Peace in a Divided Community

What America Can Learn from Northern Ireland

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Abstract

The United States, like any modern state, struggles with many forms of intra-state conflict. Ethnic, religious, political, and other deep-rooted social problems are alive and well in America. There is a necessity to resolve these conflicts in the short term as well as to prevent future disruption of the peace. In this paper, I argue that America can learn from Northern Ireland’s successful use of transformational conflict resolution. This form of alternative dispute resolution focuses on fostering and preserving the relationships between involved parties, and seems an appropriate approach to helping opposing parties in the United States overcome their differences.

Americans have much to learn from the story of Northern Ireland. True to Irish story-telling tradition, this paper tells the story of the events leading up to and including the Troubles, Northern Ireland’s path to peace, and current efforts to maintain peace and foster respect and neighborliness today. This case study of the Northern Ireland Conflict and subsequent peace process is then utilized to draw comparisons with similar social disputes in the United States. Particular attention will be given to community-based programs, the likes of which are rare in the United States. In conclusion, I offer three examples of specific ethnic, religious, and political conflicts in modern America and end by recommending solutions for these disputes that are similar to those utilized in Northern Ireland for the ongoing peaceful resolution of the Troubles.
Section 1. Introduction

This paper begins with an account of the Northern Ireland Conflict, a violent conflict over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. Sparked by a civil rights march in County Londonderry on the 5th of October 1968, the Troubles spanned three decades until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. This violent conflict brought international attention to deep-rooted social issues plaguing Ireland, including Britain’s presence in Ireland, tensions between Unionists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland, peace and equality for the different populations in Northern Ireland, and the use of violence for the achievement of political ends. This conflict left an enduring scar on Ireland, particularly wounding Northern Ireland, where much contention survives today.

I then discuss the importance of identities, which must be recognized before mutual respect can be established. Truly understanding identity was key to finding peace in Northern Ireland and it is key to solving similar social problems in America. The paper presents an overview of what transformational conflict resolution programs are currently in place to promote continued peace between Northern Ireland’s different communities and analyzes multiple factors that contribute to the success of transformational conflict resolution processes, including the involved parties and their willingness to negotiate in good faith, international influence, and key personalities involved.

After providing this overview, I will discuss the similarities between the social issues that triggered the Troubles and modern social issues in the United States. I will end by focusing on three current American disputes for which transformational conflict resolution processes could be helpful for achieving and maintaining peace. After a brief discussion of these specific disputes, I will end with recommendations for their solutions.
Section 2. A History of Northern Ireland’s Troubles

In order to best identify what steps should be taken to sustain peaceful relations in a nation such as Northern Ireland, one must first seek to understand the complicated past between rivals. The history between nations, even though it may seem insignificant to outsiders, often proves to be the key to compromise. Analyzing the Troubles as a purely modern conflict would be a mistake. Identity played a leading role in the Troubles, and it is necessary to understand what makes up the various identities of the involved parties.

A. Norman Invaders to the Republic of Ireland

The history of Northern Ireland, and Ireland as a whole, was very complicated. Nearly 900 years of Anglo-Irish conflict stretching back to the Norman Invasion in the 1160’s left both sides (the English and the Irish) weary and wounded.¹ Northern Ireland was the battleground for the Irish War of Resistance against Henry the VIII’s English colonialism programmes in the 16th century, which ultimately led to many English and Scottish (mostly Protestant) settlers colonizing Ulster, the northernmost state of the island of Ireland.² An Irish rebellion in 1641 sparked more fighting that once again resulted in English victory and solidified Anglican Protestant rule.³ Some Protestants in Northern Ireland still celebrate these victories as holidays today.

Protestant victory led to a period of Northern Ireland’s history known as the Protestant Ascendancy, or simply the Ascendancy. This period lasted from the late 17th

³ Ibid.
century until the late 18th century. During the Ascendancy, a small minority of landowners, clergy, and other wealthy members of the Church of Ireland and Church of England politically, economically, and socially dominated Ireland.4

This period was marked by the Penal Laws, set into place with the intention of oppressing the Irish Catholics as well as other groups, including members of the Presbyterian Church and non-Christians such as Jews. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on how these laws affected Catholics. These laws banned Catholics from public offices, holding firearms, becoming members of Parliament, voting, gaining higher education, building Catholic churches out of materials other than wood or building Catholic churches on main roads, and intermarrying with Protestants, amongst other restrictions that violated their rights and led to further oppression.5 These laws allowed institutional discrimination to flourish with the obvious intent of disadvantaging Catholics in order to solidify Protestant rule. The existence of these Penal Laws led to inflated partisan tensions and drove a wedge between individuals, causing them to strengthen their opposing identities within their own religions and ethnicities.

The Great Irish Famine, also known as the Great Hunger or the Irish Potato Famine, hit Ireland in 1845. At the time, many Irish families depended solely on potatoes for food. Potatoes were cheap and they could grow practically anywhere. In the 1840’s, potato blight swept across Europe. For Ireland, the potato blight proved to be disastrous. During the famine, approximately one million Irish citizens starved or died from rampant disease, and one million more immigrated, mostly to the United States. Ireland’s

4 Ibid.
population fell by about 20% in only a few years.\(^6\)

Because the Ascendancy was in place during this time, landlords held a lot of power over their tenant farmers. Many landlords went bankrupt because their tenants could not afford to pay rent during the famine. Most landlords continued exporting food during the famine instead of using it to feed the starving Irishmen in their local communities. Because Penal Laws and oppression made it nearly impossible for an Irish Catholic to own land or make enough money to feed a family during the Great Famine, this mass starvation and seeming lack of sympathy from wealthy, mostly English landowners only served to magnify tensions between the opposing parties.\(^7\)

**B. The Importance of Identity**

The concept of identity is central to understanding the Northern Irish Troubles and the environment that still exists today. It is a concept that assumes an importance in the case of Northern Ireland that is seemingly nonexistent in other parts of Britain, which is understandable considering the complicated history of the Ulster region. Three categories of identity seem to play the largest roles in prompting discrimination and feeding the tensions between the opposing sides of the conflict: national identity, religious identity, and political identity.

The Troubles were primarily an issue of national identity. The idea of national identity was much more divisive than it was in Britain, for example. In Britain, many different racial, religious, and social groups all collectively label themselves “British.” This was not the case in Northern Ireland. The citizens mostly identified as three national

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\(^6\) Boland, “Ireland.”
groups: British, Irish, and Ulster. These identities stemmed from the previously mentioned colonization of Ulster by the English, which had left the citizens of Northern Ireland with mixed opinions of the legitimacy of the state.

Religion is often considered the main, divisive issue in the conflict, but it seems more likely that national identity underlies religious identity. Edward Moxon-Browne, a professor in the Department of Politics and Public Administration at the University of Limerick, writes:

> Although the lines of division are often considered to be religious in character, religion is best seen as a badge of difference - the visible symbol of deeper and less tangible attachments to national 'roots'. These roots derive from historical events whose interpretation is itself a subject of conflict. ⁸

This seems like a logical explanation if one considers the oppression that was forced onto the early Irish Catholic community by the occupying English Protestants. And, despite hundreds of years of colonization, the Catholic population of Northern Ireland has largely remained separate from that of the Protestants. This is likely in large part due to religious and political objections to intermarriage between individuals of different religions, as previously discussed.

Given the clear boundaries between populations, national identity and religion can basically be used interchangeably to describe groups. Similarly, it is fairly easy to guess one’s political identity. Catholics are typically nationalists, meaning they either support Northern Ireland’s independence or wish to join the Republic of Ireland, and Protestants are typically unionists, meaning that they support the union with the United Kingdom. At

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the outbreak of the Troubles in 1968, those who identified as British were 39% protestant and 20% Catholic. By 1989, the British population was 68% protestant and 6% Catholic. A similar pattern of unification can be seen in religious affiliations of the Irish population. In 1968, 20% of those who identified as Irish were protestant. By 1989, this statistic fell to a measly 3%, although the percentage who identified as Catholic dropped very slightly as well.9 This likely occurred because of more neutral Ulster identification and the Northern Irish identification.

The national labels of British, Irish, and Ulster were often simplified to only British and Irish. Protestants were more inclined to label themselves British instead of Ulster and Catholics clung to their Irish identity. These divisions became greater the more that violence interrupted their home, particularly for those who identified as Protestant, perhaps to remain distanced from the terrorist activity associated with the radical political groups amongst the Irish Catholics.

C. The Formation of Northern Ireland

Patrick Pearse declared Ireland a republic exactly a century ago, in 1916. Following this declaration, on April 24th 1916, a rebellion against British rule over Ireland began. This rebellion, commonly referred to as the Easter Rising, ended in the surrender of the rebels. But the spirit of the rebellion was not that easily extinguished.10 In 1919, the War of Independence began and Sinn Fein proclaimed Ireland an independent state, free of British rule and oppression. Not surprisingly, Britain responded by sending reinforcements to Ireland with the intent of quelling the discord and maintaining power

9 Ibid.
over the entire island of Ireland. Following the influx of troops, both sides perpetrated much violence.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1920, the Government of Ireland Act\textsuperscript{12} partitioned Ireland, meaning that the British Government established a parliament in Stormont and removed itself from Northern Irish politics. The Anglo-Irish Treaty\textsuperscript{13} established the Irish Free State in 1922. The Irish Free State was a Dominion of the British Empire. Separate parliaments in Dublin and Belfast were established, although both ultimately answered to London. It was made of 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland and left six northeastern counties of Ulster, which had previously requested exclusion from the Free State due to the majority of its population identifying as British, Protestant, or both, in union with Britain.\textsuperscript{14} With this partition between the north and south sections of the island of Ireland, Northern Ireland as we know it today came into existence. The region covered the northeastern part of the island, sharing a southern and western border with the Irish Free State (the Republic of Ireland).

The Protestant Unionist majority in Northern Ireland continued to oppress the Catholic Nationalist minority that lived within the six counties of Ulster through governance and policing tactics. The sectarian environment and the populist policies pushed through by those in power escalated the rivalry that already existed between Unionists and Nationalists. This complicated history must be considered to understand

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
how citizens of Northern Ireland identify and what they are saying about themselves when they label themselves by political party (Unionist or Nationalist), religion (Protestant or Catholic), or nationality (British or Irish). The deep-rooted tensions between the opposing factions of the region are the key to understanding what both sides of the issue were interested in achieving during the Troubles, and still interested in achieving today.

D. Setting the Stage for Conflict

In 1937, the Irish Free State approved a new constitution\(^\text{15}\) that claimed Northern Ireland as part of its territory. The constitution effectively made Ireland a republic, although Ireland did not officially become the Republic of Ireland until 1949. Northern Ireland voted to stay a part of the United Kingdom. Violence between the different social and political groups continued on in Northern Ireland and the display of the Irish flag was banned in 1954\(^\text{16}\) as IRA activity increased. In 1956, the IRA launched the Northern Ireland Campaign\(^\text{17}\), leading the Unionist government to allow for the internment of perceived terrorists without trial.

In the 1960’s, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, or NICRA, nonviolently challenged the Unionist Government to end its discriminatory practices in housing, education, and employment that harmed the minority community. Unionists perceived this challenge as a threat and reacted against what they saw as Nationalist

Sectarian tensions began to escalate and soon the British Government was forced to send troops to Belfast and Derry, the two largest cities in Northern Ireland, in order to protect the Catholic Nationalist community. In 1967, a wave of protests across the western world sparked the beginning of a civil rights movement in Belfast. Heavily influenced by the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States, the Northern Irish movement called for equality for the Catholic, Republican minority of the state.

**E. The Troubles and Failed Attempts at Peace**

On the 5th of October 1968, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association hosted a march in County Londonderry. Marchers were met by police officers from the Royal Ulster Constabulary who attempted to disperse protestors and put an end to the march. The clash turned violent and many were injured including several MP’s. These skirmishes were captured on camera and distributed to media around the world, bringing Northern Ireland’s “situation” to international attention. This march is commonly considered the starting point of the Northern Ireland Troubles. Rioting became commonplace and further civil rights demonstrations were met with counter demonstrations. The next major march took place in January 1969, and was cut short by an ambush by Unionists, including members of the security forces that were meant to protect the Nationalist minority. Tensions continued to escalate and rioting was worse than ever.

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
By the end of the 1960s, the British army was seen as an enemy of the Nationalists. The Provisional Irish Republican Army, or the PIRA, resurfaced and engaged in fighting against the British army by 1970. More than 300 people were interned without trial following raids in 1971, and soon after, the Ulster Volunteer Force bombed a bar in Belfast, resulting in the deaths of 15 people. On January 30th, 1972, the British Parachute Regiment killed 13 participants of a civil rights march in Derry. This became known as the Bogside Massacre, or Bloody Sunday. Following the massacre, the British embassy in Dublin was burned down and the PIRA bombed a Regiment’s barracks in Aldershot. In response, London instituted direct rule over Belfast.

Members of the PIRA continued to indiscriminately bomb security forces and innocent civilians, which led to the internment of suspected PIRA members. Unionists such as the Shankhill Butchers and other extremist groups retaliated by carrying out sectarian attacks and gruesome murders against Nationalists. In 1974, London attempted to introduce the Prevention Against Terrorism Act and no jury Diplock Courts in order to contain the conflict. The Sunningdale Agreement of 1974 attempted to promote

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
cooperation between the British and Irish governments, but direct rule was reestablished by London following violent Unionist protests by the Ulster Workers Council strike in 1975. In 1976, Ireland declared a state of emergency.

During the 1970’s the British Government focused on the criminalization of the PIRA instead of trying to change the structural inequality between Protestants and Catholics that provoked the PIRA’s attacks. Britain also placed all frontline policing power to maintain law and order in the hands of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defense Association. Interned PIRA members responded with the PIRA Hunger Strikes, which bolstered support for Sinn Fein and resulted in Sinn Fein’s electoral success.

In 1981, a prisoner by the name of Bobby Sands gained wide media attention due to his participation in a hunger strike. He became so popular that he was elected as an MP at Westminster. A month later, however, he passed away. Severe rioting across Northern Ireland and Dublin followed his death. In an attempt to assassinate Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the IRA bombed the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the Conservative Party conference in 1984. The attempt failed, but five were killed. With

30 Ibid.
the popularity of Sinn Fein on the rise, the British Government decided to begin consulting with the Irish Government in an attempt to curb the electoral success of Sinn Fein. This led to the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement,\textsuperscript{32} which failed to end the conflict, but was the precursor to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement,\textsuperscript{33} which effectively ended the Troubles and brought peace to Northern Ireland. In 1988, the British government banned Sinn Fein from broadcasting in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{34} In 1991, the IRA attacked Downing Street, London with mortars. In 1993, the Downing Street Declaration endorsed the right of all Irish people to self-determination and pushed for an IRA ceasefire.

**Section 3. The Path to Peace**

In 1994, the PIRA submitted (although talk of decommissioning weapons proved unsuccessful). And finally, in 1995, British army patrols ended in Belfast. The Mitchell Report, a set of principles on non-violence that all parties were to agree to in order for all-party peace negotiations to take place, was published in 1996. Senator George Mitchell from the United States was the architect of the principles and the subsequent peace talks between all involved parties. But the peace talks were not immediately successful. Two weeks after the principles were published, a PIRA bomb exploded in Canary Wharf, London. When Sinn Fein was excluded from the talks due to the PIRA’s attack, another PIRA bomb went off in the center of Manchester. Although the PIRA agreed to another ceasefire in 1997 and Sinn Fein was once again included in party talks, little progress was

made. Proposals were repeatedly made, and repeatedly rejected.

**A. Conflict Resolution Process and Methods**

According to Kriesberg, “Conflict occurs when groups perceive that they have incompatible goals, have developed a sense of identity, have a grievance, and believe they can successfully change the other party.”\(^{35}\) The success or failure of the conflict resolution process depends completely on whether or not the needs of involved groups can be met through compromise or by a new, creative solution. Factors such as the history between parties had to be taken into account in order to effectively overcome the violent identity-based conflict. The Troubles were a passionate, deep-rooted conflict, but both sides were tired of fighting. A sense of war-weariness paved the way to negotiation across all parties involved.

Besides the interests of involved parties and the parties’ willingness to participate in good faith negotiations, two factors that can greatly influence the outcome of the conflict resolution process are international interest and influence, and key individuals involved in peacemaking initiatives. For Northern Ireland, the difference was arguably the result of President of the United States Bill Clinton’s interest in peace in Northern Ireland. Clinton became personally involved in the promotion of peace and convinced a divided community to come together over the common goal of leaving violence and inequality behind. In 1995, he visited Belfast and delivered a speech to tens of thousands, urging both sides to pursue the peace process. It was in this speech that he famously called terrorists “yesterday’s men.”

President Clinton also aided in the peace process by appointing Senator George Mitchell to the position of United States Special Envoy for Northern Ireland from 1995 to 2001. Mitchell was responsible for creating the principles of non-violence for all parties to follow during peace talks and chaired the all-party peace talks that followed. His personal involvement was crucial to the success of the negotiations and his devoted efforts culminated in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which effectively marked the end of the Troubles.

Early in 1998, peace in Northern Ireland seemed unlikely. Multi-party talks were taking place and the IRA agreed to a ceasefire, but there were still many problems that would be difficult to overcome. The Ulster Unionist Party refused to negotiate directly with Sinn Fein and negotiators from loyalist paramilitary groups nearly withdrew from talks. George Mitchell, a Senator from the United States who was the chairman of the talks, decided to set a deadline for a settlement at midnight on April 9\textsuperscript{th}. At the stroke of midnight, negotiations were unfinished and the deadline was missed. The Ulster Unionists were unhappy with some sections of the proposed agreement that dealt with the release of paramilitary prisoners and the decommissioning of paramilitary weaponry. Fortunately, Tony Blair personally contacted David Trimble, the UUP leader, and smoothed over his concerns. On the afternoon of April 10, George Mitchell stated, “I am pleased to announce that the two governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland have reached agreement.”\textsuperscript{36}

The Good Friday Agreement (officially titled the Belfast Agreement), was an international agreement between Britain, Ireland, and eight political parties and

\textsuperscript{36} “Good Friday Agreement,” \textit{BBC History}, 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/good_friday_agreement.
paramilitary organizations from Northern Ireland: the Ulster Unionist Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Sinn Fein, the Alliance Party, the Progressive Unionist Party, the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalitions, the Ulster Democratic Party, and the Labour Party. It addressed Northern Ireland’s system of government, proposing a Northern Ireland Assembly that was headed by a power-sharing executive. The Assembly is a devolved legislature with mandatory cross-community voting on major issues. An institute was created to link Westminster and Dublin. It defined the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The document acknowledged that the majority of Northern Irish citizens wished to remain a part of the United Kingdom and a majority of citizens in the Republic of Ireland hoped for a united Ireland. It recognized both positions as legitimate and both governments agreed that if the time comes when a majority in both nations wishes for a United Ireland, they are under a binding obligation to implement the choice of the people.37 38

Additionally, the Good Friday Agreement contained provisions for the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, the normalization of security, and “the mutual respect, the civil rights and the religious liberties of everyone in the community.”39 It highlighted “the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to

39 See footnote 37.
linguistic diversity,” which demanded respect for the Irish language, a part of the
Unionists’ identity that had been severely suppressed, saying that the languages of ethnic
minorities are “part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.” Ninety-four percent
of voters in the Republic of Ireland voted in favor of the Good Friday Agreement at the
referendum in May 1998. Seventy-one percent of voters in Northern Ireland voted in
support of the Agreement.

In reward for his involvement in the Northern Ireland negotiations, Senator
Mitchell was awarded the Liberty Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Upon
receiving the Liberty Medal in 1998, Mitchell said, “I believe there’s no such thing as a
conflict that can’t be ended. They’re created and sustained by human beings. They can be
ended by human beings. No matter how ancient the conflict, no matter how hateful, no
matter how hurtful, peace can prevail.” Peace did prevail with the passing of the Good
Friday Agreement, but tensions did not disappear overnight. Although there is much to
say about the end of a violent era, continued efforts help to promote peace and
cooperation in Northern Ireland today.

Section 4. Post-Troubles Northern Ireland

Following the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland’s politicians formed a
new Assembly in Stormont. Many disagreements continued on such issues as policing
and the decommissioning of paramilitary weaponry. Paramilitary groups that opposed the

40 Ibid.
peace process committed terror attacks like that in Omagh, when a Real IRA bomb killed 29 and unborn twins on a busy street.\(^{43}\) The assembly was suspended on three occasions before 2002 when direct rule was reinstated from London.

It took five years for the devolved government to return. This occurred after the St. Andrew’s Agreement of 2006,\(^ {44}\) which included Sinn Fein’s acceptance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and power sharing between the Democratic Unionist Party and the Irish Nationalists. When the Assembly was reinstated in 2007, Ian Paisley of the Democratic Unionist Party became First Minister and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein became the Deputy First Minister. Although tensions continued, this cooperation stands as proof of the progress that has been made since the outbreak of the Troubles. A successful partnership between a member of the Democratic Unionist Party and a member of Sinn Fein would have been unthinkable even ten years earlier.

\textit{A. Northern Ireland Today}

Today, Northern Ireland has a growing population of 1.86 million people, divided roughly in half by national identity.\(^ {45}\) Since 1998, citizens of Northern Ireland have sought to reach their goals in a much more democratic way than they perhaps would have before. However, this does not mean that the two sides of the conflict do not still have mutually exclusive identities and goals and the tensions that come with them. There are

still issues that need to be resolved. Both the International Fund for Ireland and the European Union Peace and Reconciliation fund have designated funds to support attempts to engage the Unionist and Nationalist communities in cross-community development, be it political, social, or economic.46 Seemingly partisan violent attacks still occur on occasion, made easier by the segregation between opposing communities.

As previously discussed, segregation has been a huge issue in Northern Ireland for many years. It was arguably both a cause and an effect of the Troubles. Originally a tool of oppression, today it is more of what Personal Finance Reporter for the Guardian Mary O’Hara calls a “self-imposed apartheid.”47 Due to inter-communal tensions through the years, housing is almost completely segregated, particularly in Belfast, which is separated to this day by high walls called “peace lines” that were built as barriers to control the movement of opposing parties between their own “territory” and rival neighborhoods on the other side (See Appendix A).48 Intermarriage, while completely legal, is still quite rare, although attitudes have become increasingly more positive recently.49 Although the levels of segregation in the workforce have decreased in recent years, there is still

48 For more information regarding the history and function of the peace lines, visit the Northern Ireland Foundation’s webpage “Peace Walls,” at https://northernireland.foundation/sharedfuture/research/peace-walls/.
49 For the personal account of one devoutly Catholic woman’s 35 year marriage to a Protestant man, consider reading “Northern Ireland Quietly Opens Heart to Mixed Relationships” on the British Future... website. The article can be found through the following link: http://www.britishfuture.org/articles/northern-ireland-quietly-opens-heart-mixed-relationships/.
progress to be made. Additionally, education is heavily segregated.\textsuperscript{50} Protestant children mostly attend state schools and Catholic children tend to attend schools that are run by the Catholic Church. The main issue with separation at such a young age is that the majority of children in Ulster learn in monocultural schools where they have little to no contact with children from the other major voting bloc.

Much of the progress that has been made in Northern Ireland can be attributed to the younger generation, which is typically more open-minded. This is likely in part because they do not have as strong of memories of the Troubles as their older neighbors. Nevertheless, separate identities still define relations in Ulster. Hopes of a lasting, peaceful integration or bi-communal co-existence are aided by individual and community efforts to build upon what was achieved by the Good Friday Agreement.

**Section 5. Transformational Conflict Resolution**

Transformational conflict resolution, or “the peace concepts, methods, norms, parties, practices, and processes that ethnic communities together use to transform underlying structural issues in the process of post-conflict peace-building,”\textsuperscript{51} is in place in Northern Ireland today. As I will explore, transformational conflict resolution can take many forms and seek to reach many different goals, but always seeks peace. It is about more than just achieving an agreement for a single transaction like many forms of conflict resolution. It must nurture the relationships between opposing parties in order to prevent conflicts in the future. This form of ADR must address the most basic, deep-


rooted issues between parties by building up relationships instead of simply solving disputes. In the case of Northern Ireland and similar regions, transformational conflict resolution seems to be the logical path to pursue.

A. Examples of Transformational Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland

Numerous transformational conflict resolution projects are in place across all of Northern Ireland today. Many local community groups bring together Unionists and Nationalists to meet one another and pray for peace. An example is the Saint Columba House of Prayer and Reconciliation in Belfast, which facilitates peace and justice in group settings and works to promote trust and forgiveness across both communities. The Columbanus Community of Reconciliation, also located in Belfast, allows a common place for Christians to meet and challenge sectarianism, violence, and injustice within Northern Ireland. The Corrymeela Community in County Antrim provides a meeting place for Christians to work toward reconciliation and peace work. Corrymeela offers conflict analysis and mediation training as well as problem-solving workshops that help foster respect and stamp out feelings of prejudice and fear.

A rather unique ADR process is storytelling. Local storytelling guilds bring citizens from both sectors together, offering the opportunity to share their own stories as well as local or international stories about cross-cultural issues that build on a common narrative of peace. The opportunity to learn from others and to teach others through your personal story results in a shared experience in cross-cultural groups that fosters trust and respect. A public storytelling event is held at the Ulster Folk Theme Park in County Tyrone once

52 Ibid.
a year.\textsuperscript{54} Similar projects, like one at the Ulster People’s College in Belfast,\textsuperscript{55} bring the divided community together to explore shared problems and perceived differences and to take certified courses in community development and relations.

Projects that focus on the development of problem-solving and community-building skills are another widespread form of ADR in Northern Ireland. Two examples are the Community Relations Council,\textsuperscript{56} an organization based in Belfast that provides training in skills such as problem-solving, mediation, and conflict resolution at neighborhood mediation centers across the community divide with the goal of increasing interaction between Protestants and Catholics. Many other organizations share similar goals: Education for Mutual Understanding, the Ulster Quaker Peace Education Project, the Christian Education Movement, and All Children Together.\textsuperscript{57}

Many transformational conflict resolution groups focus on common factors of the participants. While some focus on the shared problems of all members of the community, such as memories of the Troubles, others focus on more distinct personal traits such as age or gender. The Belfast Charitable Trust for Integrated Education\textsuperscript{58} promotes integrated schools for Protestant and Catholic children with the hope that bringing

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item For more information on this annual event, visit the Ulster American Folk Park’s webpage at the following address: \url{http://nmni.com/uafp}.
\item Tony Clarke, “Ulster People’s College,” \textit{communityni}, 2012, \url{http://www.communityni.org/organisation/ulster-peoples-college#.VxqcMyMrLoA}.
\item Gemma Cowles, “Community Relations Council,” \textit{communityni}, 2015, \url{http://www.communityni.org/organisation/community-relations-council#.VxqdWCMrLoA}.
\item For information on these and other similar organizations across Northern Ireland, visit the communityni website: \url{http://www.communityni.org/}.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
children together will introduce them to different traditions at an early age, offsetting future prejudice as much as possible. Groups such as the National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland and the Youth Council of Northern Ireland work with young people to create and promote peaceful youth initiatives. The Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition is, well, self-explanatory.

These examples of transformational conflict resolution aim to make changes on the micro level that will ultimately transform the macro level relationship between the Unionists and Nationalists. “Preventing an escalation to violence involves the active, vigilant, and constructive involvement of all members of the community to enhance the rights of an oppressed minority.” Transformational conflict resolution supports the personal involvement of the involved parties, allowing for mutual acknowledgement and respect, the recognition of common problems, and political, social, and psychological empowerment. This type of ADR process is Northern Ireland’s best hope of building a sustainable culture of peace and fairness, whether in an integrated community or co-existing neighboring communities.

Section 6. What Can the United States Learn from Northern Ireland?

Americans have much to learn from how Northern Ireland is navigating the post-Troubles era. The transformational conflict resolution processes utilized by different groups in Northern Ireland help build mutual respect and bring attention to the civil rights

59 Ibid.
61 Byrne, "Transformational Conflict Resolution and the Northern Ireland Conflict,” 13.
and religious liberties of all community members. They provide a platform for individuals to teach, and a place of learning. They highlight the cultural contributions of diverse groups, and grant validity to the unique experiences of each. These processes do not promise an immediate discontinuance of tensions between groups, but can be highly effective in the long run if undertaken by willing participants. By focusing on the micro-level (individuals and unique groups), these processes have the potential to alter underlying structural issues and ultimately lead to a more peaceful, macro-level America.

Transformational conflict resolution can be applied to a variety of grievances, large and small. Next I present three rather large issues that are prevalent in the United States at present: racial inequality and Ferguson, political polarization in the government, and the fear of Muslims in America. These issues are all important conflicts of identity that are deeply ingrained in the American psyche, and it is necessary that each be resolved in a lasting way. I believe that conflict resolution methods like those used in Northern Ireland are the best bet for reaching this goal (for more information regarding transformative mediation in America, see Appendix B).

A. Possible Application for Ethnic Disputes: Ferguson, MO

On August 9, 2014, an unarmed black teenager by the name of Michael Brown was shot and killed on the street by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Reactions were mixed, even amongst witnesses. Some believed Brown was shot with his hands up in the air in surrender; others (including the St. Louis County Police Department) reported that he had reached for the officer’s gun. Unrest immediately followed and the streets were filled with primarily black looters and rioters. Police claimed that rioters became increasingly violent, even firing guns at them, and began using tear gas and
rubber bullets against protestors. President Obama’s requests for the community to stay calm went ignored, and the next week saw the use of Molotov cocktails and the introduction of the National Guard and a heavily militarized police force.\(^{62}\)

The fatal shooting of an unarmed teenager by a police officer is a tragedy in and of itself, but to many, Ferguson represented a much larger issue: racial inequality in the United States. For many, especially in the African American community, the shooting of Michael Brown was a symbol of the injustice they face living in America. The African American community is traditionally marginalized, having spent nearly 100 more years in slavery in the United States than as a free people. Protestors in Ferguson and with groups such as Black Lives Matter (founded after Trayvon Martin was shot in 2012) aim to bring attention to the contributions that black citizens give to their communities and the injustices they face in the United States’ system. Alternately, many in the United States maintain that racial equality is nonexistent or that the protestors in Ferguson and with the Black Lives movement more generally are too extreme. While opinions on this conflict and other racial matters are not quite as clearly divided as the issues between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, there is a noticeable difference along the racial divide between blacks and whites.\(^{63}\)

Many parallels can be drawn between the environment that fostered the Northern Ireland Conflict and present-day America. Disputes over the racial inequality of African Americans are often based on the fact that black people are a minority in America and


have traditionally been oppressed. Today in the United States, blacks have considerably lower household incomes, net worth of households, homeownership rates, rates of higher education, and life expectancy rates as compared to whites (and often Asians and Hispanics). They have much higher incarceration rates and poverty rates in their communities.\footnote{“Chapter 3: Demographic & Economic Data, by Race,” \textit{Pew Social Trends}, Aug. 22, 2013, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/08/22/chapter-3-demographic-economic-data-by-race/} And, as expected, these differences have existed in the African American community since the end of slavery. Other similarities include the importance of identity, the notion of government and security forces working against the minority, and the use of violence for the achievement of political ends.

Firmly held identities are not likely to change, but the opposing parties in this dispute and others like it can strive to understand the viewpoints of others and learn to respect those viewpoints that come from a good place. Transformational conflict resolution can help resolve this ethnic disputes by working through current problems and fostering the relationships between opposing parties in order to prevent future conflicts. For example, for Ferguson or other conflicts in smaller geographic areas, community-based efforts such as prayer groups or storytelling events could help create an open dialogue and increase understanding for both sides of the issues.

\textbf{B. Possible Application for Political Disputes: Political Polarization}

Another possible application for transformational conflict resolution processes would be to lessen tensions between the political left and the political right. According to the Pew Research Center, 54\% of Americans believe that the Republican Party is “too extreme,” and 37\% of Americans believe the same about the Democratic Party. Pew also
discovered that voters in the United States are growing increasingly frustrated with politics and the government and that voters are quickly losing confidence in the public’s political wisdom across partisan lines even over the last few months. Pew reports that 90% of voters report they are frustrated or angry about politics today, and 30% of voters claim their anger and frustration is primarily due to partisanship, gridlock, or other political affiliations or beliefs than their own.\textsuperscript{65}

The tensions between the left and the right are apparent in the media as well as on social media, often sparking intense debates that often devolve into personal attacks on candidates or individuals’ characters rather than their views. It is my belief that the United States would benefit from using forms of transformational conflict resolution to attempt to quell some of the angry discourse that surrounds politics today. While efforts at the national level would probably prove fruitless due to distrust of the government and general disenchantment with the American political system, I believe that more concentrated local efforts could work to allow citizens the chance to voice their opinions and learn about those of others (not just that they exist, but how they formed). These programs would have the potential to empower participants and build respect amongst proponents of different views and with different identities. At the very least, participants would probably leave having learned something new, having had their positions challenged, or having been presented with a difficult question to consider.

C. Possible Application for Religious Disputes: Islam in America

On September 11, 2001, the Islamic terrorist group Al-Qaeda carried out four coordinated terrorist attacks against the United States. Following the attacks, paranoia and anxiety over another terrorist attack skyrocketed. Unfortunately, this fear has led to the distrust and, in extreme cases, hatred of all practitioners of the Muslim faith. The Pew Research Center estimates that the population of 3.3 million Muslims in the United States will double by the year 2050.66 Another survey showed that nearly 70% of Republicans, 45% of Independents, and 30% of Democrats believe Islam promotes violence. Thirty-two percent of Americans are in favor of Muslims being subject to more scrutiny than people of other religions, with 56% reporting that the government has not gone far enough to protect the United States against terrorism and only 28% reporting that the government has gone too far restricting civil liberties.67

My recommendation for easing the tensions between Muslim Americans and the rest of American society is similar to that of my recommendation for racial inequality issues. The people of the United States need a solution that will alter the way Muslim-Americans are perceived and their role in society. The identities and beliefs are not likely to change in this situation, but education could make a drastic difference. Interactions between the Muslim community and others could help put a positive face to the minority community that is so often cast in a negative light, and those with anxieties would be

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given the chance to voice their fears and hear back from members of the community they believe to be a threat. This personal involvement would be psychologically empowering to both parties.

Transformational conflict resolution can help resolve this ethnic dispute by working through current problems and fostering the relationships between opposing parties in order to increase understanding, calm tensions, and prevent future conflicts. For example, for conflicts in smaller geographic areas such as a city with a growing number of Islamic immigrants, community-based efforts such as prayer groups or storytelling events could help create an open dialogue and increase understanding for both sides of the issues. Regardless of the specific strategy used, mutual understanding and respect must be established or tensions will surely continue.

**Conclusion**

Northern Ireland has come a long way since the outbreak of the Troubles. Today, Northern Ireland is a nation divided, but working toward a sustainable peace through transformational conflict resolution processes. Transformational conflict resolution is an inclusive and non-violent ADR process that brings opposing sides together to address the underlying structural and social issues of a conflict and to build a framework in which they can pursue a lasting peace. This method of peace building could successfully be applied to various social issues in the United States as well. It seems likely that transformational conflict resolution would be a viable option for fostering long-term relationships in cases of racial inequality, political divisiveness, and religious persecution. Even the simple establishment of small community groups has the potential to make major changes to American relations.
Appendix

A. Map of the Belfast Peace Lines

This simplified map shows the major divisions in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The green areas are mainly Catholic and the orange mainly protestant. In some cases, neighborhoods are directly across the road from one another. In many, the homes of Catholics and Protestants are practically in each other’s backyard, only separated by a peace wall.  

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Appendix B. Transformative Mediation in America

Transformational conflict resolution is not as common in the United States as it is in Northern Ireland. However, Joe Folger and Baruch Bush, authors of *The Promise of Mediation* (Jossey-Bass, 1994), brought attention back to the concept of transformational dispute resolution. The two founded the Training Design Consultation Project, which worked with the Conflict Research Consortium at the University of Colorado, Boulder to learn from mediators who use transformative mediation and to develop a training program for those interested in learning more. The result of this research can now be found on the Conflict Research Consortium website.69

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