

Tainted Commemoration

by Gracie Stillman 6 September 2019

No matter the generation, Bloody Sunday runs deep in Northern Ireland's collective memory. The young and the old hold onto the brutal massacre that occurred during a peaceful protest against internment without trial in 1972. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) planned to march to Guildhall Square, but British paratroops opened fire and murdered fourteen civilians. The injustice of the day still pollutes modern culture. The British government attempted to sweep the massacre under the rug by exonerating the soldiers, but local communities still fight against this oppression by remembering the day as it truly happened. The biggest way they do this is by commissioning their own murals.

The community took polls to see what everyone wanted to remember and transformed the trauma into a form of respect. The biggest aspect of the massacre that everyone wanted as part of a mural was the fact that the organizers intended this protest to be the safest yet. Local citizen Glenn

Doherty, a son of one of the Bloody Sunday victims, reveals in an interview that "after you can guarantee people's safety, then more people are going to show up. Make it the safest and it will also be the biggest." People of all types felt emboldened by the focus on safety to finally stand up to oppression. However, this hope was quickly shattered with violence.

On 30 January 1972, thousands of protestors showed up to protest internment without trial, so it turned into pandemonium when the British started firing. The mural below shows the full force of the peaceful protest, with the faceless soldier representing the British paratroopers. When visited in person, clumps of dirt are covering the soldier, thrown by locals to show their contempt. The soldier is also trampling the Civil Rights Association banner, signaling the end of that peaceful era. This is the most hidden, but important part of this mural. This is when many members of the community resolved to violence, because they realized no one would listen to their peaceful ways. After the massacre, over hundreds sign up to join the [IRA](#), a small but violent

faction dedicated to protecting Catholics from discrimination.



Gone were the days of peaceful marches, only to be replaced by errant bombings and assassinations, throwing the country into "The Troubles." The community wants to remember this because they are still recovering from this era of violence that ended [twenty](#) years ago. Another mural is used to remember the fourteen victims of the bloody massacre, as seen to the right. They are all painted as happy and full of life, as their families wanted them to be remembered. Surrounded by leaves and a cross in the center, the community wanted everyone to see how these people were more than just victims. In order to truly commemorate their murders, the community must remember when and how it started. This is done through



the murals, but also through memorials and marches still honored to this day.

Despite fracturing apart after Bloody Sunday, the NICRA came together for one

last act. In 2003, they created and dedicated the Bloody Sunday [Memorial](#). Standing in front of the monument that bears his father's name, Gleann Doherty holds himself proudly and recalls that "they came back together just to erect this monument. This is the last thing they ever do." NICRA and the community refused to go down without a fight. They commissioned their own murals to remember the dead and to bring justice to their people.

The other major way Derry remembers Bloody Sunday is through an annual march that takes place on the January 30th. However, due to recent events, this march experienced some turmoil. In 2011, the [Saville](#)

[Inquiry](#) was released, exonerating the victims and condemning the soldiers. This was a huge step in getting justice for the victims and their families. As a result, many felt that the march was no longer [necessary](#), but some felt it was too late. Tony Doherty, another son of a victim, believed that "now is the time for us all to consider moving on." Unfortunately, despite its peaceful origin, many believe that dissident political groups seized control of the march for their own gains.

In 2018, the Bloody Sunday march saw a record low turnout. This is due to a boycott by dissident groups, like Saoradh, a far-left political group with roots in the Real IRA. They [boycotted](#) the march due to marketing material that listed attacks by republicans. This reveals that these groups control the marches and have a say in what they commemorate. However, 2019 saw a



much bigger attendance, despite "the march [coming] a week after suspected dissident republicans detonated a bomb in [Derry](#)." This bigger turnout shows that citizens are still marching for what is right, justice for the victims. The Saville Inquiry is a good step in the right direction, but some citizens still feel there is an imbalance.

Moving forward under the weight of uncertainty is no easy task. With Brexit looming ahead and seeds of resentment sown deep, Northern Ireland is at a crossroads. Every member of the community remembers Bloody Sunday in their own way, whether it is through stories passed down by their parents or by living it themselves. These memories took root in each person, because it is a part of their history and because they can still see the effect of it in their hometown. I can only hope that Derry remembers the march, not to continue living in the past, but to learn from it and move on to a brighter future.

This mock newspaper article was written by a student on the Fall 2019 Syracuse Abroad Signature Seminar on "[Borders in Flux: Identities and Conflict in Ireland](#)".