

This is part one of a series on Brexit and IRA. You'll hear part two next week.

When discussing the on-going Brexit process, we tend to have fairly high-level discourse about what this or that possibility might do to the economy or freedom of movement, the economy, various institutions, and so on. What gets lost in all of this, though, are the much more human consequences. Although there are many, one of the most potentially explosive in the matter of Ireland; or rather, the two Irelands that Britain's exit from the EU may once again separate. It may seem far off today, but the Good Friday agreement that officially ended the bloody conflict between Irish nationalists and the British government was signed only in 1998. And some, like X, are warning that missteps in British politics threaten to undo that. *Play clip* To understand these dynamics, we must first understand parallels systems of power in Ireland. But to understand that, we need to look at Ireland's history. I'm Cameron Lallana. Let's talk about the Irish Republican Army.

Let's take a step back for a second. For those of you who aren't super familiar with the geography of that archipelago off the coast of France, the British Isles are actually made up of thousands of small Islands. The most important two are, of course, Ireland and Great Britain. Scotland, England, and Wales are all on the latter island. So when we say United Kingdom, we're referring to the nation comprised of the regions of Great Britain as well as Northern Ireland, which is a separate entity from the Republic of Ireland to the South.

The reason for this confusing separation is found in England's colonial past—as many of you might be aware, the British Empire was not only global but also domestic: the entrances of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland into the United Kingdom are perhaps best described as conquests. These regions, especially Ireland, never forgot that. Anti-British sentiment remained over centuries and was exacerbated by the often cruel governance of the English government. Take for example, the Famine that killed nearly a quarter of Ireland between 1845 and 1849. A well-known maxim of 19th Century Irish nationalist John Mitchell was “God sent the potato blight, but the English created the famine.” Some Irish historians have made the argument that

the English recognized the severity of the famine at the time, but refused to extend relief to Ireland due to a strict adherence *laissez faire* economics—an act tantamount to genocide. Although this is the most severe case, it is far from the only horror story in Irish history. And thus, Irish separatism slowly grew to an incredibly potent and militant opposition force. Even in the midst of WW1, a group of Irish nationalists formed the first Irish Republican Army and attempted a rebellion that would later be put down. In response, Secretary of State for War Winston Churchill developed the Royal Irish Constabulary Special Reserve, popularly referred to as the ‘Black and Tans,’ which were comprised of British veterans of WW1. The Black and Tans were deployed to Ireland to help the police put down IRA groups. In practice, they were poorly prepared for the task and very quickly suffered a number of casualties at the hands of the IRA; in response, the groups began engaging in arbitrary reprisals against Irish civilians, including burning villages and other Irish property, kidnapping, and extensive extrajudicial murder.

At the same time that the IRA and the Black and Tans were duking it out, political games and conversations were being played out that would eventually lead to Ireland being granted self-rule, which it would use to declare independence from the United Kingdom. The North of Ireland, however, had a much larger population of Protestant Irish, who had much closer ties to the British—this group was the sticking point that caused the rift between the north and the primarily Catholic south, which is part of the reason that Northern Ireland remained a part of Great Britain when the Republic of Ireland seceded in 1921. After its secession, the free state of Ireland maintained rather chilly relations with Britain while some IRA militants continued to carry out attacks with the intention of reuniting the 32 counties of Ireland. The conflict continued, although its intensity decreased over the next forty years.

This, of course, is just where our tale begins. In the late 1960s, civil rights groups sprung up in Northern Ireland in response to anti-Catholic discrimination. The police—a force generally dominated by Protestants—worked again in tandem with the British army and brought violent crackdowns on the marchers. Around this time, disagreement within the IRA led to its splintering into two separate factions, known as the “Official IRA,” and the “Provisional IRA.” Although both would continue their activities long into the future, it is the Provisional IRA that is most important to this story.

From their formation in 1969 to 1972, the PIRA escalated their use of violence, under the theory that strong use of force would push the British government from Northern Ireland. In practice, this meant sniper attacks, assassinations, and bombings—for three years, these tactics were met with limited success in both recruitment efforts and influence on the British government.

Then, on the 30th of January, 1972, British troops attempted to curtail a Catholic march in the city of Derry. While in the process of arresting marchers, the paratroopers clubbed people with rifles and shoot others with rubber bullets at close range. Occasionally, they used live ammo.

By the end of the day, 13 people were dead and one more would later die of his injuries. An equal number were non-fatally shot. Bloody Sunday, as the event would come to be known, would proved to be the Catalyst the PIRA in the fight against the British.

The week after next, we'll be covering the bloody emergence and then fragmentation of the Irish Republican Army, and why the EU was essential in maintaining this peace. The music used in this report was "Come out ye Black and Tans by Derek Warfield and the Young Wolfe Tones.