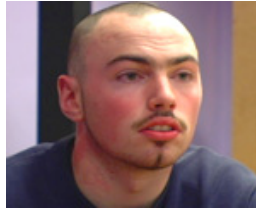




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FRONTLINE/World **Rough Cut**



Rough Cut  
Northern Ireland: Uneasy Peace  
A community learns to forgive

BY Niall McKay  
March 16, 2006

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Learn more about the political and religious history of Northern Ireland and how a conflict that came to be known as "the Troubles" began.

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Niall McKay is a San Francisco-based writer, broadcast journalist and filmmaker. He wrote "Northern Ireland: A Troubles Over?" for **FRONTLINE/World** in August 2005. Currently, he is an associate at the Center for Investigative Reporting in San Francisco. McKay writes for the *The Economist*. In 2001, McKay spent two months in Indonesian Borneo working on a documentary on headhunters and cannibals. He is also the director of The San Francisco Irish Film Festival. McKay comes from County Wicklow in Ireland. He graduated from Trinity College Dublin and moved to California in 1990.

After decades of violence, Northern Ireland is finally experiencing the possibilities of peace. Reporter Niall McKay takes back to the island of his birth to examine the transition from a civil war to a civil society in the north corner of the Emerald Isle.

McKay lived for a short time in Belfast, which was a bombed-out and boarded-up city in the 1990's.

The so-called "troubles" began in 1968 when Catholics demanded equal voting rights from the Protestant controlled parliament. Demonstrations ensued. Later, the British army, originally brought in to keep the peace, became embroiled in violence. More than 3,700 people have died since the conflict began.

Now the British troops have left Belfast, the IRA has destroyed its weapons, and the visible scars of war have been healed a newfound economic optimism.

McKay takes us in to the back rooms and front yards of Belfast to speak to survivors on both sides of the conflict. Neighbors -- who for years felt nothing but hatred for each other -- are learning to live in peace.

"We're expected to report on conflict," McKay says, "but what about the story of conflict resolved?"

Now that the violence has ebbed, McKay finds that the hard work of forgiving is underway. His film "Uneasy Peace" introduces us to men who lost their sons and fathers, and to women who are working to keep forgotten traditions alive. McKay also reminds us how beautiful Ireland really is, with its rolling green hills, ancient churches and robust legends.

But the journey toward peace is a fragile process that has faltered more than once. The morning that McKay arrived to start filming, the car belonging to a man who was to be one of his main subjects in Northern Ireland had been stolen and burned. The summer brought dozens more torched vehicles, and tense riots. Why, wonders McKay, were Protestants still rioting the IRA had declared a cease fire?

A Protestant man named Willy explained it this way, "Some of the people we lived side by side with came and murdered us...you just can't simply turn around and say, 'Well, we have to move on' because they say they've done this and they say they've done that."

Despite the difficulty, Willy and others like him on both sides of the bitter divide are making steps toward healing. Trust is slowly growing. McKay talks with community activists, local youth group leaders, and those who are hoping to heal communities by providing a place to tell painful stories.

McKay finds that their stories are remarkably similar.

"People think that in Northern Ireland Catholics and Protestants are quarreling about religious difficulties when really they are fighting for resources, power and money. Each community wants equal access to housing, jobs and political power. Who wouldn't?" he asks. In the end, McKay says, what the working class on both sides needs is a decent living.

Associate Producer  
Singeli Agnew

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## REACTIONS

### **Gerry Donlon - Seattle, WA**

Very good program with a good question. Perhaps most insightful to that fundamental question posed is reaction from two of the viewers, one from Woburn, MA and the other from Madison, WI. Nicely removed from the troubles of Ireland as always. The "pro-British unionist/Orange settler community" in the province of Ulster arrived centuries ago and the strident assertion that Northern Ireland is "not" Ireland is an equally ridiculous corruption of history. It is not inconceivable that were it not for the politics (then as now), the guns, and the support of equally bigoted American émigrés during the first 2 decades of the century, Ireland would have become free and economically prosperous on its own within decades and with none of the violence of 1916 and beyond. The South and the North would not have gone through 70 years of cultural isolationism and economic backwardness with the focus being on building a Catholic state and a Protestant state. Sometimes you need 70 years of hindsight.

### **DAVID JEFFERSON - SAN MATEO, CA**

Requires repeated viewing due to the Brogues, however, for the relatively uninformed such as myself, I welcome this film as a first step in the enlightenment process. My grandparents emigrated from County Antrim and County Monaghan but the

heritage and mine were not a priority as I wish they had been. I've fallen in love with all things Irish and am just recently discovering the beauty and tragedy of Ireland. The story is just unfolding for me and I appreciate this very significant snippet of Irish life.

**Dave . - Spokane, WA**

There is a weariness among Ulster protestants of the image they are given by the world's media. We have constantly been portrayed as a community attempting to completely annihilate the Nationalist culture. It is easy to paint the revival in the Irish language as a cultural blossoming, something of beauty. But it is not a mark of the two communities growing together rather one of emphasizing our separations. It is easy to talk of Protestant groups who won't talk with Catholics but what rarely mentioned is the Republican tactic of choosing negotiators they know would be offensive to the Protestant community. For example in Portadown, (one of the biggest flashpoints areas) where the chosen leader of the nationalist community group had been convicted of bombing a Protestant bar in the town's center. What was widely reported was the Protestant's intransigence. One comment suggested as long as the Protestant community has those such as Ian Paisley representing them things won't improve. I am no supporter of Paisley, but I would point out that throughout the trouble and indeed up until the last couple of years, all hard-line unionist parties remained in the minority. Protestants supporting paramilitary parties were very much a tiny, tiny minority. Sinn Fein, however, the political wing of the IRA, consistently gained a large proportion of the Catholic vote. What did the Protestant community see? A large section of the nationalist community supporting those who would use the bullet and the bomb. We are told the IRA has disarmed, but we see IRA captured in Colombia training others for guerilla warfare. We see the last cease-fire last for a year and then be broken by an attack which was at least 6 months in the planning. And after all this the Protestant community still supported the Peace process, and gave in to the demands that murderers and bombers be released from prison. Do not underestimate how big that was -- and how much pain it caused the victims. I am not saying that protestants have been the only victims. As the said the hurt on both sides is just as great. But that is my point, both sides are victims -- hijacked by a small minority of terrorists. The standpoint of either group equally unjustifiable. When will there be trust? When is it earned -- that is the only way trust can be gained. So great are the treacheries and atrocities that I sadly conclude it will be perhaps generations before complete normality is restored. It will not be instituted by reformed terrorists, but when those involved in violence give up their quest for power and allow the everyday community to exist and work together as normal people going about their lives and business. For in areas where that has happened, community relations have never been a problem. Democracy, without weapons behind the back, is the only thing which will truly plant peace.

**(anonymous)**

I liked this a lot. I think Niall gave a good balanced view of the situation in the North of Ireland. I am from the South myself, so I know a little about it. It was also quite timely to examine what is happening there now - are wounds healing? His final observation, whilst not new, is a good one. If people are doing well economically, they will no doubt have less to be angry and bitter about - a solution to terrorism and many troubles all over the world. Nicely done.

**(anonymous)**

I come from the North. I have worked there with youth in education and counselling. I am now working in Asia, I have worked in other countries which I loved, but I will return to home in the North. There is nowhere like home and warm here. Also every where I go, the North follows me: Titanic, the play has been advertised in every country in Asia, George Best football player, Joey Dunlop the motor bike racer and St. Patrick who was buried in Amrath, the ancient capital of Ireland all globally famous. All my friends and my generation at home who were born in the 1970s want peace. It is up to communication channels like the media to promote us without mentioning all the time politics and more politics. Thank you for reading my thoughts and experiences.

Nathalia Byrne from County Antrim

**Lynn - Vallejo, CA**

The "troubles" are often overlooked in the US and yet this continuing argument of people, religion, and governments need to be solved. I have described the troubles as "apartheid" and "economically driven" not religion, to those that wonder "why". I am glad that economics, tourism and some good sense are prevailing. It gives the Irish hope and it gives me hope, that's a start for us all. Keep up the good work (Ulster and PBS)! In 1987 I visited Ireland and due to a booking error our group drove on city streets through Belfast (with a spontaneous British Army escort because the freeway was closed). I saw the barbed fencing, barricades and damage to the buildings. I was surprised by my emotional response to both Belfast and the Good Friday Accord, as only half of my ancestors are Irish.

**Amanda de Luis - Barcelona, Spain**

I live in a country where we still have terrorism. Too bad that we do not have anybody who wants to talk openly about it showing both sides of the conflict. Probably we would find that they have similar ways to defend their point of view. All still see lots of hatred between "franquistas" (the Spanish right) and the "republicanos" (the Spanish left that also include: socialists), or between the nationalist areas (Vasc Country and Catalonia) and the Spanish nationalist although the Spani Civil War ended 70 years ago. Healing is a long process and it takes several generations. Also, I love to see how McKay presents the problem as a "class problem."

**Matt Regan - San Francisco (Derry native), CA**

A short 30 minute or hour long documentary can never hope to do more than scratch the surface of the the troubles and tl complexities that lie therein.

Niall, you made a very good effort and your film is definitely a very informative introduction to Northern Ireland post troubles for anyone who is new to the country and its modern history. I do have a couple of small criticisms...everyone's critic right? You focused a lot on the sectarian nature of the conflict and in Belfast that was a strong driving force, however other parts of the country, Derry for example, the troubles waged on largely free of any sectarian component so you have look beyond religion as the sole or even primary cause for the conflict. Sectarianism was a byproduct of the troubles, not cause. I also don't think that the progress of unbridled capitalism is the magic bullet that will end sectarianism and the national identity question. Raising people out of poverty and giving them employment and opportunities will definitely starve the paramilitaries of many of the disaffected youth that traditionally comprised the bulk of their recruits, but again is just part of the solution. If poverty and unemployment were the sole causes of the troubles, jobs and economic development would likely result in lasting peace, but we all know its not that simple. I believe it will take a generational before we can see true progress towards resolving the true cause of the troubles, the question of national identity. Only when the people of Northern Ireland see themselves as Europeans first and Irish or British second will the root causes of the violence cease to exist. Northern Ireland has made great progress and its a much different place then the country I left 12 y ago. Long may it continue, the people there deserve peace and prosperity. I have some friends who have recently made fil in Northern Ireland...you might know them.

**(anonymous)**

I found the film very insightful to a point. It is refreshing to show both sides of the divide experiencing the same issues in relation to fear, loss etc. The presenter presented the piece without prejudice and without blame which is important. On the other hand I feel that through the clips of people, especially the last man who spoke, the republican response is unreasonable. It is true that Catholics and Protestants lived together and interacted with one another. Following from this the Republican response seems illogical; so at some point the issue of the oppression of Catholics and the unequal treatment of Catholics within their own 'Country' needs to be mentioned.

**le corri - houston, tx**

The problem in the north is that people and politicians alike who lead the largest Unionist party are determined not to work with Republicans, because Republicans want to remove the British from Ireland as well as to dissolve the partition of the island. They also refuse to see all the changes of the party representing the largest number of nationalists in Northern Ireland. People like that Willy guy have to understand -- nationalists were murdered by unionist/loyalist paramilitaries AND the British Army, many unarmed, as well, but they are willing to 'move on'. As long as people like Ian Paisley represents unionism, I don't see unionism 'moving on'. I hope I am wrong.

**Thomas Mitchell - Madison,, WI**

Niall McKay starts off by telling us that Ireland is a violent country. It is not. Northern Ireland has been a violent country in the recent past, and in some ways still is. Northern Ireland is not part of Ireland--it is a different country just as Virginia and West Virginia are separate states. It suffers largely because people with Mr. McKay's views have tried to violently assert what he claimed. This is years after the Republic of Ireland and both main nationalist parties in Northern Ireland officially recognized this in the Belfast Agreement. Next time get a journalist who recognizes these basic facts to do the report.

**FRONTLINE/World's editors respond:**

Mr. McKay is well aware that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, as his report and our Web site make clear.

**ciaran crowley - Woburn, MA**

The report is interesting but overlooks the real problem, i.e. Unionist terrorists who demand to march in the Irish nation

area and numerous attempts by Unionist residents to prevent Irish school girls from walking thru' part of N. Belfast to go to school. With a mindset like that and filled with decades of sectarian hatred of Irish people (in occupied Ireland), it is relevant to point out that most of the trouble comes from the pro-British unionist/Orange settler community.

**Dan Kahl - Manhattan, KSA**

McKay's observations about the importance of having equal access to jobs, housing and political power are very much in line with my observations. After spending a short time studying the troubles in Derry and Belfast last year through a partners program of the University of Ulster and Kansas State University, I came to understand that there is not ONE solution to political, economic, religious, social, and justice issues that resound in Northern Ireland. However, approaches that encourage healing in all these areas will collectively blend together to help create trust and promote healing. It takes more than one stitch to heal deep wounds.

**Janine Pohland - Erfurt, Germany**

I'm 25 years old. I've been living in Belfast for one year and working as a foreign language assistant in three schools. I experienced Belfast as a great city and even after returning home to my family, I still miss this place so much. When I arrived in September 2004, I felt a little afraid, but a few weeks later, everything was fine. The Irish people are so warm and welcoming and I like their positive attitude. When they go out, they have fun and enjoy themselves. I also realized that only a small minority of people are responsible for the conflict, which is not a religious conflict. Catholic people have no problem with the Protestant belief, and vice versa. The conflict exclusively bases on political issues, and many Irish are fed up with their sad past. I still miss Belfast like anything in the world, and I'm so grateful for the time I had there.

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