrows and seek

comfort. Not only did they seek comfort in God and Mary, but they also looked for their

sympathy and support for the cause. This is seen in the prison writings of Sands. In his poem

"Poetic Justice" Sands dreams that he is at the Gates of Heaven where he is greeted by God and

St. Peter. Upon seeing him, God says:

> 'Bob,' said the Lord, 'you done all right down there,
> Of torture, pain and suffering,
> Don't I know you had your share?'
> 'Let him in, Peter,' said the Lord,
> 'And go in peace, my son,
> For the Lord your God forgives you
> For everything you've done.'[40]

God acknowledges the suffering Sands endured in Long Kesh and shows his sympathy for the

brutal treatment he received while imprisoned. This is then juxtaposed at the Gates of Heaven

with stanzas about the former Secretary of State in Northern Ireland, Roy Mason, who

supervised the criminalization program. Unlike God's reaction to Sands, His reaction to Mason

is harsh:

> 'And what about those H-Blocks, Roy
> And all those naked men you kept?
> Don't you know' said the Lord, 'I watched them,
> And every night they wept?
> Roy you tortured them
> And you held them all those years,
> Naked and suffering,
> They wept a million tears.'[41]

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[39] Rubin, "Mary," 2.

[40] Sands, *Skylark* "Poetic Justice," 140.

[41] Sands, *Skylark* "Poetic Justice," 141.

Not only does God condemn the actions of Mason, but he further reveals that he is on the side of the strikers. Every night for years he has watched over them—whether on the blanket or a hunger strike, God watched over the political prisoners, imprisoned for their actions in the armed struggle. While Sands' writings were not compiled into a published book until after his death, his smuggled out writings were published in newspapers like *An Phoblacht/Republican News* as early as 1979.[42] Therefore, muralists in 1981 would already be familiar with the association between the hunger strikers and religion.

Knowing the association between the hunger strikers, God, and the Virgin Mary, during the strike, muralists found inspiration in religion. Figure 2, a mural from 1981, features a dying hunger striker clutching rosary beads with Mary standing over him. The artist, therefore, is making the connection between the hunger strikers and religion and suggesting that God and Mary are on their side. For the Republican artist, it is much easier to portray God as sympathetic to a prisoner, beaten down and starving to death, than a prison guard or the British government. While it is certainly sympathetic and partial to the Republican cause, the painter is using the idea that God sides with and protects His oppressed people, the prisoners.

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[42] Danny Morrison, introduction to *Prison Poems* by Bobby Sands (Dublin: Sinn Fein Publicity Department, Oct. 1981) 7.

Figure 2

The images alone show the religious component to this mural, but the words on the mural also provide a further religious element. The text is derivative of the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus gave his followers the eight Beatitudes, one of which is, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied."[43] Any Catholic reading this mural would recognize the similarity in language between the Beatitude and the quote. Not only does the quote reaffirm the notion that God is on the side of the strikers since they are blessed, but it highlights the deeper meaning and intention of the hunger strike. The ten went on a hunger strike in order to receive the benefits of special category status of political prisoners—they protested to receive what was just. Furthermore, the quote can be looked at in the context of the Republican struggle as a whole. Their struggle goes far beyond the right to wear their own clothes and to be exempt from prison work or any of their demands, because the heart of the issue is that they are fighting for Irish freedom. To Republicans, justice

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[43] Matt. 5: 6 (New American Bible Revised Edition) https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5-7&version=NABRE.

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means gaining freedom from British rule and joining the Republic of Ireland without partition. A hunger strike is one tactic in the greater armed struggle to overthrow British rule. Because ten men gave their lives the 1981 Hunger Strike alone, in murals of the 1980s, they became immortalized as martyrs and were often artistically compared to Jesus (with their shared long hair and beard, battered body, or style of dress), who gave his life for his people and his cause. This mural does not explicitly say the words hunger strike, nor does it depict the image or list any names of a particular striker, but it clear that this mural is about the hunger strike. For one, the quote is obviously referencing the strike, but secondly, the background depiction of the H-block jail, another name for Long Kesh, further indicates that this mural is in homage to the hunger strikers. While this may seem obvious, it is important to note because it shows how it fits into a mural of the 1980s. Because this mural was painted either while the strike was still happening or in the months after it ended, the artist was able to be more vague and symbolic because it was referencing current events; someone who looked at this mural in 1981 knew that even though it does not explicitly say "hunger strike," nor depict a person, or list any names, this mural is about the then-current hunger strike. Chapter three will show that as the 1981 Hunger Strike becomes more of a historical event and no longer a current event, artists will be more straightforward and less vague because of the years that passed.

Moving away from the hunger strike, international events also served as source of inspiration for Republican painters, particularly other armed struggles like those in Palestine or South Africa. Figure 3 depicts an IRA volunteer with a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) member, each in disguise with weapons, holding a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) together. While both Loyalist paramilitary groups and the IRA used RPGs, they are practically synonymous with the IRA and seen as their weapon of choice—so much so that local

Republicans renamed the street Beechmount Ave to RPG Avenue, which can be seen on the mural.[44]
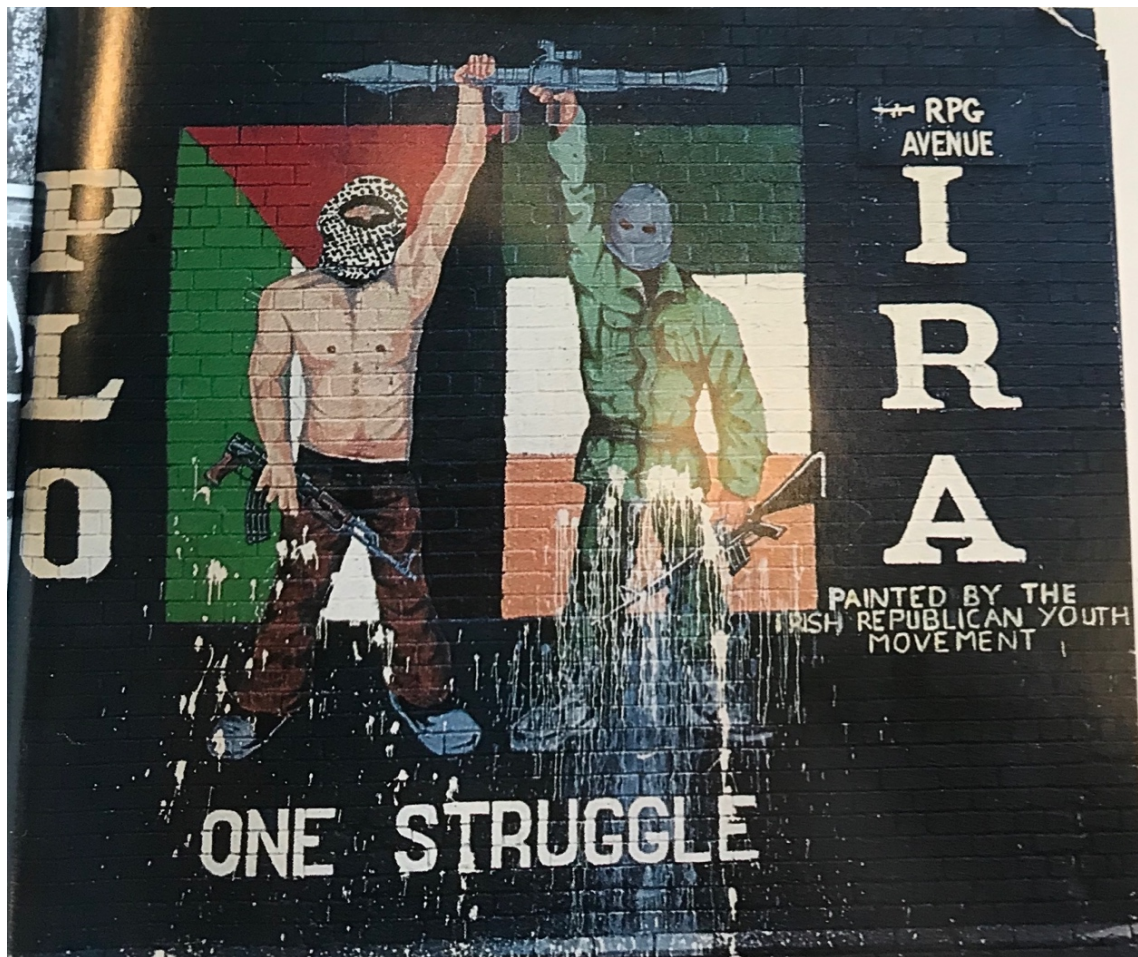
Figure 3

The message of Figure 3 is direct—support. By depicting the two fighters together, joined by the quintessential weapon of the IRA and the text "One Struggle," the artist is showing the connection between the two organizations' fight for liberation. Like the conflict in Northern Ireland, the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is rooted in a long, complex history over territory and religion. The PLO has its roots in 1964, when it was created with the goal of

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[44] "For Some, the RPG-7 Was Once Icon of 'Armed Struggle'- Now it's a Symbol of its Futility," *Belfast Telegraph,* Dec. 8, 2016, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/news-analysis/for-some-the-rpg7-was-once-icon-of-armed-struggle-now-its-a-symbol-of-its-futility-35277053.html.

Palestinian liberation.[45] In an attempt to achieve this, the PLO waged a terroristic campaign throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, somewhat similar to the campaign of the IRA.[46] The artist of Figure 3 is drawing on their similar struggle and recognizing that is not just the Irish who are attempting to rid their land of an oppressor, but rather, that it happens all over the world. While the circumstances of the fighting in Northern Ireland and Palestine are not exactly the same, this mural recognizes that both the PLO and IRA are both involved in an armed struggle to change the political landscape of their countries.

The inclusion of weapons, both in their own guns and in their shared RPG, is telling of a mural from the 1980s. In 1982, the year this mural was painted, both the IRA and the PLO were active in their armed campaign, so it is normal for the muralist to depict the soldiers with theses threatening and destructive weapons because it fits the time period of an active and current struggle. By painting a mural that includes international events, rather than solely Irish current events, the artist is creating a larger scope for their respective struggles. This mural shows that what is happening in Northern Ireland is not unique to them; it is currently happening in other areas of the world. The desire for freedom, and the means by which people try to achieve it, are not distinct to one people or nation. By showing that the Irish Republican struggle is not an isolated occurrence, this mural is an attempt to generate more support because if someone supports a similar political struggle of the PLO in Palestine, then they should support the IRA fight in Northern Ireland.

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[45] Rashid Hamid, "What is the PLO?" *Journal of Palestine Studies,* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Summer 1975): 96, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2535603.

[46]Michael Moran, "Terrorist Groups and Political Legitimacy," *Council on Foreign Relations,* Mar. 16, 2006, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/terrorist-groups-and-political-legitimacy.

Despite the continued bombing and shooting campaigns carried out by both the IRA and UDA, strides towards peace were made as early as 1985 with the Anglo-Irish Agreement. This treaty gave the Republic of Ireland influence in Northern Ireland and said that should the majority of people in the North want a united Ireland, then it could happen. While the Agreement did help create more inclusive dialogue and a wider political scale, it also created more violence, particularly from Loyalist forces who feared the agreement as a step to a united Ireland.[47] Despite its intentions, the agreement marked the start of a long and often clumsy effort to bring peace to Northern Ireland.[48] Even though the peace process was slowly starting to take shape, Republicans—especially the IRA—did not back down in their struggle for freedom. Figure 4, a mural from 1989, demonstrates this determination for victory. The mural, unlike others examined thus far, can be described as a "quasi-mural," according to professor Bill Rolston. This style is somewhere in between graffiti and a traditional mural; slogans are painted onto a wall that has been painted, often hastily and without artistic quality. This style is common to murals in the 1980s, when artistry was not the main takeaway for many muralists.[49]

Figure 4

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[47] Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto-Arponen, "The End of Violence and Introduction of 'Real' Politics: Tensions in Peaceful Northern Ireland," *Geografiska Annaler Series B, Human Geography* 83, no. 3 (2001): 124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/491073.

[48] Golway, *Liberty,* 317.

[49] Rolston, *Politics,* 77.

Figure 4 provides a message of Republican triumph. By saying, "twenty years onward to victory," this mural is referring to the start of the Troubles in 1969. Despite twenty years of war, twenty years of tragedy, this mural sends a message of hope—not in achieving peace, but in winning the war. The artist is invigorated to keep fighting until victory is reached. The use of the Irish language is significant in this mural. By using it here, the artist is indicating that this is a Republican mural; without it, it could be unclear who is emerging triumphantly. The use of Irish language on murals is seen throughout the decades because it is an obvious and effective way to express Irish nationalism and culture. By incorporating the Irish language the artist is rejecting the Anglicization of Ireland centuries earlier. However, the English translation is provided, perhaps because few would know the translation for this mural, either because they do not know the language or because it is not one of the common Irish phrases even those unfamiliar with the language would know. This quasi-mural serves as a good example of a mural from the 1980s because of its simplicity in artistry—some may only see it as graffiti—and because of its timeline; not only is it recognizing that twenty years have passed since the onset of the Troubles, but the artist is still hopeful that Republicans will endure and topple British rule. It captures the mindset of many Republicans in the 1980s: yes, the war has been raging on for twenty years, but it will not stop until the goal is achieved—until Ireland is recognized as a united, thirty-two county nation without partition or under the United Kingdom. However, this mindset will slowly begin to change for some Republicans in the 1990s as the prospect of peace and a reformed Northern Ireland becomes more important than a united Ireland.

CHAPTER TWO

1990—1998: Peace Process and Good Friday Agreement

> It's the same old theme since 1916
> In your head, in your head
> They're still fighting
> With their tanks and their bombs
> And their bombs and their guns
> In your head, in your head they are dying.
>
> *Excerpt from the song "Zombie"*
> *by The Cranberries.*

Despite politicians from both Unionist and Republican parties and the British, Irish, and eventually the U.S. governments' speaking together and attempting to broker peace and create some kind of solution, the violence continued into the 1990s. While the general population took it as a positive sign that leaders from different parties and countries met together, the paramilitary groups on both sides of the conflict continued to wage their armed campaigns. For example, in 1992, the IRA detonated a bomb in London which caused over one billion dollars in damage and Loyalist groups like the UDA continued their shooting campaigns against Catholics suspected of being sympathetic to either Sinn Féin or the IRA.[50] Because little changed between 1990 and 1993, many of the murals painted in those years are similar to murals painted in the 1980s. One such mural from 1992 is a memorial to fallen IRA volunteers—a common theme of murals for any decade. Figure 5 is a tribute to three IRA volunteers—Mairéad Farrell, Dan McCann, and Sean Savage—who were killed by the Special Air Service (SAS) unit of the British Army in Gibraltar in 1988. The three were on an IRA mission and it is believed that their plan was to attack the British Army by detonating a bomb during the changing-of-the-guard

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[50] Golway, *Liberty,* 327.

ceremony. However, Spanish authorities alerted the British of their arrival, and the three

volunteers never had the chance to plant the bomb. Instead, all three were shot dead by the SAS.

At the time of their deaths, all three volunteers were unarmed and witnesses say they were shot

several times without warning and while trying to surrender. This is important because it caused

many Republicans to accuse the SAS of using the illegal "shoot-to-kill" policy.[51] An inquest into

their deaths was conducted in the months after the incident and the SAS maintained that they

intended to arrest the three volunteers, but after they made "threatening gestures" they were

compelled to shoot.[52] Despite the request by Gibraltar police to use minimum force, the

"threatening gestures," and the assumption by the SAS that the three were armed, the inquest

detailed the force used and showed that the SAS went "far beyond what would have been

necessary to incapacitate them."[53] For example, McCann was shot four times (twice in the head,

twice in the back), Farrell was shot eight times (five in the face, three in the back), and Savage

eighteen times, including four shots to the head that were fired above him and no more than two

feet away, after he was already incapacitated by the rounds of bullets.[54] Despite the use of force

and the fact the three were unarmed, the inquest determined that the actions of the SAS were

lawful.[55] The story did not stop with their deaths, however. At their burial in Milltown Cemetery

that which thousands attended, UDA volunteer Michael Stone began attacking the mourners with

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[51] Borthwick, *Writing on the Wall,* 173-174.

[52] Karen DeYoung, "18 Bullets Hit IRA Man, Gibraltar Inquest Told," *The Washington Post,* Sept. 9, 1988, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/09/09/18-bullets-hit-ira-man-gibraltar-inquest-told/1dd8fb34-8920-4452-8cc2-91829fa4ab32/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f69423dff1ec.

[53] DeYoung, "18 Bullets Hit IRA Man."

[54] DeYoung, "18 Bullets Hit IRA Man."

[55] Cianan Brennan, "30 Years Ago a Trio of Killings Sparked One of the Darkest, Most Bizarre, Fortnights of The Troubles," *The Journal,* Mar. 6, 2018. https://www.thejournal.ie/gibraltar-killings-30-years-3885830-Mar2018/.

guns and grenades. He killed two civilians and one IRA volunteer before the RUC caught him as he fled from the scene with the mob of mourners chasing him.[56] Then, at the final funeral of the three killed by Stone, for reasons still unknown, a car with two men drove in front of the funeral procession, drove on the sidewalk, which forced mourners to scatter. At this point, the mourners started to attack the car and the one of the two fired a shot. The two, who were off-duty British Army soldiers, were then dragged from the car, beaten, and shot nearby.[57] In the end, eight people were killed in a series in just two weeks.

It is interesting to note that the majority of murals painted about the Gibraltar Three, including Figure 5, do not include the Milltown Massacre or the death of the British corporals in their depictions. Instead, the majority of murals focus on honoring solely the three IRA volunteers killed in Gibraltar. Based on my research, I could not find a mural including the victims of the Milltown Massacre until 2000. While the reason is unclear, perhaps it is due to wanting to keep the focus on the IRA volunteers who were killed first; by keeping the focus on them it makes their sacrifice and memorial more powerful. Additionally, it could be because the killing of the Gibraltar Three was the catalyst to all the other killings, so perhaps, muralists chose to focus solely on what started the chain reaction of killings, rather than the subsequent killings.

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[56] Borthwick, *Writing on the Wall,* 173-174.

[57] Brennan, "A Trio of Killings."

Figure 5

Although this mural is a depiction of an event that happened in 1988, it is fitting for a mural made in the early 1990s. Artistically, it is very simple, especially compared to murals of the 2000s and 2010s that are not only more elaborately painted, but that also incorporate other mediums like photographs. As for its content, it is straightforward in its message—remembrance. Portraits of the three volunteers appear on the mural, but their names are absent. Perhaps this is because their images and title as "Gibraltar Martyrs" would be enough information for someone in 1992 to understand the mural since they were killed less than five years before its painting. Similarly, the word choice of "martyr" is indicative of a mural painted soon after the event. By calling them martyrs, this mural immortalizes them as heroes. The connotation of martyr creates an idea of a victim, and perhaps pious person, who exhibits the utmost amount of strength because he resists giving and changing his beliefs—he would rather die. It is interesting, then, that the artist would choose to categorize the three with the title martyr, since some witnesses say

they tried to surrender to the SAS in order to save their lives. [58] But, because of the sheer amount of bullets fired at the three, many Republicans would have been sympathetic, especially someone in the years immediately following their death who perhaps read or was at least familiar with the findings of the inquest. This tension between the circumstances surrounding their deaths and the word choice, further point to why this mural is typical of others in the early 1990s. Unlike murals painted decades after an event, this mural was painted less than five years after their deaths, which is perhaps why they are immortalized in this way; the pain of their deaths is still very present.

The other text on Figure 5 is faded in the photograph, but it says, "those that endure the most will conquer in the end." While not exactly the same, it sounds like a paraphrased version of a quote by Terence MacSwiney, who said, "it is not those who can inflict the most but those who can endure the most who will conquer in the end." [59] MacSwiney was an Irish Republican, and Lord Mayor of Cork, who died on hunger strike in an English prison in 1920.[60] By using words so similar to MacSwiney, the painter is drawing a connection to a figure in Irish history and showing the arc of the Republican struggle. The full MacSwiney quote is seen on multiple murals, but, these tend to be in memoriam of hunger strikers. However, the quote makes sense on this mural because though they did not die on hunger strike, there were still brutal circumstances surrounding their deaths, plus the subsequent chaos at their funeral make the quote fitting. Though the manner of death differs, the Gibraltar Three and MacSwiney share that they were killed at the hands of the British for their Republican beliefs. Lastly, the mural contains symbols

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[58] DeYoung, "18 Bullets Hit IRA Man."

[59] Sweeney, "Self-Immolative Martyrdom," 340.

[60] Sweeney, "Self-Immolative Martyrdom," 340.

common to many murals, namely, the emblems of the four provinces, three different Irish and

Republican flags, and a Celtic cross. These quintessentially Irish symbols serve as another way

to demonstrate an Irish nationalist and Republican identity. While the Ulster province emblem

and the red hand of Ulster is used in Loyalist murals, since the six counties that make up

Northern Ireland are a part of Ulster, the inclusion of the other three Irish province emblems

shows that this is a Republican mural, for a Loyalist would not include them.

The final important symbol in the mural is the hooded and armed IRA man. The gun's

position here is significant because it is not *as* threatening as weapon positions in other murals,

both Republican and Loyalist, since it is not pointed at the viewer, nor is it held in a funeral-like

stance or final salute. It seems as if the figure is mobile, prepared to fight if necessary. When this

mural was painted, the bombings and shootings were still frequently occurring and despite some

clamoring for an end to the violence, there was no real end in sight. Furthermore, perhaps this

ready to fight IRA figure could be a reference to the events that followed the funeral attacks;

when the British corporals drove their car in the funeral procession and fired a shot, the IRA

responded and killed the men. Because they were still in the thick of the fighting in 1992, it is

not surprising that a hooded IRA man armed with a rifle would be featured in this mural.

Finally in 1993, there was a breakthrough that would begin a true and realistic peace

process, though it will take a number of years to complete. On December 15, 1993, the Downing

Street Declaration, an agreement issued by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, John

Major, and the Taoiseach of Ireland, Albert Reynolds, was released.[61] In some ways echoing the

Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration affirmed that the people of both the

Republic and Northern Ireland decide the future of the island of Ireland; the majority of people in

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[61] Golway, *Liberty,* 328.

both Ulster and the Republic will vote to decide if the six counties of Ulster will remain a part of

the United Kingdom, or if they would leave and join as counties in the Republic of Ireland.

Additionally, it declared that the Great Britain does not have "selfish, strategic or economic

interest" in Northern Ireland.[62] It also mandated that the British and Irish governments would

create a political framework allowing them to work with one another for Northern Ireland and

their own countries. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, it stated that should the IRA

renounce their armed campaign and violence, Sinn Féin leader, Gerry Adams, would be included

in peace talks.[63] This was crucial because not only would the violence by the IRA stop, but

including Adams and Sinn Féin in the talks could potentially mean the end of the Troubles. On

August 31, the IRA announced their ceasefire, saying "there will be a complete cessation of

military operations."[64] Unlike other previous ceasefires that lasted only days, this ceasefire had

no timeline—a sign that peace might be on the horizon. However, Loyalist paramilitaries would

continue their armed campaigns until October, when the Combined Loyalist Military Command,

representing multiple Loyalist paramilitary organizations finally issued their own ceasefire

statement. Gusty Spence, founder of the modern UVF, delivered the announcement, which also

included an apology and a message of hope. He said, "…Let us firmly resolve to respect of

differing views of freedom, culture and aspiration and never again permit our political

circumstances to degenerate into bloody warfare."[65] By 1993, it became clear that both

politicians and the people of Northern Ireland were ready for an end to the violence. The British

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[62] Philip Stephens, "Anglo-Irish Plan Offers Hope for Peace in Ulster," *Financial Times,* Dec. 16, 1993, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/8Z6uZ4.

[63] Stephens, "Anglo-Irish Plan Offers Hope."

[64] Golway, *Liberty,* 331.

[65] Golway, *Liberty, 332.*

Army had been stationed there since 1969, thousands had died, and tens of thousands were injured; the people were simply exhausted and wanted peace.[66] Figure 6, a mural from 1994, is an example of how some Republicans felt this desire for the change of the status quo and chance at peace. The mural lists demands many Republicans wanted, including disbanding the RUC and Royal Irish Regiment (RIR), releasing POWS, and returning British soldiers to England. Additionally, it calls for an end to the Unionist veto, which Republicans felt hindered the status of Northern Ireland from ever changing.[67] Strikingly, the mural also includes the word "permanently" next to each of the demands, signaling that in order for peace to ever truly happen, these things must change forever. No longer can the British troops occupy Ireland, no longer can the British government, Army, RUC, and Loyalist paramilitary groups collude with one another, and no longer can the RUC exist. If these changes happen, then "a just and lasting peace" can also happen. While the painter could certainly be advocating for a united Ireland, especially with demanding an end to the Unionist veto, it is must be noted that the other demands listed would advance the lives of Republicans and Catholics even if Northern Ireland remained a part of the United Kingdom. This is important because even if Republicans concede to continuing British control, they insist on other changes, including disbanding the mostly Protestant RUC, releasing political prisoners, and the army leaving, which would all not only improve their lives, but create an environment where peace could actually happen. Unlike in murals of the 1980s where the British relinquishing control over Northern Ireland and creating a thirty-two county Ireland was the only solution, this 1990s mural shows that peace has become

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[66] Golway, *Liberty,* 316.

[67] Seamus Mallon, "It Takes Two to Consent," *Fortnight Publications,* no. 333 (Nov. 1994): 15, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25554799.

the main goal for many Republicans; for some, an end to violence became more important than

leaving the United Kingdom. While they still certainly have grievances against the British and

Loyalists, evident by the demands, this mural demonstrates that some Republicans in 1994 are

willing to try and give peace a chance.

Figure 6

Because the peace process took so many years with talks with various political parties

and international governments, Figure 7, a mural painted two years later in 1996, also centers

around a message of ending violence and establishing peace. It resembles a political cartoon: it

depicts a dove carrying a British soldier out of Ireland for England. The words "time for peace,

time to go" appear—a phrase seen on Republican murals first in 1994, the year that marked

twenty-five years since the deployment of British soldiers in Northern Ireland. This mural perhaps expresses the political climate of 1996 in Northern Ireland because it shows the public's clamoring for peace and an end to the Troubles. In the depiction of the soldier—he is carried out by the dove, he is not leaving on his own. Also, the way his head hangs low, it looks as if he is leaving in defeat. This is important to a Republican mural because in no way is it praising the army and its efforts; in fact, it is saying that in order to have peace, the army must leave Northern Ireland. It is significant that a British soldier is carried out and not a government figure or a symbol that would mean end British rule in Northern Ireland, but rather he is carried out by a symbol of peace. Like Figure 6, the artist is advocating for an end to the occupation of Ireland in the name of peace, not necessarily for Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom. Of course the artist may also think that, but this mural does not reflect that belief. Instead, it perhaps expresses the feeling that after almost thirty years of war, peace must be restored and the way to achieve that is by the British soldiers returning to England. By 1996, peace talks had been occurring for years and the desire for an end was only getting stronger, even if an end meant that a thirty-two county Ireland would not happen, at least the violence and killings could end.

Figure 7

Republican murals painted in the 1990s did not always reference the Troubles. For example, Figure 8 from 1995 refers back 150 years to the start of the Famine, or as the mural refers to it in Irish, the Great Hunger.[68] This word choice is so important because while many non-Irish refer to 1845 to 1852 in Irish history as the Famine, many Irish Republicans call it the Great Hunger because they do not believe that the circumstances and events of the time period fit the definition of a famine, mostly due to the response of the British government to combat the crop failure and mass starvation. While it is such an important event in Irish history, my research showed that no Republican mural referred to the Great Hunger prior to 1995—the 150th anniversary of its start. Since 1995, murals about this period have been painted, but not to the extent of other events of Irish history like the Easter Rising or the 1981 Hunger Strike. What these murals have in common is referring to it as An Gorta Mór (The Great Hunger) and expressing Republican views by blaming the British for the death and emigration the crop failure caused.

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[68] Borthwick, *Writing on the Wall,* 32.

Figure 8

Figure 8 incorporates two walls in order to convey its message about the Great Hunger. With no text besides "An Gorta Mór," the artist used the wall to the right to firmly state that no famine ever happened. While this mural does not say that the British caused a genocide or Ireland's holocaust like some made in later years do, the implication is clear that the British government caused the people of Ireland to starve because of their lack of response to the potato failure and that the use of the word famine is misleading.[69] While this mural was painted to commemorate the 150th anniversary, it is interesting to note that it was also created after the 1994 ceasefire. Instead of referencing past events of the Troubles or current events, the artist chose to represent his Republican beliefs by going back to an event a century and a half ago. It is also significant to note the white dove and green ribbon—two symbols meant to show support for the

[69] Borthwick, *Writing on the Wall,* 33.

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Republican prisoners. The green ribbon began to appear in murals in the 1990s to show support

for political prisoners, specifically to lobby for their release. The demand for the release of

political prisoners was popular during the 1990s; as talks of peace began to increase, so did the

hope that political prisoners would be released. Figure 8 serves as an example of how

Republicans expressed anti-British sentiment without referring to the Troubles.

The years between the 1994 ceasefire and 1998 were similar to those of the early-to-mid

1990s. They were marked by seemingly endless talks and negotiations among multiple political

parties. Finally in 1998, after years of complicated political talks and arrangements, an

agreement was reached by both Unionist and Republican political parties and the British and

Irish governments. Former United States Senator George Mitchell had served as the chairman of

the peace talks throughout the peace process and made the announcement that the Good Friday

Agreement had been signed, saying in part,

> I'm pleased to announce that the two governments, and the political parties of Northern
> Ireland, have reached agreement. The agreement proposes changes in the Irish
> Constitution and in British constitutional law to enshrine the principle that it is the people
> of Northern Ireland who will decide, democratically, their own future. The agreement
> creates new institutions: a Northern Ireland Assembly, to restore to the people the
> fundamental democratic right to govern themselves; and a North/South Council, to
> encourage cooperation and joint action for mutual benefit. It deals fairly with sensitive
> issues as prisoners, policing, and decommissioning.[70]

The Good Friday Agreement created a new style of government in Northern Ireland based on

power-sharing; no longer would Northern Ireland be exclusively ruled by a Protestant Unionist

majority. The agreement is composed of three strands, which Mitchell referenced in his

statement. Strand one focused on the relationships among political parties in Northern Ireland

and created the Northern Ireland Assembly. Strand two established a stronger relationship

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[70] George J. Mitchell, *Making Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 181.

between Northern Ireland and the Republic. While the Republic changed its Constitution to

reflect the fact that the six counties of Northern Ireland were a part of the United Kingdom

(unless a majority of the populations vote otherwise), it was important for the creators of the

agreement to foster a relationship between the North and the Republic. Finally, strand three

focused on the relationship between the British and Irish governments. Like strand two, this was

meant to foster a better political relationship between the governments by establishing the

British-Irish Council.[71] Additionally, the Good Friday Agreement addressed issues with

prisoners and the RUC. Under the agreement, the government created a system to enable the

release of political prisoners, both Republican and Loyalist, imprisoned for their military actions

during the war. As for the RUC, the agreement acknowledged the deep-rooted issue regarding

the police force in Northern Ireland—particularly their relationship with Catholics and

Republicans:

> …the agreement provides the opportunity for a new beginning to policing in Northern
> Ireland with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the
> community as a whole…They consider that this opportunity should inform and underpin
> the development of a police service representative in terms of the make-up of the
> community as a whole and which, in a peaceful environment, should be routinely
> unarmed.[72]

As a practically all-encompassing document, the Good Friday Agreement established a new form

of government in Northern Ireland, changed the Constitution in Ireland and constitutional law in

Britain, released political prisoners, enabled paramilitary groups to demilitarize, changed the

police force, and formally ended the Troubles. The Good Friday Agreement paved the way for

peace to once again return to Northern Ireland. In Mitchell's book about the peace process, he

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[71] Kuusisto-Arponen, "The End of Violence," 125.

[72] *The Belfast Agreement*, Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity- Policing and Justice, 26.

recounts the words two elderly women said to him after his announcement of the Good Friday Agreement. With tears streaming down their faces, they thanked him for the peace agreement, but not for what it would do for them, but rather for their grandchildren saying, "thanks to you, they'll lead lives of peace and hope, something we've never known."[73] No longer would the lives of generations of Catholic and Protestant children be marked by sectarian violence. While it was not perfect, nor did it solve every issue immediately, the Good Friday Agreement proved that not only could peace be established in Northern Ireland, but that it could be done democratically.

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[73] Mitchell, *Making Peace,* 183.

CHAPTER THREE

2000s/2010s: Murals Post-Peace Agreement

Now the music's gone but they carry on
For their spirit's been bruised, never broken
They will not forget but their hearts are set
On tomorrow and peace once again
For what's done is done and what's won is won
And what's lost is lost and gone forever
I can only pray for a bright brand new day
in the town I love so well

Final verse of the song "The Town I Loved So Well"
written by Phil Coulter.

While the Troubles officially ended in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement, it must be noted that the violence did not stop immediately. For example, just four months after the signing of the agreement, the Real IRA—a splinter group from the Provisional IRA that opposed the agreement—detonated a bomb in Omagh, County Tyrone, that killed twenty-nine people and injured over two hundred, making it the deadliest attack of the conflict.[74] However, in the days after the Omagh bombing, any dissident groups still opposing the Good Friday Agreement ceased all violence; this was the first time in almost thirty years where every paramilitary group stopped military operations or declared a ceasefire.[75] As the years have progressed, less and less violence has occurred and the main paramilitary groups are no longer active. Despite this, the mural tradition has persisted. Post-peace murals are especially interesting because while they share characteristics of murals painted in the prior decades, they are also influenced by their time

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[74] "Omagh Bombing: Key Events Before and After the Attack," *The Irish Times*, Aug. 12, 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/omagh-bombing-key-events-before-and-after-the-attack-1.3593660.

[75] Mitchell, *Making Peace,* 184.

period—a period in which a new form of government was created and peace officially arrived. After the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, Republican painters decided they would no longer paint murals with contemporary guns—guns would only be featured "in historical murals or memorials to dead colleagues."[76] This is an artistic choice that could have a significant impact on the community because it shows a willingness to move away from violent sectarian images that further separated a divided community. This decision, however, does not prevent Republican muralists from conveying their staunchly pro-Irish beliefs, nor does it means guns are never featured; instead, murals still maintain their Republican identity, sometimes through Irish history, but they do not feature a contemporary IRA volunteer with a weapon directly pointed at the viewer with threatening words like murals painted in the 1980s and 1990s. Furthermore, in 2006, the state became involved in the mural-changing process by creating the Reimaging Communities Programme which gave over four million pounds as an incentive for muralists to change the more divisive, militaristic, or offensive murals with ones with more acceptable themes. Murals sponsored through this program reflected a wide range of themes, some Loyalist, some Republican, and some purely neutral.[77] Whether because of incentive from the government or because of their own volition, murals painted after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement differ than ones of the 1980s and 1990s in a variety of ways. Artistically, many murals painted in the 2000s/2010s showcase the talent of the painter more so than previous decades; less quasi-murals are seen and more elaborate, bright murals are seen. This perhaps could be because now that the conflict is over, artists do not feel the need to hastily get a message across to the community like they did with quasi-murals of the 1980s. Furthermore, murals post-peace use

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[76] Rolston, *Drawing Support,* ii.

[77] Rolston, *Drawing Support*, ii,vii.

other mediums like posters or photographs in addition to traditional paint on a wall. Aside from the artistry of the murals, seen in comparing these murals to the ones painted 1980s and 1990s, messages and symbols differ among those painted post-peace. This chapter will explore these differences and how while the general theme of murals painted in the 2000s/2010s may be the same, there are differences that make these murals indicative of their time period.

One mural that highlights differences between murals before and after the Good Friday Agreement is Figure 9—a West Belfast mural celebrating the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). The GAA celebrates Irish culture and identity through sport. It established a league for purely Irish sports like hurling and Gaelic football and connected Irish people not only throughout Ireland, but eventually in America, Australia, and England as well. When it was founded in 1884, its manifesto quickly became "bitterly anti-English and flamboyantly pro-Irish."[78] By rejecting traditional British sports like rugby and cricket for traditional Irish sports, nationalists expressed their political beliefs in non-violent means; they promoted their Irish identity and culture, and rejected British culture simultaneously. (Note: why many Irish play rugby and soccer, they are not sports in the GAA).This pro-Irish, anti-British mentality is expressed 125 years later in Figure 9. By featuring men playing Gaelic football and women playing camogie it is evident that this is a Republican mural—they are expressing their Irish identity through GAA sports. While non-GAA sports are also featured on the mural, it is clear that the main focus of the mural is the GAA, based on not only the sports, but also the local sports club's logo, name, and 125th anniversary, all written in Irish.

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[78] W.F. Mandle, "The I.R.B. and the Beginnings of Gaelic Athletic Association," *Irish Historical Studies* 20, no. 80 (Sept. 1977): 241, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30006691.

Figure 9

In addition to this main mural, the wall running along the sidewalk has been painted to convey more messages of culture, with the Irish language being the main focus. Included in the description of the image is the translation of these quotes. Translated by the CCDL, the first says "The Recovery of the Irish Language" and has the insignia of a local language organization. On the same panel appears the phrase "The Recovery of Ireland" and a logo of a language school. These quotes are relevant to the Republican movement because it is a reference back to the late 1800s when Ireland was undergoing a period of revitalization. Organizations like the GAA and later the Gaelic League worked to ensure the Irish language would not die. As discussed in chapter two, the Famine, or Great Hunger, devasted the Irish in many ways—at least one million died, another million emigrated, and their native language was in danger of disappearing. Irish speakers were more prevalent in the west of Ireland, which was also the area most affected by the Famine. This meant that many native speakers died and those speakers who did survive, were

then eager to teach English to their children instead of Irish in hopes it would provide a better

life. During the Famine they saw the connection between those who spoke Irish and those who

died and, then, those who spoke English and those who were able to emigrate and survive.

Leaders of the revival of the Irish language and culture tended to be from the east of Ireland and

saw the Irish language differently. Instead of seeing it as backwards and something that held

them back, they saw it as a way to take a stand against the British. An artist recreating these

quotes in Irish in 2009 is acting in the same way. By writing in Ireland's native language, they

are taking an anti-British and pro-Irish stance.

Figure 10

       Two additional figures in this mural further conveys the message of Irish culture by

featuring images other elements of Irish culture, like music and dance, in addition to sport. It

emphasizes traditional styles of dance and music by featuring a sean-nós, meaning "old style"

dancer and a bodhrán, a traditional drum linked to the revival of Irish music in the 1960s.[79]

Finally, the mural features men playing hurling, making a trifecta of Irish sport, dance, and

music. In addition to these images, Figure 11 contains many Irish quotes, also translated by the

CCDL. The largest quote is the straightforward command of "Speak Irish." This is supplemented

then with two more phrases: "It's better to speak broken Irish, than smart English," and a Padraig

Pearse quote, "A land without a language is a land without a soul." These two quotes seem to be

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[79] Edward O. Henry, "Institutions for the Promotion of Indigenous Music: The Case for Ireland's Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann," *Ethnomusicology,* Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter 1989) :72, 81, https://www.jstor.org/stable/852170.

advocating language as a tool for resistance in the Republican movement. They show the power

behind language—the native element that the colonized refuse to give up. All three quotes are

important for a mural made in 2009 because it connects the past and present. The reasons behind

the revival of the language and culture and the creation of organizations like the GAA and the

Gaelic League in the late 1800s are the same reasons why a Republican painter in Belfast in the

twenty-first century would paint this mural. It is a way to express Irish identity by being anti-

British; if the British speak English, the Irish will speak Irish, if the British play rugby, the Irish

will play hurling, if the British are Protestants, the Irish will be Catholics. Not only is the quote

important because of its content, but it is important to note that it comes from the executed

Republican Pearse. Pearse is a prominent figure in Irish history for his role in the 1916 Easter

Rising and by using a quote from him, the painter is connecting the nationalist struggles of the

early twentieth century and today. All three segments of this mural come together to create a

clear Republican and Irish, and thus, anti-British, mural. However, like the Great Hunger mural

from 1995 (Figure 8), it makes no reference to the Troubles, nor does it mention Great Britain in

a direct way. This is key because this mural proves that one can express Republican views

without using violent images or referencing the Troubles. Instead, it uses cultural images through

sport, language, dance, and music to show that while Ulster remains a part of the United

Kingdom, they are still Irish, not British. While murals in the 1980s and 1990s did contain

images of the GAA and use Irish language, what makes this mural clearly from the 2000s is the

artistry and elaborate design involved in painting this mural. Unlike earlier ones, this mural is

vibrant and bright and the artistic talent is obvious, particularly in the depiction of the footballers

and cyclists. Additionally, this is an anniversary mural—showing not only the historical

significance of the GAA, but also its modern day importance. Lastly, the inclusion of non-GAA

sports like cycling and racquetball are relevant to a mural made in 2009, about ten years after the

Good Friday Agreement, because they depict sports that do not have a history and culture

wrapped within them. The cyclist could be any man—Protestant or Catholic—because there is

no distinct cultural and religious organization tied to a sport like cycling, as there is with a sport

like Gaelic football. The artist could have made it obvious that Protestants were depicted by

painting a non-GAA sport that has ties to the British like soccer or rugby, but the artist chose to

pick a sport for anybody instead. The mural shows that sports are a major aspect of the

community, whether they are GAA or not. While the circumstances and borders have changed

since 1884, the message is still the same for nationalists: the Irish have a distinct language and

culture, completely separate from the British, that will not die out.

Figure 11

Like murals of previous decades, murals painted in the 2000/2010s, portray Irish

historical figures—some a part of the Republican struggle in the Troubles, others from long

before that. One such mural is Figure 12, a dedication to James Connolly. Connolly was one of

the founders of the Irish Citizens Army and one of the signers of the Proclamation of the Irish

Republic; he was executed in 1916 after the Easter Rising. While murals containing Connolly are

not limited to the 2000/2010s, this mural painted in 2012 dedicated to him and his daughter,

Nora, should be examined through the post-peace agreement lens. The mural features portraits of

the two along with a short biography, detailing their activity in the Irish Republican movement.

The mural features common elements found in many murals, namely the flags of the four provinces and Celtic knot designs; it also has a border of "1916" as Connolly was one of the leaders executed in the uprising.

Figure 12

Like the GAA and Irish culture mural, Figure 12 serves the same purpose: express Irish nationalism and Republicanism without referring to the Troubles. It is evident by the quote used—"the British government has no right in Ireland, never had any right in Ireland, and never can have any right in Ireland,"—that this is an anti-British and a Republican mural. However, instead of referencing an IRA member or a Republican leader involved in the Troubles, the artist chose to reference an event that occurred when all of Ireland was under British rule and in Dublin, rather than in Belfast or Derry. This is an important distinction to make because it perhaps could be seen as less controversial by a Loyalist in 2012, and in the years since the initial painting, since the Easter Rising and the execution of Connolly did not occur in his/her lifetime, nor in his/her province (or country as a British-identifying Loyalist would see it). However, it is still an important event for Republicans today because it is part of the Irish Republican struggle. Both Connolly and Provisional and Official IRA leaders all wanted the same thing: a thirty-two county socialist Ireland. The inclusion of Connolly's quote further

demonstrates the anti-British/pro-Irish sentiment. While Connolly was referring to all thirty-two counties that were then under British rule, when read in 2012, and the years since, it is clear that the artist is saying that the British still do not have the right to have Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. Many of the murals painted before the Good Friday Agreement that featured Connolly were for commemorating the Easter Rising or a portrait that simply did not have the same artistic quality as this 2012 mural. Unlike those, this mural features superb artistic talent (the photograph was taken in August 2018 further showing its longevity) and the quote featured sends a much more powerful message than murals of Connolly painted decades earlier. By using a prominent Irish historical figure, this mural conveys the message that though the Good Friday Agreement has been in effect for over ten years, there are some who still hold anti-British sentiment and desire a united thirty-two county socialist Ireland.

As discussed in chapter one, the 1981 Hunger Strike had both a major influence and impact on the Republican cause and murals. It is not surprising then, that in 2011 murals were painted to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Hunger Strike. One of two that will be discussed in this chapter is Figure 13—an elaborate and vibrant dedication in Derry to the ten who died in 1981, plus two IRA prisoners, Michael Gaughan and Frank Stagg, who died on hunger strike in England in 1974 and 1976, respectively.[80] Based on my research, the inclusion of these two strikers in a hunger strike mural does not occur until the 2000s/2010s. At the center of the mural is a painting of a lark holding in its mouth a banner with "the spirit of freedom" written on it. This imagery of course connects back to Figure 1 in chapter one—the mural that has an excerpt from Sands' writings where he says he has the spirit of freedom within him and compares his imprisonment and struggle for freedom to the struggle of a lark trapped in barbed

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[80] C.P. Walker, "Irish Republican Prisoners—Political Detainees, Prisoners of War or Common Criminals?," *Irish Jurist* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 197, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44027778.

wire, yearning and trying to free itself. It is because of Sands' writings that the lark as the spirit

of freedom became a symbol for the Republican struggle and was featured on many murals after

his death.[81] With the Sands quote symbolically represented by the lark, the artist chose to paint a

different Sands' quote: "our revenge will be the laughter of our children," which is written in

both English and Irish. This quote is not only important because of its content, but also because

of its prominence. My research indicates that it did not appear on murals prior to 1998, when it

was featured on arguably one of the most famous Republican murals: Bobby Sands on the side of

the Sinn Féin building. This distinction between quotes used in the 1980s and quotes used in

1998 and the 2010s, is important to make because it shows the change in relevancy. Because

thirty years passed in between the hunger strike and the painting of Figure 13, a change in quotes

was needed. The 1981 mural discussed in chapter one focuses more on the present; the quote

itself conveys hope that Sands can gain political status and also has a hopeful, inspiring tone

even when read in the months following his death. The quote featured on the 2011 mural,

however, focuses more on the future; it is about the next generation and creating a better life for

them. By saying that their (meaning the hunger strikers and perhaps Republicans in general)

revenge will be laughter implies Republican triumph over the British and Loyalist forces.

Because this quote is more timeless than the remaining a political prisoner of war quote, it is

fitting that it is featured on murals starting in 1998. The quote also appearing in Irish is

significant for a number of reasons: it stresses the importance of the Irish language, especially in

Northern Ireland, it reinforces its Nationalist and Republican quality, and lastly it is a connection

to importance of the Irish language in Long Kesh, seen in forbidden language classes, smuggled

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[81] Gregory Goalwin, "The Art of War: Instability, Insecurity, and Ideological Imagery in Northern Ireland's Political Murals, 1979–1998," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 26, no. 3 (Sept. 2013): 206, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24713367.

writings, and secret communication among prisoners.[82] Another feature to note is that the names

of the men with the title Óglach (volunteer) are listed; this is noteworthy because, regardless of

the decade, murals are inconsistent in listing the names of those featured. The final symbol

featured in the mural is a locked chain, an allusion to imprisonment, that is broken at the bottom

by an H with 30, symbolizing the anniversary, and by one of ten doves at the top, symbolizing

one of the ten strikers. Although these twelve hunger strikers did not receive special category

status and of course died on strike, by having a broken chain, the mural is symbolizing the

freedom political prisoners did achieve—the eventual return of special category status and the

release of political prisoners under the Good Friday Agreement.

Figure 13

Figure 14 is a second hunger strike inspired mural from 2011. Located in Belfast, this mural contains similar elements, along with some additional features. Like Figure 13, this too features painted portraits of the ten 1981 strikers and includes Gaughan and Stagg, but rather than a portrait, they are portrayed in a black and white poster on the grass below the portraits. Perhaps this is to differentiate between the strikers of the 1970s in England and the ten in Long Kesh, but to still acknowledge their common struggle for their rights while imprisoned. This mural features the portraits in the order the men died, with Sands dying first and featured on the bottom left, and Michael Devine dying last and featured on the bottom right.[83] While the other mural does not list them in death order, it does use practically the exact same portraits for the men; there are some differences in the color of clothes, but the pictures and poses are the same for both murals. The last similarity between the two are the ten doves for the ten strikers and the broken chain. However, while the broken chain is featured in both, it is shown in entirely different ways. In this mural, the broken chain is a part of the biggest difference between the two murals; it is on the wrist of a female prisoner. By portraying the female prisoner with a clenched fist in the air and a broken shackle, the artist is showing the ways in which both men and women protested prison conditions.[84] Although women did not participate in the blanket protest because they were allowed to wear their own clothes, they did participate in other prison protests including the no work and eventually the no-wash protest, which lasted for thirteen months in 1980-1981. Partly because of the much smaller number of female prisoners, the protests in Armagh did not receive the same amount of attention as the blanket protests or hunger strikes of

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[83] Maggie Scull, "Timeline of the 1981 Hunger Strike," *The Irish Times,* Mar. 2, 2016, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/timeline-of-1981-hunger-strike-1.2555682.

[84] Rolston, *Politics*, 82.

the men in the H-blocks.[85] Therefore, the inclusion of a female prisoner is significant to a mural painted thirty years after the hunger strike because it shows the artist is presenting a broader view of Republicans imprisoned during the late 1970s and early 1980s. While the women's protests did not receive the same amount of attention, both domestically and internationally, as the men at the time, the protests did happen, and including them thirty years later recognizes the women's activism. This mural is not solely about the commemorating the anniversary of the 1981 Hunger Strike, but rather, it is also about Republican prison protests; it is acknowledging that they happened in both England and Ireland by both imprisoned men and women.

Figure 14

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[85] Christina Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy: Campaigns around Republican Women Prisoners in Armagh Jail," *Feminist Review,* No. 23 (Summer 1986): 60, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1394720.

Figure 14 also features an armed IRA man with a weapon and wearing a balaclava standing before a grave. Unlike murals of the 1980s and 1990s, this armed and masked IRA man is not threatening to the by-passer. Not only is he a small figure and not the main focus of the mural, but he is standing more symbolically as if he were partaking in military burial honors. Furthermore, he is not even shooting his weapon in a final salute, but rather just holding it solemnly. This makes this mural distinct from ones of the 1980s and 1990s when the use of weapons in a threatening stance was common. In this small depiction, the gun's intent is not to threaten the by-passer, but rather it indicates to the by-passer that these men were members of the IRA who received full military burial honors because of their sacrifice during the conflict. The last notable symbol present in this mural is the recreation of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic besides the posters of Gaughan and Stagg. Like the Connolly mural of 2012, the addition of the Proclamation serves as a reminder of the history and evolution of the Republican struggle. In the picture of the mural, the text of the Proclamation cannot be deciphered, but excerpts from the Proclamation directly relate to the Troubles and the hunger strikes. The Proclamation declares the right of the Irish people to take up armed resistance in order to rule their own land and have an Ireland for the Irish, by the Irish. After declaring Ireland a sovereign state, it states, "we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom."[86] Though the Proclamation as a whole is important to the Republican struggle in Northern Ireland, these lines are most important because they show the justification of the armed campaign of the IRA and INLA—not only does it have historical basis in 1916 (and the years both prior to and following the Easter Rising), but also they are exerting that same right to national freedom through arms. The line expressing the willingness to sacrifice their lives in

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[86] "Proclamation of the Republic (1916)" in *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991) from *Irish Historical Documents 1172-1922,* ed. E. Curtis, R.B. McDowell (1943), 733.

order for Irish freedom are the most relevant to a mural dedicated to the hunger strikers. When the men decided to partake in the hunger strike, they knew that there was a chance that they would never come off of it, but that did not deter them. Like the signers of the Proclamation, they were willing to die for Ireland's freedom; like the signers, they did in fact die for Ireland's struggle for freedom.

Aside from symbols, this mural also features two quotes, one from Frank Stagg, the other from St. John. A careful review of murals in both the CCDL database and the books by Rolston and Borthwick reveals that Stagg is not often quoted, nor is he prominently featured in murals, making the artist's use of his quote significant. In the same way that the Sands' quote in Figure 13, looks to the future, Stagg's quote is about remembrance and the next generation. Although this quote is from the 1970s, Stagg is already talking about a peaceful future. However, he also talks about a just one, meaning the struggle will continue until Republicans receive justice. This quote is best on a mural painted after the Good Friday Agreement because it conveys his message—peace has once again returned to Ireland. While the justice Stagg and the other strikers pictured might not be exactly what was achieved in 1998, justice was at the very least partly delivered and peace was certainly achieved by 2011. Even though this quote is taken from the 1970s, its most effective use is in a time where peace exists because it fulfills Stagg's wishes for a memorial. The second quote featured on the mural comes from St. John, saying that the greatest love a person has is to sacrifice his own life for his friends. While the content of the quote is not inherently religious, it does come from the Bible, specifically the Gospel of John. While using this quote is not something unique to murals of the 2000/2010s—it can be seen in a hunger strike mural from 1983—it is still relevant to a 2011 mural because there is a distinction in how religious elements are incorporated into murals. Like the 1981 mural of the dying striker

praying the rosary with the Beatitude-like quote (Figure 2), the religious elements are overt—not only is there a quote, but there are also Christian symbols and pictures. Rolston argues that murals painted during or soon after the hunger strike were direct in meaning and conveyed their message "not merely using words but also pictorial images."[87] Thus, the combination of religious images *and* religious quotes is one of the reasons why Figure 2 fits the characteristics of a 1980s mural. It makes sense then, that a 2011 mural would hold onto that historical religious tradition by quoting St. John, but stray away from depicting the men on hunger strike as Christ-like figures because it would not be as effective with the audience because thirty years have passed since their deaths. In 1981 it was easier to paint the strikers as Christ-like figures because it was relevant to the time; these murals were painted during the strike or soon after they died, so the overt religious elements—the patient suffering, the emaciated bodies in blankets, the long hair—were familiar to people in 1981 because it was current. In 2011, however, it is more effective to move away from portraying the ten men as Christ-like figures, but still keep that religious tradition by quoting the Gospel of John. As the decades pass on, it makes more sense to portray the strikers as heroic, rather than Christ-like martyrs because so much time has passed; they will always be remembered for their sacrifice and dedication to Irish freedom, but as time goes on, they lose the religious aspect and become seen more like war heroes. Aside from the religious connection, this quote is also a reference to Sands and the start of the hunger strike. Right before embarking on his hunger strike, Sands met with a priest to discuss the morality of his decision and if he were to die because of the strike would the Catholic Church consider it suicide. After the father tried to dissuade him from undertaking such an intense protest method,

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[87] Rolston, *Politics,* 81.

Sands responded with the quote from St. John.[88] While this mural does not directly quote Sands like so many others do, it does use a quote he is associated with, reinforcing not only the prominence of Sands in the strike, but also a Christian component to the 1981 Hunger Strike. Lastly, this quote points to the sacrifice that the hunger strikers made. It shows the comradery between IRA, INLA, prisoners, and the Republican struggle as a whole—these men sacrificed their lives for a greater cause and, of course, for one another.

In the same way that Figures 13 and 14 honor the hunger strikers, Figure 15 is a tribute to the IRA volunteers Farrell, Savage, and McCann—the three killed in Gibraltar in 1988 and the focus of Figure 5 from chapter two. Because of their significance to the Troubles, it not surprising that muralists would continue paint murals dedicated to them. Figure 15, from 2008, shares some similarities with the mural discussed in chapter two, but has some distinct differences because it was made sixteen years later. For example, this mural is comprised of photographs rather than actual paintings. It contains photographs of the three volunteers and their funeral procession with text printed over the photographs. Also unlike the 1992 mural, this one has each of their names written under their picture and a short explanation of what happened. While it does not go into great detail, the mural does say that they were *executed* by the SAS. In the same way that martyr was a key word for the 1992 mural, this deliberate word choice of executed is important because it calls out the actions of the British government and army and the shoot-to-kill policy. Additionally, this mural was made after an appeal to the European Court on Human Rights to look into the deaths. The Court declared in 1995 that the actions of the SAS were in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights—a significant change from the initial declaration that the soldiers killed legally. However, despite this important change in

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[88] Golway, *Liberty,* 307.

condemning the SAS, none of the soldiers were tried or arrested for the deaths of the Gibraltar Three. [89]

Lastly, while both Figure 5 and Figure 15 feature an armed IRA figure, Figure 15 features three IRA members giving the final salute for the victims, whereas the IRA figure in the 1992 mural looks on guard and prepared to use the weapon if needed. This mural, is a good example of muralists only incorporating guns for historical purposes, which as said earlier, started after the Good Friday Agreement. Like the gun in Figure 14, the guns in this mural indicate that the people who died were not civilians, but rather volunteers in the IRA who received military honors at their burial. The IRA men indicate that this is a military funeral in the same way that their tri-color draped coffins do. Lastly, the use of photographs in Figure 15 really emphasizes that the guns are used for historical purposes because the mural is showing a primary source, rather than a recreation of an image or a painted portrait of a person. Because Figure 5 was painted six years before Republican muralists decided to only paint guns for historical purposes, it makes sense that the armed IRA figures look much different in the two murals. To put the IRA figure with the same weapon and stance from Figure 5 in Figure 15, would be off-putting to by-passers because the majority of Republican muralists do not paint murals in that style any longer.

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[89] Cónal Thomas, "State Papers Shed New Light on Family of Gibraltar Three's Fight for Truth," *The Journal,* Dec. 12, 2018, https://www.msn.com/en-ie/news/newsireland/state-papers-shed-new-light-on-family-of-gibraltar-threes-fight-for-truth/ar-BBRvtts.
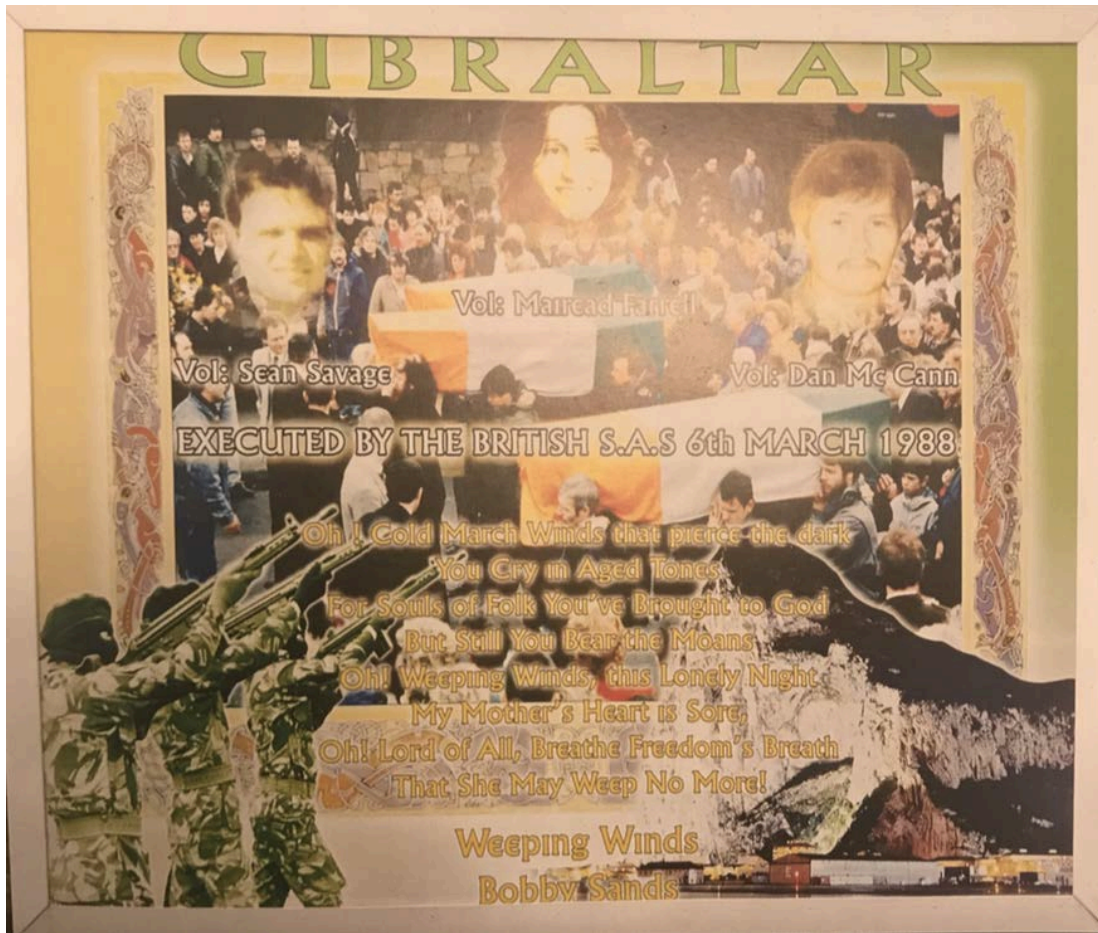
The fact that this mural was created shows that the Gibraltar Three are still memorialized, but it does not invoke the same feeling as the one painted in 1992. The 1992 mural invokes a great sense of sadness, particularly because of the use of martyr and its connotation, whereas this one, while still sad, also has an angry tone, particularly because of the word executed. This mural reads as a way to call out the British; they are pointing the blame directly at the SAS in telling the viewer how the three volunteers died. Of course any mural memorializing them will be sad since three young lives were lost, but by refraining from calling them martyrs and instead focusing on the killers, this mural shows a shift in attitude that can happen after years have passed in between their death and the creation of the mural, especially because this mural was painted more than a decade after the European Court on Human Rights declaration that the SAS were violated their human rights. Additionally, this mural also features the last stanza of one of

Sands' prison poems, "Weeping Winds" that adds a dimension that the 1992 mural does not have. In this stanza, Sands personifies the wind he hears from his cell and says how despite people having already given their lives to the Republican cause, the goal has not yet been achieved. He pleads to God that He may bring freedom to his people and no longer will people have to die for freedom, nor will mothers have to cry for their lost children. This stanza is relevant to a mural dedicated to the Gibraltar Three because they, like Sands, gave their lives in the Republican struggle; like Sands' mother, their mothers wept for their children. What makes this poem particularly somber for a mural created in the late 2000s, though, is the final line because while the conflict ended, the freedom that Sands and the Gibraltar Three envisioned, did not happen. While their souls were some of the many "brought to God" the Lord did not truly "breathe freedom's breath." The kind of Ireland that Sands and the Gibraltar Three—a thirty-two county socialist Ireland—did not come out of the Troubles. While it is a much different Northern Ireland than what was in 1969, when the Troubles began, or even the 1980s when they died, it is not the Ireland they initially joined the fight for. This mural serves as a way to not only remember them and their sacrifice, but also as a reminder of what they were fighting for.

In the post-peace years, murals have been used as a way to try and petition the British government for justice. Figure 16, from 2010, is a plea to the government to tell the truth about what happened in the Ballymurphy area on August 9, 1971, when during internment, eleven people were killed by the British Army. The mural claims that no proper police investigation ever happened, nor did any of the soldiers serve time in prison for the deaths. After almost forty years since the massacre, the families are still demanding the truth about what happened that day—they are pleading for some kind of closure.
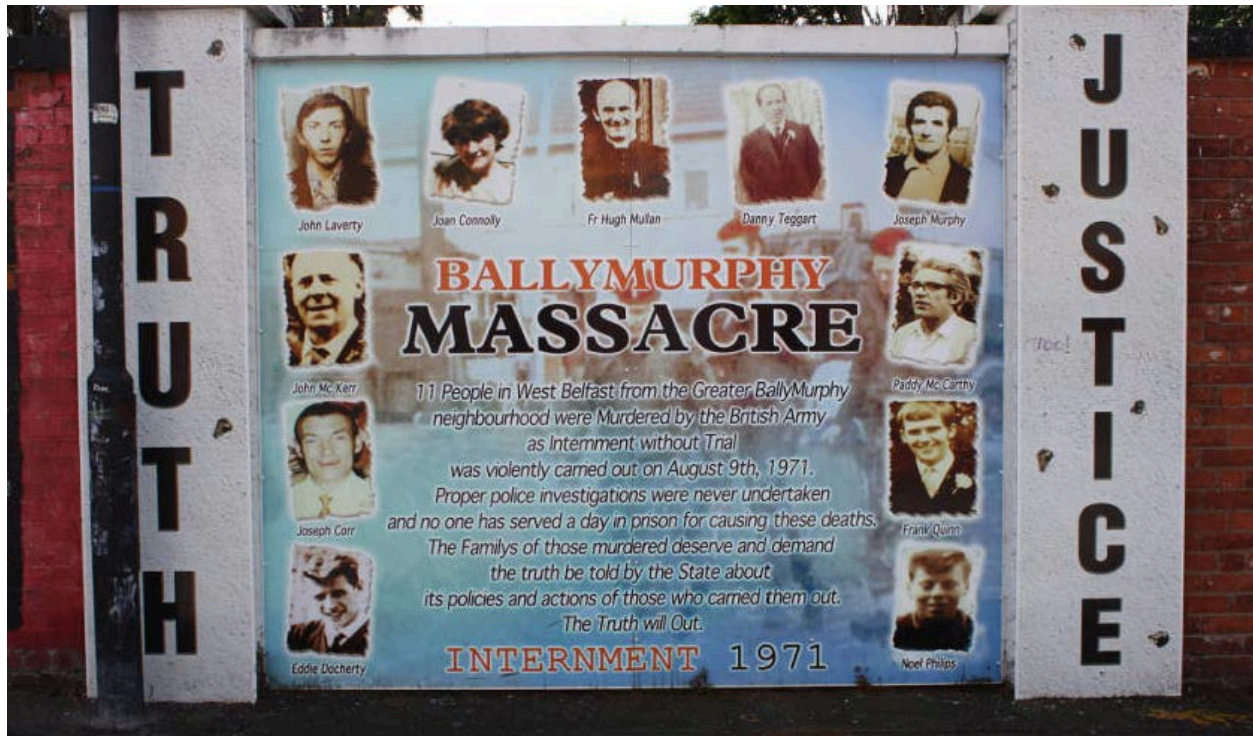
Figure 16

    Republican murals that demand truth and justice are common in the 2000s and 2010s.

With every passing year, the Troubles gets further and further away, but for so many surviving

family members, they are left without the true knowledge of their loved ones' deaths. Whether

Ballymurphy, Springhill Massacre, New Lodge Six, or the seventeen people killed by rubber and

plastic bullets, families are demanding the government to tell the truth about their deaths and to

carry out the justice that is deserved. Now that the violence has subsided and peace among the

people has been established, families who lost loved ones at the hands of the British Army and

RUC search for the truth surrounding their deaths. While peace has been officially in Northern

Ireland since 1998, in many ways the scars and damage that come from thirty years of war still

remain.

CONCLUSION

For nearly thirty years, deadly violence from all sides plagued Northern Ireland—Loyalists shooting Catholics, the IRA bombing places indiscriminately, the RUC and British Army unfairly treating and often killing those who they were supposedly there to protect. Atrocities were committed on all sides of what once seemed like a never ending conflict. One account estimates that between 1966, three years before the official start of the Troubles, and 2006, eight years after their official end, 3,720 people were killed and tens of thousands more injured because of the violence.[90] Throughout all of this violence and in the twenty years since the Good Friday Agreement, the Republican mural practice persisted. However, it is wrong to paint a broad-brush and simply accept that Republican murals have been widely painted throughout cities in Northern Ireland since 1981. This is a limiting assessment because while it is entirely correct, a mural from 1981, 1996, and 2011 differ in a number of ways, as demonstrated in this paper. Because the murals are a reaction to and reflection of political and social events and a way to garner support, it is necessary that the styles, themes, and messages changed as the circumstances of the Troubles and the peace process changed. To understand the murals is to understand them within the context of the time they were created.

It can be difficult to understand how after thirty years of fighting for something so specific—the six counties in Ulster leaving the United Kingdom and rejoining the Republic of Ireland—Republicans would settle for something else because their mission was not complete. But with every passing year and the increasing death toll, it became clear that violence would not solve the issues in Northern Ireland and the goals of Republicans—only democracy and political

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[90] Borthwick, *Writing on the Wall*, 5.

action could do that. As of now, Northern Ireland remains a part of the United Kingdom, but not because the people are forced to, but rather because the majority of the population *chose* to remain. Of course there are individuals and organizations who disagree, but the agreement is based on the majority and the current status of Northern Ireland is a reflection of the feelings of most of the people at that time. However, the Good Friday Agreement still allowed all to benefit. Whether it was because the prisoner release, the disbandment of the RUC, the creation of an inclusive government that included Catholics, the end of random sectarian violence, or a combination of all, the Good Friday Agreement produced tangible benefits and changes for Northern Ireland—even if it was not the outcome all Republicans hoped for. There is no point in wondering whether or not the fighting was worth it or necessary because it did happen and nothing will change that. But that does not mean there are not lessons to be learned from it; it does not mean you forget what happened or the lives lost. The beginning of the Good Friday Agreement sums up this view well:

> we must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.[91]

No, they cannot change the past, nor bring back the lives of all those lost, but they can move forward in such a way that honors the dead and ensures that they did not die in vain.

April 2018 marked twenty years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Much has changed of course—Belfast is no longer seen as a war zone—but the reminders of the Troubles are still very much a reality. It is seen when entering a pub and a sign on the door reads "no football jerseys allowed" because a football jersey reveals if you are Protestant or Catholic.

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[91] *Belfast Agreement*, Declaration of Support, 2.

It is heard when several Americans asked me if travelling to Belfast is safe. It is talked about when discussing the impact of Brexit on England, the Republic of Ireland, and what could become of the status of Northern Ireland. And it is seen, of course, through the murals painted throughout cities like Belfast and Derry.

The murals do more than tell the story of Northern Ireland and express political ideology; they now create revenue. Whether a taxi company who gives tours of the murals, the artist commissioned to paint a mural, or a tourist shop that sells postcards, the commodification of the murals has brought employment and wages to an area that was plagued by unemployment for decades.[92] Of course this is a major change, and benefit, from a practice that used to be used to encourage support in war. In some ways, though, the functions of the murals have not changed. New Republican murals still focus on Irish and international current events, political elections, Irish history, and tributes. While it is highly unlikely one will see a "Welcome to Provo Land" quasi-mural today, memorials to those killed in the conflict, both IRA volunteers and civilians are still seen throughout Republican areas. Though some of the goals of the murals have changed, Republicans murals still express their Irish nationalism, anti-British sentiment, and tell their side of the Troubles.

As mentioned throughout this paper, music plays a major role in Irish history and culture. In a song called the "Battle of the Bogside" by Irish-American band Shilelagh Law, the final verse speaks to this post-peace era with the lyrics:

> Now as I walk these streets the murals call out to me
> the tragedies, the victories, the pain.
> In the end the truth was heard, life lived on their own terms
> singing now never again.
> And in the Bogside voices fill the sky

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[92] Tony Crowley, "The Art of Memory: The Murals of Northern Ireland and the Management of History," *Field Day Review* 7 (2011): 24, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41411793.

as the people cry never again, never again.[93]

The Republican murals of Northern Ireland tell the story of a tragic part of modern history and while they serve as a reminder of those who gave their lives in a struggle for freedom, perhaps they also serve as a warning: never again.

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[93] Shilelagh Law, *Battle of the Bogside,* featured on *One and Nine* performed by Shilelagh Law, Big Strong Records, 1:59—2:29, 2008, https://youtu.be/tHAeMQ1WuWg?t=119.

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Images

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Figure 1: Portrait of Bobby Sands, 1981 in Rolston, Bill. *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland,* 83. London: Associated University Presses, 1991.

Figure 2: Dying Hunger Striker and Blessed Virgin, 1981 in Rolston, Bill. *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland.* London: Associated University Presses, 1991.

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Figure 15: Photographed by Crowley, Tony. "IRA Volunteers Killed on Active Service in Gibraltar by British Forces." *Claremont Colleges Library* 2008. http://ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/mni/id/1130/rec/13.

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