

Artifacts of Violence:
Political Ephemera of the Troubles 1968-2000

Hanes Rosenau
Undergraduate Senior Thesis
Department of History
Columbia University
April 3rd 2024

Seminar Instructor: Professor Susan Pedersen
Second Reader: Professor James Stafford

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Acknowledgments

I want to start by extending a deep thanks to my second reader, Professor James Stafford, for his guidance on this thesis. It was your seminar in the fall of 2022 that inspired this project, and your encouragement gave me the confidence to pursue this topic. Your advice and kindness over the past year have been instrumental. I would also like to thank my thesis seminar advisor Professor Susan Pedersen. Your tireless work over the past seven months has been essential in helping me make this project a reality. You have helped me become a better writer, researcher, and historian. I would also like to extend a thank you to the staff at the Linen Hall Library, particularly Melissa. You all consistently went above and beyond in your duties and made my time in Belfast much more enjoyable. Finally, I want to thank my friends and family. Daisy, John, Julien, and Matt, you have made my time at Columbia unforgettable. Dad, you inspired a love of history in me and have always been there to talk about anything. Mom, you have always been in my corner and encouraged me to pursue my interests.

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List of Abbreviations

DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRPO	Irish Republican Philatelic Office
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
RIRA	Real Irish Republican Army
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
UDA	Ulster Defense Association
UFF	Ulster Freedom fighters
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force



Introduction

While conducting research at the Linen Hall Library in Central Belfast, I came across a photo calendar for the year 1997 produced by the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) (fig. 1), a Northern Irish paramilitary force that has been designated as a terrorist organization by the government of the United Kingdom since 1973.¹ The calendar features several photos of masked men posing with automatic rifles and submachine guns.² In the central image, the men have their weapons pointed at the camera, creating an effect of the viewer staring directly down the barrels of the guns. This calendar is one of dozens of calendars and thousands of political artifacts in the collection of the Linen Hall Library that were produced during the Troubles, a three-decade period of political unrest and intense violence in Northern Ireland. These objects were created by organizations and individuals on both sides of the divide between the pro-British, majority-Protestant loyalists, and the pro-Irish, majority-Catholic republicans. They ranged from high-quality photo calendars like this one to leather wallets handmade by political prisoners, and everything in between. Objects professing political messages were not exclusive to Belfast but were produced across Northern Ireland and to a lesser degree are still available for sale in shops today.

This calendar raises a multitude of questions both about the object itself and the Troubles period. If paramilitaries on both sides of the conflict had declared a ceasefire in 1994, and negotiations for sustained peace were making legitimate progress, why would the UVF produce such a militaristic image at this time? Why would the paramilitaries be pointing their guns at the purchaser of the calendar, someone who presumably would agree with them politically?

¹ 864 *HC Deb.*, 22 November 1973, Column 520.

² *Ulster Freedom Fighters South East Antrim Brigade*, 1997, Calendar, 1997, NIPC/PA/CALE, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.



Figure 1. 1997 Ulster Freedom Fighters South East Antrim Brigade calendar

Furthermore, why does this calendar closely resemble murals produced in loyalist neighborhoods during the same period? Why were extremist organizations producing products for everyday consumption, and why was there such a strong culture of producing political objects across the Troubles? Finally, what can a study of these artifacts tell us about one of the most protracted and intransigent civil conflicts of the 20th century? In this thesis, I will seek to answer these questions

through an in-depth analysis of the visual and physical aspects of these objects and an examination of the context in which they were produced. In doing so, this thesis sheds light on a previously unexamined aspect of the Troubles and provides new insights into the political culture of the period.

While not engaging in the debate as to whether the Troubles should be considered an ethnic conflict, in this thesis I will only occasionally use the terms Catholic and Protestant to refer to the sides of the conflict. Rather, I will use the terms unionist, loyalist, nationalist, and republican due to the greater specificity of these terms. I use the term “unionist” to describe those who adhere to the political tradition of the same name that seeks for Northern Ireland to remain a part of the United Kingdom. When I use the term “loyalist” it references a more extreme subsection of unionism commonly associated with hardline political leaders and paramilitary organizations. Similarly, when I use the term “nationalist,” I am referencing the political tradition that promotes a politically independent Ireland with its own Irish culture and values. When using the word “republican” I am referencing the more hardline branch of the nationalist tradition often associated with paramilitary organizations such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA). It is crucial to note that unionists are almost always Protestant and nationalists often Catholic, and religion is a central part of these political traditions. These political traditions are not a product of the Troubles but are much older than the conflict and have shaped the history of Ireland. Additionally, using these terms is an effective way to view the conflict as part of the broader political history of Ireland.

I will now outline the main topics of contention during the Troubles. First and most central was the political status of Northern Ireland. Since the partition of Ireland in 1921, the six counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone have remained a part

of the United Kingdom and been politically separate from the rest of Ireland. Many nationalists sought, and continue to seek, a unification of these counties with the Republic of Ireland, forming a state entirely separate from the United Kingdom with its capital in Dublin. Unionists in general sought, and continue to seek, to remain a part of the United Kingdom—sending representatives to parliament in Westminster in addition to some degree of devolved governance in the Northern Irish state. A closely related second area of contention was around the government of Northern Ireland and the status of Catholics in the country. While Catholics were a majority on the island of Ireland, Protestants made up a majority in the Northern Irish state. This resulted in the dominance of Protestants in the Northern Irish Assembly, commonly called Stormont, and in gerrymandering and discrimination against Catholics in public housing and employment (particularly blue-collar and government jobs). As the conflict escalated, the UK Parliament dissolved the Stormont government in 1972, enacting “direct rule” from Westminster. The structure of Northern Ireland’s local government was a major point of contention throughout the Troubles including in the failed Sunningdale agreement of 1974 that sought to establish a “power-sharing executive,” the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 which sought to induce cooperation between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in Northern Irish affairs, and the Good Friday agreement of 1998 which set up a government that would ensure representation of nationalists and unionists.

Another major area of contention surrounded notions of identity. Many nationalists in Northern Ireland saw themselves as distinctly Irish and not British no matter what nationality they held. They often participated in longstanding nationalist practices such as the intentional use of the Gaelic language and traditional music, the playing of traditional Irish sports such as Hurling and Gaelic football, a strong identification with Catholicism, and an emphasis on

traditional imagery—utilizing motifs such as the harp, Celtic knots, and the color green. In contrast, many unionists saw themselves as distinctly culturally British, even if their ancestors had lived in Ireland for hundreds of years. This often took the form of identification with various forms of the Protestant faith, strong expressions of support for the monarch, membership in professedly “loyal” organizations such as the Loyal Orange Lodge, and public displays of patriotism with the Union Jack. The Good Friday agreement sought to settle this issue. In its list of core statements it “recogniz[ed] the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both” and to hold citizenship of both countries.³ While these topics were not the sole bones of contention during the Troubles, many other issues stemmed from these core aspects.

This thesis, particularly the first two chapters, engages in an examination of artifacts produced by unionist and loyalist groups. This is for several reasons. First, in comparison to Irish nationalism, unionism is a political tradition that is less studied, particularly in the context of the Troubles. That is not to say that it is more deserving of study; rather it allows this work more room to break new ground. Second, unionists were the largest population during the Troubles, and they exercised hegemony over the Northern Irish state from 1921 until the dissolution of the Northern Irish Assembly in 1972, and to a limited degree afterward. The study of the ideology of the dominant force during the early Troubles period, and their reaction to a loss of power, is crucial to understanding the reasons why this conflict lasted for thirty years. Finally, unionism is an ideology that is interesting to the author because of its contradictory nature. As historian David Miller examines as the central question in his book *Queen’s Rebels*, unionists consistently

³ “The Belfast Agreement” (Northern Ireland Office, April 10, 1998), 2, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement>.

violated the laws of the UK but ardently proclaimed their allegiance to its head of state.⁴ Since the dissolution of the Northern Irish Assembly in 1972, unionists have constantly expressed dissatisfaction with the actions of the government of the United Kingdom, yet they have vehemently fought to remain a part of the UK despite having plentiful opportunities to leave the union.

As this thesis is concerned with unionist visual culture, some context about the unionist and loyalist community is required. The community sees itself as both Irish and British. They see themselves as Irish geographically: they are separated from Britain by the sea and their ancestors often lived on the island for many generations. Yet they see themselves as British culturally, particularly due to religion and ancestral factors. While almost all are Protestant, various veins of Protestantism exist within the community. Anglicanism is more commonly associated with the upper class (and formerly with large landholders) while Presbyterianism, the most popular denomination, is more commonly associated with the middle and lower classes. Additionally, some forms of Presbyterianism, such as the breakaway Free Presbyterian Church, founded by the hardline loyalist politician Rev. Ian Paisley, are commonly associated with militant sectarianism. Presbyterianism is connected with the significant number of Scots who immigrated over the centuries to Ireland and many in the unionist community express connections to Scotland. These include supporting the heavily Protestant Glasgow Rangers Football Club, flying the occasional Scottish flag, and identifying as “Ulster Scots.” Additionally, many Scots travel to Northern Ireland for the July 12th marches.

One of the largest concerns for unionists and loyalists is the balance of the population. Protestants are a minority on the island of Ireland and a majority in Northern Ireland. They

⁴ David W. Miller, *Queen's Rebels: Ulster Loyalism in Historical Perspective* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 1.

generally fear (and I use the word fear intentionally) a united Ireland, as Protestants would become a minority voting bloc in an island-wide democracy. As Ireland moved towards independence in 1921, this fear was one of the main reasons for the creation of the Northern Irish state. Protestants thus fear the growth of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland and the loss of political power that may come as a result. These population dynamics have resulted in unionists and loyalists often having a siege mentality where they see their small corner of the island as surrounded by an enemy they must fight by any means necessary to keep their nation. This mentality is closely tied to historical references to the 1689 siege of the Protestant city of Londonderry by the Catholic forces of James II and often carries over to smaller-scale matters. Loyalist neighborhood enclaves that are surrounded by nationalist housing estates often portray themselves under siege. For example, when entering the Fountain housing estate in Derry today, one still sees a large mural reading “Londonderry West Bank Loyalists Still Under Siege; NO SURRENDER.”

A sketch of the main organizations within the unionist and loyalist community during the Troubles provides a sense of the makeup of the community. One of the main pillars of the community was the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), one of the oldest political parties in Northern Ireland. While the UUP lost ground to other loyalist and unionist parties throughout the Troubles, they still possessed a great amount of influence. They had decades of electoral dominance, they were the oldest unionist party, and they had legitimacy from being closely allied with the UK Conservative Party until 1972. Other major unionist political parties during the Troubles were the aforementioned DUP founded by Ian Paisley and the breakoff extremist Ulster Vanguard party formed by members of the UUP’s right wing.

Another significant group within the unionist community was the Loyal Orange Order. This fraternal organization, named after the Protestant British King William of Orange, was founded at the end of the 18th century to combat Catholics striving for more rights in the then Protestant-dominated Ireland. It held immense political, social, and economic influence throughout Northern Ireland, with local “lodges” in many locations and a national hierarchy. The Loyal Orange Order is a highly traditional organization, explicitly loyal to the British crown, and exclusively open to Protestants. It is famous for marching in large parades on the 12th of July to commemorate William of Orange’s victory over the forces of the Catholic James II in the battle of the Boyne.

The unionist community also had deep ties to the security forces. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (Northern Ireland’s police force), the more militarized Ulster Special Constabulary (also known as the “B” specials), and the British Army’s locally raised Ulster Defense Regiment, all were made up mostly of Protestants and members of the unionist community. This makeup resulted in a strong sense of connection to these forces among unionists, danger to the community when members of these forces and their families were targeted by paramilitaries, and loss when members of the forces were killed. This sense was particularly strong among working-class loyalists. The unionist community’s support of the security forces was often combined with a strong sense of nationalism.

The final large player within the unionist and loyalist community is the paramilitary organizations. The most prominent were the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA). The UVF traces its lineage back to the force of the same name founded in 1912 to stop Home Rule (devolved parliamentary government) in Ireland. The UDA was formed at the beginning of the Troubles as a conglomeration of various local vigilante

groups and was larger in number. As Steve Bruce argues in *The Edge of the Union*, these paramilitary groups had “three faces,” a community-oriented political face, a community self-defense face, and a sectarian murder face.⁵ These organizations sought to further loyalist political goals and protect their communities from nationalists and were often willing to engage in extreme violence to do so. They had their own internal structures and were separate entities from political parties and the Orange Order. While they often allied politically with the most extreme of these unionist groups, they occasionally found themselves at odds.

Existing histories of the Troubles mainly pursue questions as to how the Troubles began and ended. Simon Prince and Geoffrey Warner’s *Belfast and Derry in Revolt* portrays how the Troubles broke out in the late 1960s⁶ and Brendan O’Leary’s chapter *A Tract of Time between War and Peace* illustrates the difficult process of achieving peace.⁷ In addition, existing histories look to categorize the conflict as either ethnoreligious or political, as best illustrated in the recent debates between Ian McBride vs Richard Bourke.⁸ I seek to answer different questions. In this thesis, I use structural analysis to examine how one aspect of the political culture of the Troubles functioned and illustrate its consequences. Through a close study of political artifacts, I seek to get “inside the head” of the unionist community and answer these questions. While scholars such

⁵ Steve Bruce, *Edge of the Union : The Ulster Loyalist Political Vision* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1994), 11.

⁶ Simon Prince and Geoffrey Warner, *Belfast and Derry in Revolt: A New History of the Start of the Troubles / Simon Prince, Geoffrey Warner* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2012).

⁷ Brendan O’Leary, “A Tract of Time between War and Peace: Melding Negotiations and a Peace Process, and the Making of the Belfast and the British–Irish Agreements, 1992–1998,” in *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume III: Consociation and Confederation* (Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198830580.003.0004>.

⁸ Ian McBride, “Ethnicity and Conflict: The Northern Ireland Troubles,” *Journal of British Studies* 62, no. 3 (July 2023): 618–39, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2023.11>; Richard Bourke, “Nationalism and Northern Ireland: A Rejoinder to Ian McBride on ‘Ethnicity and Conflict,’” *History of European Ideas*, September 13, 2023, 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2023.2257058>.

as Patrick Radden Keefe, Steve Bruce, and Ed Moloney have sought to achieve a similar closeness through retrospective interviews with paramilitaries in their respective works *Say Nothing*, *The Red Hand*, and *Voices from the Grave*, they acknowledge that their sources' accounts are filtered through memory.⁹ In contrast, my visual and material sources are fixed artifacts of the political moment in which they were created. And in cases where they were later reconfigured I explore the meaning of the deliberate change.

This work uses the framework of scholars who study political symbolism rather than Northern Ireland. My approach has been shaped especially by Lynn Hunt and her work *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*.¹⁰ Hunt examines the constituent parts of the revolution's political culture, especially such "symbolic practices" as rhetoric, imagery, and gestures.¹¹ I am taking a similar but more narrow examination of the Troubles: specifically, the imagery and material objects created during the period. Furthermore, while Hunt focuses little on the "specific policies, politicians, partisan conflicts, formal institutions, or organizations" and instead focuses on "underlying patterns in political culture," I employ a hybrid of these two approaches.¹² I focus almost exclusively on the objects created by unionist organizations, formal institutions, and politicians, and I examine them with a keen eye for how these objects further their political goals and ideology. From these examples, I form my argument that the visual and material was a pivotal pattern of unionist political culture and ultimately a significant pattern in the political culture of the Troubles as a whole.

⁹ Patrick Radden Keefe, *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland* (London: William Collins, 2018); Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men's War in Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

¹⁰ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

¹¹ Hunt, 13.

¹² Hunt, 14.

Some scholars have examined parts of the visual and material aspects of the Troubles, providing a literature for me to draw upon. Bill Rolston's five-part series *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland* (1992-2022) is a contemporaneous anthropological study of murals;¹³ Neil Jarman's *Material Conflicts: parades and visual displays in Northern Ireland* (1997) is an anthropological study focusing on banners, flags, and other materials produced as parts of parades;¹⁴ and Dominic Bryan's *Civic Identity and Public Space: Belfast since 1780* (2019) focuses on group rituals and symbols in Northern Ireland.¹⁵ While these scholars advanced our understanding of visual culture in their analysis of murals, banners, and flags, other types of objects that made up the visual and material culture of the Troubles still need to be examined. This is not to say that in this thesis I have moved on from an examination of murals; rather, as they often shared a common visual language with other objects produced by the unionist-loyalist community, I have examined them as one part of the broader visual and material landscape.

While drawing on this previous work, I hope to take the scholarship of the Troubles' visual and material culture in a new direction. With an understanding of how these community practices came about, I examine their use during the conflict. I demonstrate that they had a purpose other than simply reaffirming unionist and loyalist ideology. Rather, I argue that unionist politicians, paramilitaries, and community organizations used these images and objects as a vector to send messages that furthered specific political, ideological, and practical goals. And I show that the use of objects and images in this way often had grave repercussions for the

¹³ Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1992).

¹⁴ Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1997), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003085997>.

¹⁵ Dominic Bryan, S. J. Connolly, and John Nagle, *Civic Identity and Public Space: Belfast since 1780* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

community by promoting violence and fear. Furthermore, I demonstrate that as unionists and nationalists utilized the visual and material culture during this period, it was an arena of political contestation where the two sides mimicked and tried to one-up each other's efforts. Ultimately, I argue that these images and objects were constitutive of an everyday life of violence and a part of the larger struggle over the political fate of Northern Ireland.

The main archive I utilized for this project was the Linen Hall Library in Belfast. Since 1968 the Linen Hall Library has been actively collecting and receiving donations of political ephemera related to the Troubles as a part of their Northern Ireland Political Collection (NIPC). Their ephemera can largely be divided into two main categories. Firstly, there is traditional printed material, including flyers, pamphlets, and newspaper clippings. There are conservatively around 150 archival boxes of these items, with boxes categorized in various ways including by organization, specific events, and political tradition. Newspaper clippings make up around half of the content of a box. The second main category of ephemera at the Linen Hall is political artifacts. These generally consist of moveable, useable, and wearable objects. The broad range includes but is not exclusive to: calendars, postcards, coins, cutlery, food, matchboxes and lighters, souvenirs, pin badges, textiles, stationary, mugs, and T-shirts. The Linen Hall library is the only large publicly accessible collection of these sorts of artifacts; however, I did come across additional examples in museums, contemporary shops, and other collections in Northern Ireland. I have also utilized these examples for this project when appropriate.

The librarians at the Linen Hall are still in the process of cataloging their artifacts, and I was not able to examine their complete collection. However, they very kindly let me get an early look at as large a portion of their collection as possible, which has provided more than enough

evidence for this project. The number of artifacts varied greatly depending on their type. The largest category I was able to examine was pins, with the library possessing around 400 with unionist or loyalist affiliation. The smallest category was t-shirts with the Linen Hall possessing around 10 that display unionist or loyalist affiliation. Due to the nature of the archive, the dates for the ephemera can be determined with varying levels of certainty. Some ephemera explicitly state their date of production, some have the date that they were purchased by the Linen Hall, and some I have had to determine by contextual clues—distinctions that I will make clear when discussing each object.

I have approached these non-textual sources by seeking to “read” the object: analyzing its physical appearance, how it may have been used by an individual, what political claims it is making, who may have produced it, and how it was disseminated into the community. By examining these aspects across multiple objects, I am able to construct an argument about how they participated in the political culture on an individual, group, community, and inter-community level and to draw conclusions about how these items shaped the conflict.

The first chapter examines these objects' roles within the community. Community is used quite flexibly here. My question for this chapter boils down to “What is this item’s role for those that it designates as the ingroup?” Unionism was a large and often fractured political tradition during the Troubles, and as a result, the ingroup could consist of all unionists in Northern Ireland, members of a particular organization such as the UDA, or residents of a specific housing estate in the Shankill Road. This was the hardest question to answer for my project as I am not an ingroup member of any of these communities, and I was not alive during this period. However, much can be gleaned from reading the objects in the context of their time. Other sources such as

newspapers, political journals, photos, and personal accounts provide clues to their function. The chapter shows how the loyalist-unionist community utilized the visual and material to reassure, intimidate, galvanize, or otherwise get a message across to those within their community.

My second chapter focuses on these items' outward-facing roles. Three broad audiences were targeted. The first is other unionists. Unionism was a diverse tradition that was not always in accord, with Steve Bruce seeing a schism even in loyalism itself between evangelicals and paramilitaries.¹⁶ Nationalists were a second target: they were the opposing side in this conflict and were seen by unionists as being fundamentally opposed to their cause and the Northern Irish state. The third was those living outside of Northern Ireland: mainly the people and governments of Britain, and the Republic of Ireland as these were politically intertwined with the conflict and had a large impact on how it played out. As an outsider who is well versed in the ideology and rhetoric of the Troubles, I have been able to examine how these artifacts contributed to the “public messaging” of the Troubles. This chapter shows how the loyalist-unionist community utilized the visual and material political culture to intimidate, rally support from, or “put on notice” those deemed outside of their community.

My final chapter examines instances of crossover between the unionist and nationalist communities. These crossovers occur most often in instances of medium or subject matter, and I examine the history of these subjects and mediums. Through analysis of conspicuous instances of crossover and response, I show the way that these objects were often in dialogue with each other as they strove to achieve their side's political goals. This chapter demonstrates that the visual and material culture of the Troubles was an arena of political contestation, mimicry, and

¹⁶ Bruce, *Edge of the Union*, 2.

one-upmanship where each side strove to achieve its political goals, and ultimately, another theatre of a conflict that had absorbed Northern Irish society.

Chapter 1: Imagery for the Community

While one might think that objects designed for use within the unionist community might amount to nothing more than self-aggrandizing propaganda, that was certainly not always the case. In many instances, unionists had motives in the creation of these objects that went beyond a simple restating of general unionist and loyalist rhetoric. Paramilitaries, politicians, and community groups used the visual and material culture to send critical messages to other unionists in the hopes of achieving specific goals. These goals included creating community solidarity for those who died during the conflict, fostering political unity in elections, and establishing crucial ideological distinctions between paramilitary groups. However, this visual culture also had severe unintended consequences in the community as it normalized violence and further entrenched the divides between communities.

One way that unionists and loyalists utilized the visual and material culture was to promote ideological points that were crucial to the producers of the object. In 1972 the government of the United Kingdom granted “special category status” to prisoners who were affiliated with paramilitary organizations in an effort to foster negotiation and garner goodwill.¹ The government claimed that this was only an administrative change and did not grant any change in legal status, but its de facto meaning was that these inmates were treated as prisoners of war.² The prisoners were separated by paramilitary affiliation, did not need to wear prison uniforms, and did not have to work prison jobs.³ As a result, paramilitaries on all sides jumped on this change to achieve a propaganda victory.

¹ David McKittrick, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, ed. David McVea (Viking, 2012), 97.

² 840 HC Deb., 6 July 1972 Col. 741-2.

³ “Presentation on Prisons (Special Category Status),” 1976, PCC/1/5/7, Public Records Office Northern Ireland.

One way that the Ulster Volunteer Force utilized this change in prisoner status was by making a calendar for the year 1973 (fig. 2).⁴ This calendar contains a cartoon depiction of a paramilitary man overlaid on the image of a Union Jack fashioned in the shape of Northern Ireland. Its large central text reads “Ulster Volunteer Force Prisoners of War Long Kesh,” while running down each side of the poster are names of the UVF men who are held in the Long Kesh prison. A quote at the bottom reads “Before an empires [sic] eyes/the traitor claims his price/what need of further lies/we are the sacrifice.” The three primary colors of the calendar are blue, red, and white, the colors of the Union Jack. By declaring the UVF men imprisoned in Long Kesh to be “prisoners of war,” the calendar explicitly promotes the idea that the UVF men imprisoned there were not common criminals. Additionally, at the top of the list of names of the imprisoned are the names of ‘Gutsy’ Spence, the infamous UFF leader imprisoned for the murder of a Catholic civilian in 1966, and R. McMenemy.⁵ These men are designated as the “commanding officer” and the “2 I.C. [second in command]” respectively, reinforcing the military organization of the UVF prisoners. Under the new regulations, the paramilitaries’ internal organization was now de facto recognized, and the UVF used this practical change to emphasize the ideological point that they were military soldiers, not street thugs.

⁴ *Ulster Volunteer Force 1973*, 1973, paper calendar, 8.27 x 11.69 inches, 1973, NIPC/PA/CALE, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

⁵ Henry McDonald, “Gusty Spence Obituary,” *The Guardian*, September 25, 2011, sec. UK news, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/sep/25/gusty-spence>.

ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE

“Prisoners of War” Long Kesh

‘Gusty’ Spence C.O. R. McMenemy 2.I.C.

J. T. King
R. Thompson
M. Ewing
Thomas Reid
Ernie Young
Albert Neill
R. Cardwell
Wm. “Plum” Smith
V. J. Loughlin
V. Crawford
N. Sayers
R. “Flint” McCullough
C. Ballantine
W. T. H. McConnell
Sam Christie
Sam McCalmont
Ian Hodgkinson
Davy Strain
W. Johnston

R. Ramage
S. J. Murray
Charles M. Quee
Denis D. Robinson
Harry Matthews
Hugh A. McClean
W. J. Carroll
W. J. Burnside
Terry Taggart
J. Irvine
David Bate
G. France
W. J. Magee
William Irvine
Samuel Moffett
E. R. Doherty
Harry Palmer
Noel Goodman
S. B. Carroll

**“BEFORE AN EMPIRES EYES”
THE TRAITOR CLAIMS HIS PRICE
“WHAT NEED OF FURTHER LIES
WE ARE THE SACRIFICE”**

1973		JULY							1973	
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
8	9	10	11	12	13	14				
15	16	17	18	19	20	21				
22	23	24	25	26	27	28				
29	30	31								

1973		AUGUST							1973	
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT				
			1	2	3	4				
5	6	7	8	9	10	11				
12	13	14	15	16	17	18				
19	20	21	22	23	24	25				
26	27	28	29	30	31					

1973		SEPTEMBER							1973	
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT				
						1				
2	3	4	5	6	7	8				
9	10	11	12	13	14	15				
16	17	18	19	20	21	22				
23	30	24	25	26	27	28	29			

1973		OCTOBER							1973	
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT				
	1	2	3	4	5	6				
7	8	9	10	11	12	13				
14	15	16	17	18	19	20				
21	22	23	24	25	26	27				
28	29	30	31							

1973		NOVEMBER							1973	
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT				
				1	2	3				
4	5	6	7	8	9	10				
11	12	13	14	15	16	17				
18	19	20	21	22	23	24				
25	26	27	28	29	30					

1973		DECEMBER							1973	
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT				
						1				
2	3	4	5	6	7	8				
9	10	11	12	13	14	15				
16	17	18	19	20	21	22				
23	30	24	31	25	26	27	28	29		

CALE (17)

Figure 2. 1973 Ulster Volunteer Force calendar. Earlier months would have been placed on top of the depicted ones and then torn off.

The imperative was for the community to recognize the men as political prisoners. The UVF traces its roots to the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force of 1912, founded with the goal of preventing Home Rule in Ireland. This force then formed a large portion of the 36th Ulster Division which suffered heavy losses at the Somme. The UVF of the second half of the 20th century sees itself as a continuation of these two preceding organizations. In his book *The Red Hand*, Steve Bruce states that the UVF has “always seen itself as a military organization,” particularly when compared to the Ulster Defense Association which “began as an unruly mob” of various neighborhood-based groups.⁶ This highly organized image was such a fundamental part of the UVF’s culture that in prison the men “followed a military pattern of daily life with kit inspections and drills.”⁷ As Bruce describes, they saw themselves as above the “grubby sectarian killers” of the UDA, which, founded in 1971, was still solidifying its military structure in 1973; instead, they identified as properly organized military men.⁸ Bruce argues that this military sentiment gave the UVF “mystique, and appeal” within the loyalist community.⁹ For example, in the early years of the Troubles, there was no open recruitment for the UVF, “rather it was based on personal recommendation.”¹⁰

This organized military image was critical both for themselves and for their reputation in the loyalist community. They had already won a victory by not being treated as regular prisoners; now they wanted to hammer this point home through this calendar. By circulating it in the loyalist community—on the walls of UVF men, on the walls of family members of UVF men,

⁶ Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 112–13.

⁷ Bruce, 113.

⁸ Bruce, 115.

⁹ Bruce, 109.

¹⁰ Bruce, 109.

and in other locations—they would foster this highly disciplined image of the UVF in the community.

In comparison to the UVF calendar, a UDA-produced calendar from the same year is quite simple (fig. 3). It consisted of an image of the standard UDA crest on a black background, and the actual calendar portion was a small booklet of paper taped to the larger sheet.¹¹ The UVF 1973 calendar is not only much more visually compelling with its cartoon and unique design rather than a recycled one but also its calendar function is superior—the viewer could look at multiple months at once. It may seem trivial but an aspect like that could separate whether individuals will utilize the calendar, thus consuming its ideology every day, or whether they will not. The object can only disseminate its message when it is hanging up on your wall being looked at.

While this UVF calendar is the starkest example of loyalists utilizing the material culture to promote crucial ideological points, many similar examples exist in the archive. There is a calendar portraying George Seawright, a unionist politician (and supporter of the neo-fascist group the National Front) who was dropped by the DUP for declaring that Catholics should be burnt and who was later assassinated, as a martyr for the cause of Ulster.¹² There is a pin produced by the Loyal Orange Order that supports their traditional marching routes through Catholic neighborhoods, a cause they sought to tie closely to rights of religious freedom, that declares “British Citizens Demand British Rights.”¹³ Later paramilitary calendars sought to

¹¹ *Ulster Defense Association 1973*, 1973, paper calendar, 8.27 x 11.69 inches, 1973, NIPC/PA/CALE, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

¹² McKittrick, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 322; James Loughlin, “The National Front (I): Negotiating the Ulster Political Terrain, 1967–1985,” in *Fascism and Constitutional Conflict: The British Extreme Right and Ulster in the Twentieth Century* (Liverpool University Press, 2019), 223, <https://doi.org/10.3828/liverpool/9781786941770.003.0007>; *From Friends Who Love the Lord and Care About You*, 1977, Calendar, 1977, NIPC/PA/CALE, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

¹³ *British Citizens Demand British Rights*, 1990s, pin, 1990s, NIPC/PA/BADG, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.



Figure 3. 1973 UDA calendar. Lifting up the page marked “calendar would reveal January.

achieve similar effects as this UVF product, including one produced by the UDA in 1987 showing members marching in uniform behind the wires of the Long Kesh prison.¹⁴

Politicians and political parties also utilized visual and material objects to further their agendas and to help achieve their political goals. The Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 between the governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland formalized a way for the two governments to collaborate on major issues (security, legal, cross border, and political) in Northern Ireland.¹⁵ This was the latest in a series of efforts by the British government to find a resolution to the Troubles. Unionists across the board, including the paramilitary UDA, the slightly more moderate Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the more hardline Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), were upset with what they claimed amounted to “Dublin Rule” and launched a mass protest campaign.¹⁶ However, this agreement between the two governments did not need the cooperation of unionists. The unionist voting bloc in Westminster was not large enough to require the Thatcher government to pay heed to them.

To send a message of disdain for the agreement both personally and for the unionist community as a whole, all 15 unionist MPs resigned their seats in parliament.¹⁷ These resignations triggered by-elections in their constituencies, where they all contested the seats they had just resigned—this amounted to a popular referendum on the agreement.¹⁸ In an effort to not pilfer each other's votes, the UUP and DUP agreed not to contest each other's seats and instead

¹⁴ *Long Kesh UDA*, 1987 1986, Calendar, 1987 1986, NIPC/PA/CALE, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

¹⁵ John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, “The Anglo-Irish Agreement: Folly or Statecraft?,” in *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements*, ed. John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary (Oxford University Press, 2004), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199266573.003.0002>.

¹⁶ *No Dublin Rule*, 1986, paper sticker, 1986, NIPC/PA/STIC, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

¹⁷ Martin Melaugh, “Chronology of the Conflict,” Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN), accessed March 28, 2024, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/chron.htm>.

¹⁸ Elise Uberoi, Matthew Burton, and Richard Cracknell, “UK Election Statistics: 1918-2023: A Century of Elections,” November 16, 2023, 64, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7529/>.

put forward a common unionist electoral front. This was a tactic they had used in the general election of February 1974 to protest the Sunningdale power-sharing agreement.¹⁹

In these by-elections, some candidates ran under the motto of “Unionist Solidarity.” These candidates had a shared graphic design for the slogan, and some campaign materials were produced without candidates’ names, while others were produced supporting individual candidates. Directly copying the logo of the first independent Polish trade union *Solidarność* [solidarity], the logo consisted of the word “solidarity” in a nearly identical semi-screwed red script with a Union Jack sticking out of the “l” instead of a Polish flag.²⁰ However, the design also added a unique Northern Irish touch: the “tail” of the “y” hooked around and constituted the red strand of a blue and a red band of barbed wire that ran underneath the word. Above “solidarity” in smaller blue font it read “Unionist,” and below in larger font, it read “vote” and the candidate's name if it was being used by a specific candidate. A vertical reading of a campaign sticker would read “Unionist Solidarity Vote McCusker,” for example (fig. 4).²¹ The extant archival examples of this logo exist on stickers and buttons but may have appeared on other common forms of political campaigning such as printed on leaflets.

The “Unionist Solidarity” political campaign sought to unify the unionist-loyalist community under one message. First, it literally preached a message of solidarity among the community and even put the message above the name of the candidate on the sticker. In this circumstance, the sticker implied a unified front against the Anglo-Irish agreement as being more important than which particular unionist politician was elected.

¹⁹ Bruce, *Edge of the Union*, 13,21,24.

²⁰ Richard Nelsson, “The Birth of Solidarity in Poland - Archive 1980,” *The Guardian*, September 18, 2019, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/from-the-archive-blog/2019/sep/18/the-birth-of-solidarity-in-poland-archive-1980>; *Unionist Solidarity*, 1986, metal button, 1" diameter, 1986, NIPC/PA/BADG, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

²¹ *Unionist Solidarity Vote McCusker*, 1986, paper sticker, 1986, NIPC/PA/STIC, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

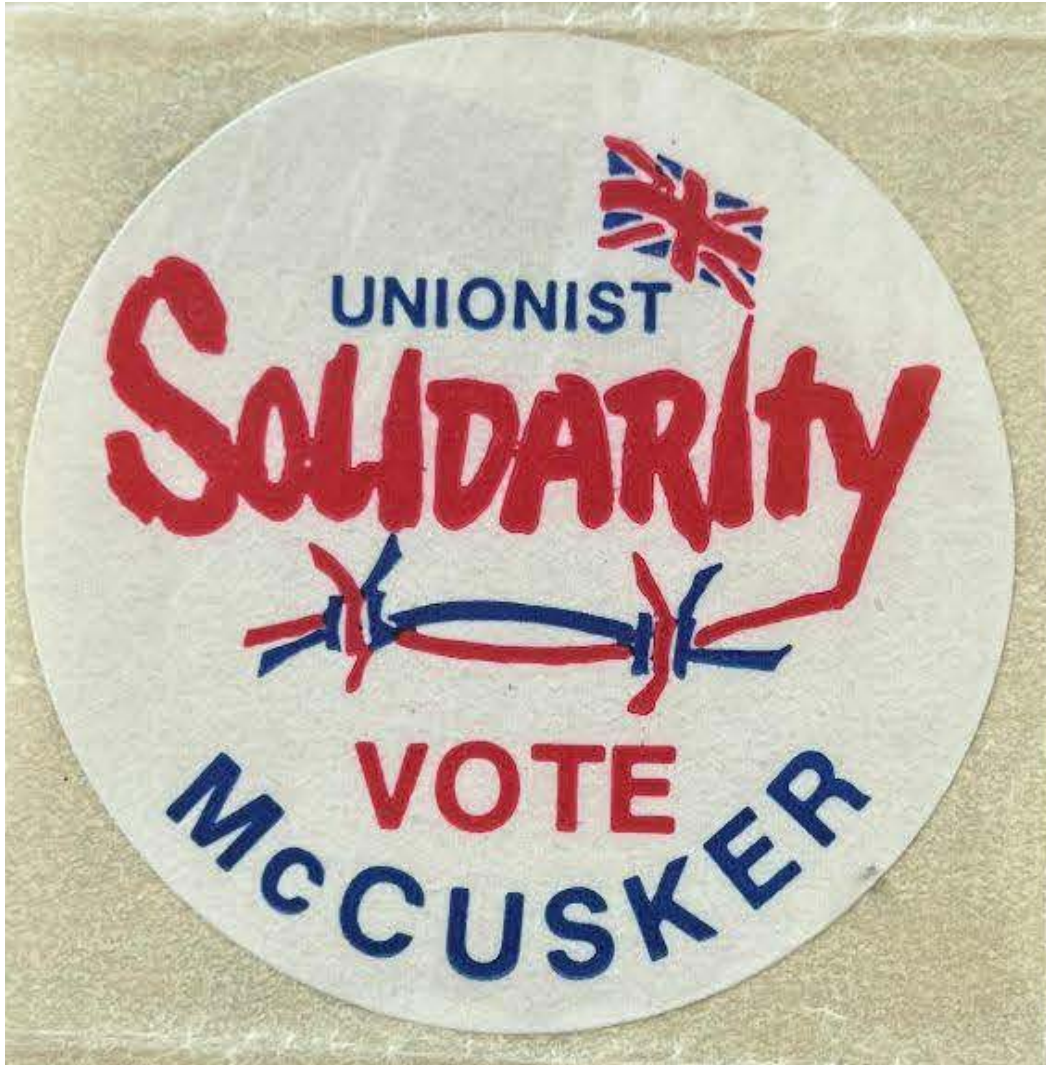


Figure 4. 1986 Unionist Solidarity campaign sticker for Harold McCusker running for MP in the constituency of Upper Bann

Second, the colors of this campaign help invoke unity. Some unionist MPs in Northern Ireland will utilize orange in their election materials, evoking the primary color of the Loyal Orange Order. While the order had historically drawn from all Protestant demographics, as the Troubles progressed the terrorist wing of loyalism began to develop a distaste for the order while the evangelical wing, best exemplified by Rev. Ian Paisley and his Free Presbyterian Church,

continued to support the institution (there is also an element of class here).²² Not only did the Unionist Solidarity campaign solely utilize the blue, red, and white of the Union Jack, a symbol that all unionists have historically rallied behind, it literally waved the flag proudly over the whole image. Additionally, the image utilized the common paramilitary trope of barbed wire—evocative of the barbed wire on various other loyalist imagery, including the 1973 UVF calendar mentioned above (fig. 2), and the Loyalist Prisoners Aid logo that can be seen on the right side of the 1997 UFF calendar (fig. 1). However, the barbed wire would have spoken even to the non-paramilitary-inclined evangelical. Common unionist rhetoric and ideology during the Troubles described Northern Ireland as besieged (and even referenced the 1689 siege of Derry). The coil of barbed wire, the word “solidarity” seemingly scrawled in blood, and the Union Jack waving as if off a flagpole created by the “I,” are visually evocative of a bloody siege.

This campaign breaks from the typical unionist political campaign material that exists in the archive with respect to both quality and messaging. Typically, a candidate’s face and name or a political party’s fairly basic logo and slogan would be included on campaign materials. Maybe the image of a Union Jack would be included in particularly detailed material. They were designed to promote solely the candidate and party. The highly detailed visual language of this Unionist Solidarity campaign sent the message that all unionists should support the incumbent candidate despite any political or personal differences that they may have. This was a unique message for a political campaign during the Troubles where many different unionist parties were vying for votes. The results of this campaign spoke for themselves: for example in Belfast East, a constituency with a major paramilitary presence, Peter Robinson, the candidate for the highly evangelical DUP, saw his vote share increase by 35.6% with only a marginally lower turnout.²³

²² Bruce, *Edge of the Union*, 31.

²³ Uberoi, Burton, and Cracknell, “UK Election Statistics,” 63.

This visual and material culture was utilized not only by paramilitary organizations and politicians. Community institutions also created objects to foster a sense of unity among unionists and loyalists. Founded in 1907, the Belfast Loyal Orange Widows Fund is an organization that provides financial support to wives of deceased members of the Orange Order. As a part of their fundraising efforts, the Orange Order would produce an annual pin that would be sold to members of the community. For example, in the year 1974 the lodge produced an enamel pin that consisted of the flag of Ulster crossed with the Union Jack on an orange background (fig. 5), a motif also commonly seen on loyalist murals.²⁴ The pin was circumscribed with “Belfast L.O [loyal orange] Widow’s Fund” and topped with a crown. While the Orange Order sold pins for the Widow’s Fund long before the Troubles (the Orange Order’s Museum contains examples dating back to 1950 and up to 2010), these pins would have been particularly poignant in 1974. The proceeding two years were the most violent of the Troubles. For these years, the records of Royal Ulster Constabulary tabulated over 15,000 shooting incidents and over 2,300 explosions.²⁵ Tragically this violence resulted in the deaths of 492 civilians in the two years.²⁶ Additionally, republican paramilitaries had escalated their attacks on the largely Protestant security forces: 30 members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and 34 members of the British army’s Northern Irish regiments were killed in these two years.²⁷ These pins had a positive community-building effect during this violent time. Buying a pin would provide financial support to needy members of the community who likely lost the primary breadwinner of the household. This mutual aid would have helped the widows and made the purchaser feel

²⁴ *Belfast L.O Widows Fund 1974*, 1974, Enamel Pin, 1" diameter, 1974, Museum of Orange Heritage; Rolston, *Drawing Support*, ii.

²⁵ Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 296.

²⁶ The Chief Constable’s Annual Report (Royal Ulster Constabulary), from “CAIN: Violence - Annual Deaths in Northern Ireland, by ‘Status’ of Person Killed, August 1969 to December 1995,” accessed February 16, 2024, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/violence/death95w.htm>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*



Figure 5. 1974 Belfast Loyal Orange Widows Fund pin

good for supporting members of their community. Furthermore, seeing others wear the pins in public would create a sense of broad solidarity with those who lost their husbands and fathers. It would help promote a feeling of “togetherness” in the community. Additionally, the pin’s imagery helped create meaning for the community despite the loss. The pin’s blatant symbols of patriotism suggest that these men died not in vain but in patriotic service or as a part of a greater patriotic mission: the Union Jack, the Ulster flag, and the crown. However, while the pin did provide these benefits to the community, it is also worth thinking about how, by reaffirming the ardent British nationalism of the loyalist and unionist community, it helped prolong the conflict.

While the Belfast Loyal Orange Widow’s Fund pins are the best example of the use of objects for community building, they are not the only instance. During the Troubles loyalists and unionists created pins and a vinyl record in support of loyalist prisoners, the UDA printed Christmas cards, and activists created wallet-size calendars to thank the security forces.²⁸ Due to their longstanding existence and their annual consistency, the Belfast Loyal Orange Widow’s Fund pins are the best representation of the way that organizations within the loyalist community utilized the material and visual to foster a sense of unity.

Paramilitaries also created objects to send a message to the loyalist community in response to political changes going on in Northern Ireland. In November of 1994 the Combined Loyalist Military Command, consisting of the leaders of the main loyalist paramilitary organizations, had declared a ceasefire. The IRA had also called a ceasefire in the same year. There was a seeming cessation in hostilities and Bill Clinton had sent Senator George Mitchell as a special envoy to help negotiate peace in Northern Ireland. Yet the single-sheet photo calendar produced by the West Belfast Battalion of the Ulster Freedom Fighters for the year 1996

²⁸ *Loyalist Prisoner Aid*, 1976, vinyl record, 1976, Loyalist Conflict Museum; *From Friends Who Love the Lord and Care About You*. Also see NIPC/PA/BADG and NIPC/PA/CARD

contained high-resolution color photos of hooded men posing with rifles aimed at unseen enemies out of frame (fig. 6).²⁹ This calendar was an effort to both reassure and intimidate the community in this time of drastic change in Northern Ireland.

Amongst the photos of the gunmen are the words “The Blood Our Comrades Shed, Will Not Have Been In Vain, We Honour Ulster's Dead and Staunch We Shall Remain.” Three dates in August have been circled in red pen—a clear indication the calendar was not solely decoration but was used by an individual in the loyalist community. As a medium-sized calendar, is it likely not something that would be for large communal use but rather something that one would have hanging up in a home or business for personal or small group use. As an object with these uses, it sought to convey a message to a particular audience: other loyalists.

This calendar served various purposes. Firstly, it sent a message of reassurance to the community. In her scholarship on loyalist murals which depict similar images of masked gunmen, Judy Vannais argues that they reflect “a sense of insecurity about the position of the loyalist community in the new Northern Ireland and a lack of confidence in the process which would deliver this new dispensation.”³⁰ This calendar uses this same common visual language to send a very similar message, albeit through a different medium. On this calendar, the images of men with guns and the phrase “Staunch we shall remain” reflect an effort to reassure the loyalist community that despite now being in the post-Good Friday world, they will continue their mission of protecting the community and its interests.

Secondly, this poster strives to rally community support for the broader loyalist and unionist mission. By declaring that “The blood of our comrades shed will not have been in vain,”

²⁹ *Ulster Freedom Fighters 1996*, 1996, paper calendar, 11.7" x 16.5", 1996, NIPC/PA/CALE, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

³⁰ Judy Vannais, “Out of the Shadows of the Gunmen,” *Fortnight*, no. 382 (2000): 21.

2nd BATTALION WEST BELFAST


THE ULSTER FREEDOM FIGHTERS

1996

2ND BATT.
U.F.F





SEND OUR
PRISONERS HOME





LOYALIST
PRISONERS AID

*The Blood Our Comrades Shed
Will Not Have Been In Vain
We Honour Ulster's Dead
And Staunch We Shall Remain*


JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
M 1 8 15 22 29	M 5 12 19 26	M 4 11 18 25	M 1 8 15 22 29	M 6 13 20 27	M 3 10 17 24
T 2 9 16 23 30	T 6 13 20 27	T 5 12 19 26	T 2 9 16 23 30	T 7 14 21 28	T 4 11 18 25
W 3 10 17 24 31	W 7 14 21 28	W 6 13 20 27	W 3 10 17 24	W 1 8 15 22 29	W 5 12 19 26
T 4 11 18 25	T 1 8 15 22 29	T 7 14 21 28	T 4 11 18 25	T 2 9 16 23 30	T 6 13 20 27
F 5 12 19 26	F 2 9 16 23	F 1 8 15 22 29	F 5 12 19 26	F 3 10 17 24 31	F 7 14 21 28
S 6 13 20 27	S 3 10 17 24	S 2 9 16 23 30	S 6 13 20 27	S 4 11 18 25	S 1 8 15 22 29
S 7 14 21 28	S 4 11 18 25	S 3 10 17 24 31	S 7 14 21 28	S 5 12 19 26	S 2 9 16 23 30

JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
M 1 8 15 22 29	M 5 12 19 26	M 2 9 16 23 30	M 7 14 21 28	M 4 11 18 25	M 2 9 16 23
T 2 9 16 23 30	T 6 13 20 27	T 3 10 17 24	T 1 8 15 22 29	T 5 12 19 26	T 3 10 17 24
W 3 10 17 24 31	W 7 14 21 28	W 4 11 18 25	W 2 9 16 23 30	W 6 13 20 27	W 4 11 18 25
T 4 11 18 25	T 1 8 15 22 29	T 5 12 19 26	T 3 10 17 24 31	T 7 14 21 28	T 5 12 19 26
F 5 12 19 26	F 2 9 16 23 30	F 6 13 20 27	F 4 11 18 25	F 1 8 15 22 29	F 6 13 20 27
S 6 13 20 27	S 3 10 17 24 31	S 7 14 21 28	S 5 12 19 26	S 2 9 16 23 30	S 7 14 21 28
S 7 14 21 28	S 4 11 18 25	S 1 8 15 22 29	S 6 13 20 27	S 3 10 17 24	S 1 8 15 22 29

Figure 6. 1996 Ulster Freedom Fighters calendar

the UFF is informing other members of the loyalist community that the political goals that these paramilitary members died for will continue to be championed by the organization and will ultimately be achieved. In doing this the UFF also sought to elicit an emotional response from other members of the loyalist community. By referencing the “Comrades’ Blood” and “Ulster’s Dead” they are reminding members of the community of the violence that they have experienced firsthand and the violence that has been inflicted upon people they know and love. In an era of an easing of tensions, the UFF is striving to galvanize the community in support of the unionist cause by referencing this violence, with their organization at the vanguard.

It was also particularly beneficial for the UFF to portray itself as the rallying point and its members as martyrs for the unionist cause. Starting in the late 1980s, more public attention was paid to the connections between various loyalist paramilitary organizations and narcotics distribution—which their leaderships ardently denied.³¹ Starting in the early 1990s the Ulster Defense Association (of which the UFF was the arm that carried out sectarian murders) was receiving large amounts of negative public attention around their racketeering practices.³² The effort of this calendar to portray the UFF as valiant martyrs for the loyalist cause combats this new harmful perception of the organization. The calendar as an item in itself fostered community support for the UFF. We can’t know how this calendar was distributed but most likely it was sold cheaply or given away for free: albeit printed in color, it is a single sheet of paper and is not particularly large. Inexpensive and practical, it was an item with a potentially broad distribution. Although not likely placed in extremely public areas, hanging the calendar in one’s house or business would be a symbol of affiliation or support. Those in the community who would see it would recognize its significance and the message it conveys.

³¹ Bruce, *The Red Hand*, 191.

³² Bruce, 245.

On the other hand, paramilitaries could use these same visual and physical materials as a vehicle for community intimidation. The images and text of this UFF calendar were a reminder to individuals in the community that these dangerous paramilitary organizations were still active, armed, and seemingly not going away anytime soon. Wearing ski masks and heavily armed, they declared that “staunch we shall remain.” They were sending the message that despite the efforts of those in the community to foster peace they were still committed to violence. This sentiment becomes particularly poignant considering loyalist paramilitaries increasing reputation for being, as historian Steve Bruce puts it “murdering gangsters” who engaged in drug dealing, extortion, and racketeering.³³ This calendar was part of a tradition of materials that unionists and loyalists have produced for consumption within their own community and it demonstrates the varied uses of these artifacts.

While the visual and material aspects of the political culture often tried to rally the community together, its existence often negatively impacted the community as a whole. Stickers, pins, calendars, posters, murals flags, and other sources contributed to a daily onslaught of messaging that individuals encountered. As anthropologist Neil Jarman describes in his work, *Troubled Images*, the messaging put forth by unionists seeped into the heads of those in the community without explicit recognition: “An image may carry its statement heavily or crudely, but the important thing is that the statement is made, read and reread daily until it dissolves into the spatial background, not necessarily consciously noticed.”³⁴ When these images conveyed militaristic, sectarian, or violent messages, as exemplified in this chapter, they fueled the conflict

³³ Bruce, 173.

³⁴ Neil Jarman, “Troubled Images,” *Critique of Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 1992): 157, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X9201200204>.

and had harmful effects on the community itself. These consequences were increasingly noticed by the community as the peace and reconciliation process progressed. A senior paramilitary member described this effect to a reporter in 2006 after deciding to remove murals of masked gunmen in his area: "We don't want children to go to school anymore seeing these images of masked men with guns. We as loyalists and unionists want to move on from that position and this is part of the positive role we are playing to change the environment down here and create a more positive one for our young people."³⁵ Not only is the “positive example” not encouraging political violence, sectarianism, or extremism—things that the imagery and material culture of the Troubles encouraged—but also more broadly not encouraging violence as a whole.

As I have illustrated in this chapter, during the Troubles loyalist and unionist actors utilized the visual and material culture within their community to help them achieve their goals. Paramilitaries utilized the culture to further their specific ideological designs or galvanize the community; politicians and political parties utilized the visual and material to assist in achieving their political goals and to broaden their electoral base; and organizations such as the Loyal Orange Order utilized the culture to further community support initiatives and foster solidarity. However, these images and objects also further entrenched sectarian political ideology, promoted violence, and even served as a means of community intimidation. Ultimately, this visual and material culture was significant for the loyalist and unionist community both as a vehicle for achieving ends within the community and due to the culture’s unintended consequences.

³⁵ Belfast Telegraph, March 19 2006, quoted in Rachel Griffin, “The Murals of Northern Ireland” (Glasgow, University of Glasgow, Department of History, 2007), 54.

Chapter 2: Communicating With Others

Historian Peter Shirlow describes in *The End of Ulster Loyalism?* that “resistance by republicans and loyalists was directed at a community ‘other’ that was deemed insufferable, abhorrent and whose ideas and discursive agendas required rejection.”¹ This chapter will examine the various ways in which members of the loyalist and unionist community sought to utilize objects to send messages to those they saw as outsiders. The main recipients of this messaging were other unionists, the nationalists, and those living outside of Northern Ireland, particularly in Britain and the Republic of Ireland. This chapter will focus on the typical messages conveyed by these objects and the objects themselves. These artifacts ranged from cheap paper goods, such as flyers and postcards, to expensive murals and banners. While the messages of unionists and loyalists varied greatly depending on which of the three groups they were trying to communicate with, their messages to each group were largely the same. They wanted to segregate themselves from other unionists, sought to send a message of strength and intimidation to the nationalists, and desired to express their political dissatisfaction to those outside of Northern Ireland. In these objects one can most clearly see the purposefulness with which unionists and loyalists utilized the visual and material culture. They were weapons in their arsenal that could be used to further their political goals.

Organizations within the loyalist community utilized visual and material culture to distinguish themselves and send a message to other unionists. The materials produced by the Ulster Vanguard movement, in an effort to separate themselves from mainstream unionism, are the best examples of this usage. By March of 1972, the UK government became convinced that

¹ Peter Shirlow, *The End of Ulster Loyalism?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

the unionist-dominated Northern Irish Assembly, often called Stormont, was unable to effectively govern and reduce the violence that had only escalated in the past four years.² This violence had kicked into overdrive with “Bloody Sunday,” the killing of Catholic civil rights protestors by British army paratroopers, in January of the same year. As a result, Westminster implemented “direct rule,” whereby Parliament would retake all governmental authority previously devolved to Stormont, most critically those involving policing and elements of the welfare state. The imposition of direct rule shattered the bond between the UUP and the British Conservative Party, whose whip they had followed in Westminster up to this point.³

The Ulster Vanguard was founded a month before the suspension of Stormont (when the writing was on the wall so to speak), and it was a backlash to the implementation of “direct rule.” Vanguard pushed for increased autonomy for the state of Northern Ireland, and the movement incorporated politicians, the UDA, the Loyalist Association of Workers, and other members of the loyalist community. They are most famous for their organization of industrial action to try and achieve their political goals. These included a two-day walkout just before the fall of the Stormont government, and a two-week general strike in 1974 that brought down the power-sharing executive created by the Sunningdale agreement.⁴ Although its leader William Craig was a UUP politician, Vanguard was a separate entity; a year after its founding, Vanguard’s members

² McKittrick, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 91–94.

³ Jeremy Smith, “‘Ever Reliable Friends’?: The Conservative Party and Ulster Unionism in the Twentieth Century,” *The English Historical Review* 121, no. 490 (2006): 72.

⁴ McKittrick, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 93; Gordon Gillespie, “The Ulster Workers’ Council Strike: The Perfect Storm,” in *Sunningdale, the Ulster Workers’ Council Strike and the Struggle for Democracy in Northern Ireland*, ed. David McCann and Cillian McGrattan (Manchester University Press, 2017), 28, <https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719099519.003.0002>. Interestingly, the UDA provided the muscle for the 1974 strike, intimidating business owners and setting up roadblocks throughout Belfast to ensure that the city was shut down. Many roadblock passes survive from this period and they are a fascinating conglomeration of unionist organizations. To bypass paramilitary roadblocks, individuals had to produce passes issued on surplus Vanguard membership cards and stamped with the logo of the Ulster Workers Council.

would break from the party in response to the UUP's role in creating the Sunningdale agreement.⁵

The Ulster Vanguard used the imagery and rhetoric of its campaign materials to separate itself from the UUP and its policies. One of the most prominent examples of this usage is their logo which appeared on election leaflets, armbands, flags, stickers, and commemorative plaques. It utilized the central motif of the Northern Irish flag, which would have been recognizable to anyone living in the country at the time: the red hand of Ulster and a crown on a white six-pointed star. In Vanguard's logo, a blue "V" has been superimposed on the star, and it mirrors three of the star's six points (see fig. 7).⁶ By using this logo, they broke from the traditional Unionist Party's use of the Union Jack and instead used a logo that is distinctly Northern Irish.



Figure 7. The Ulster Vanguard logo

This logo not only distinguished them from the UUP, but it also represented the Vanguard's politics. As Troubles scholar David McKittrick stated in his work *Making Sense of the Troubles*:

⁵ McKittrick, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 92.

⁶ The "V" is also visually evocative of the V-shaped sash that members of the Loyal Orange Order wear as a part of their regalia.

the fact that “Ulster flags outnumbered Union Jacks” at a 1972 Vanguard rally was “a sign of Protestant anger with London.”⁷ While Vanguard certainly did not agree with the government, the logo sent a deeper political message than simple dissatisfaction with Westminster. Created in 1801, the Union Jack combined the then flags of Scotland, Ireland, and England and represented the joining of the nations in the United Kingdom. Thus, the Ulster Vanguard, which sought to promote a governmental autonomy of the Northern Irish state that nearly verged on a desire for independence, rejected the Union Jack in favor of the flag that represented Stormont and the principle of devolved government in Northern Ireland. The logo became particularly poignant when, after the fall of the Stormont government, this flag was no longer in official use in Northern Ireland.⁸

The Ulster Vanguard also utilized conspicuous rhetoric on its campaign materials to distinguish itself from the UUP and other unionists. The best example of this rhetoric is from a flyer for their most notorious event: a massive rally in Belfast’s Ormeau Park in March of 1972 (fig. 8).⁹ This flyer declared that “Ulster Vanguard Speaks for the country” and advertised a “province-wide rally.”¹⁰ It invited the viewer “to join with the thousands in Belfast and take your stand for Ulster” and underneath photos of crowds it identified them as “some of the 60,000 from all parts of the Province [sic] who have, to date, united in their solidarity in the face of Ulster's adversity. YOUR presence to-morrow [sic], is NECESSARY to show the world that Loyalists can UNITE FOR ULSTER.”¹¹

⁷ McKittrick, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 94.

⁸ Dara Mulhurn, “Symbols - Flags Used in Northern Ireland,” CAIN Ulster University, accessed January 21, 2024, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/images/symbols/flags.htm>.

⁹ It was notorious due to its large size and being the location where Craig stated that “we must build up the dossiers on the men and women who are a menace to this country, because one day, ladies and gentlemen, if the politicians fail, it will be our duty to liquidate the enemy” (McKittrick, 93).

¹⁰ *Ulster Vanguard Speaks for the Country*, March 17, 1972, Paper poster, March 17, 1972, NIPC Ulster Vanguard box, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

¹¹ *Ulster Vanguard Speaks for the Country*.

News Letter, Friday, March 17, 1972 — Page



ULSTER VANGUARD

SPEAKS FOR THE COUNTRY





*You are invited to join
with the thousands in
Belfast and take your
stand for Ulster*




Some of the 60,000 from all parts of the Province who, have, to date, united in their solidarity in the face of Ulster's adversity.
YOUR presence to-morrow, is NECESSARY to show the world that Loyalists can UNITE FOR ULSTER.

PROVINCE-WIDE RALLY

ORMEAU PARK, BELFAST — 2-30 p.m.

to-morrow SATURDAY, 18th MARCH, 1972



SPEAKERS — REV. W. M. Smyth, B.A., B.D.
Sir Knox Cunningham, Q.C.
Mr. W. Hull (L.A.W.)
Rev. R. Dickinson, M.A., B.D.
Rt. Hon. W. Craig, M.P.

CHAIRMAN — Mr. George H. Allport



ULSTER VANGUARD — ULSTER VICTORY

AMPLE PARKING FACILITIES AVAILABLE

Figure 8. A flyer for Ulster Vanguard's rally in Ormeau Park in Southeast Belfast.

By declaring that “Ulster Vanguard speaks for the country,” the movement sought to undermine the authority of the still dominant UUP by tacitly accusing them of no longer properly representing the people of Northern Ireland. They wanted to change the perception of the Unionist Party as the voice for Protestant Northern Ireland. Furthermore, to distinguish and separate itself from the UUP, this flyer never used the word unionist; rather it solely identified the participants as loyalists. This was for two reasons. First, by avoiding the term they repudiated association with the Unionist Party. Second, by using “loyalist,” Vanguard portrayed themselves (and the rest of the country) as on the political right of the UUP, suggesting that the Unionists were out of touch. Finally, to portray its politics of advocating for a more independent Northern Ireland, Vanguard went out of its way to never use the country’s official name on this poster. Instead of the term “Northern Ireland” they used every other alternative: “Ulster,” “the Province” (Ulster is one of Ireland’s four historic provinces), and “the country.” Here Vanguard has conspicuously rejected the term Northern Ireland due to its associations with the UK (formally, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Instead, they used more local terms, and the term “the country” which has self-deterministic connotations, to distinguish Vanguard’s unique autonomous politics.

While these visual and rhetorical indications may seem subtle to the outside observer, in the charged political culture of the Troubles these differences in terminology and imagery were glaringly apparent and legible. Individuals would have been acutely aware of these differences and picked up on them. As exhibited by the poster for the rally in Ormeau Park, the Ulster Vanguard sought to segregate itself from other unionists through visual and rhetorical differences that individuals would have noticed and understood.

When unionists and loyalists also utilized physical objects to send a message to their nationalist political opponents, they took a different approach than they did with other unionists. They made no attempt at subtlety. These objects were another weapon in their arsenal, and they used them to intimidate nationalists and project an image of unionist strength. One of the most visceral examples of this intimidation is a postcard sent to the headquarters of Sinn Fein, the political arm of the IRA (fig. 9).¹² This postcard is postmarked 26 April 1998—18 days after the signing of the Good Friday agreement and about a month before it was approved via referendum. The main parties to the agreement were the UUP, headed by David Trimble, and Sinn Fein, headed by Gerry Adams. Despite hardcore loyalist political parties associated with paramilitaries also signing off on the agreement, the DUP, still headed by a 72-year-old Ian Paisley, walked out of the talks due to the inclusion of Sinn Fein, and they campaigned for Ulstermen to vote no in the subsequent referendum.¹³ Many loyalists shared in his disdain for the agreement due to what they saw as unacceptable cooperation with nationalists.

This postcard, addressed to Gerry Adams, was most likely mailed by a loyalist who opposed the Good Friday agreement. This card utilized the traditional Irish symbol of the shamrock; however, the shamrock was changed. It was printed in black instead of the typical green, the center leaf was transformed into a skull, and the two leaves flanking the skull were emblazoned with red swastikas.¹⁴ Underneath the image were printed the words “repatriate sectarian Irish; it’s time to go home now, your caves are waiting.”¹⁵ On the reverse, Adams’ name and the headquarters’ address were printed in the same manner as the shamrock, and there

¹² *Repatriate Sectarian Irish*, April 1998, Postcard, April 1998, NIPC/PA/CARD, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

¹³ McKittrick, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 252–54; Martin Melaugh and Fionnuala McKenna, “1998 Northern Ireland Referendum - Summary of Party Positions and Campaign Leaflets,” CAIN Ulster University, accessed February 23, 2024, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/refparties.htm>.

¹⁴ *Repatriate Sectarian Irish*.

¹⁵ *Repatriate Sectarian Irish*.



Figure 9. A postcard addressed to Gerry Adams and mailed to Sinn Fein's headquarters on the Falls road.

is the postmark stamped 26 April 1998. While likely not the worst thing that Sinn Fein received in the mail during the Troubles, this card has quite a threatening character.

Those who sent this card sought to intimidate nationalists and send a political message about the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The use of color printing, the high quality of print, the typed address, a lack of a return address, and the existence of other artifacts with near-identical images and phrases suggest this particular card was part of a larger number sent to Sinn Fein headquarters by unionists. This multitude of identical cards would have portrayed an image of unionist strength and added to its menace. This card is significant as it is one of the only extant examples in the archive of unionists using postcards for this purpose, which is to be expected as individuals do not normally keep threatening letters. However, that is not to say that it is unique. Death threats in the mail were very common during the Troubles, and greeting cards, mass-produced by paramilitary organizations during the conflict and today archived in the Linen Hall Library and the Loyalist Conflict Museum, were likely used for this purpose. For instance, the Irish Prime Minister Charles Haughey received a Christmas card from the UDA, similar to those that exist in the archives, at his home in Dublin during the 1980s.¹⁶

The ominous image evocative of skull and crossbones, the anonymity created by a typed address and no return address, and the likely receipt of many of these postcards would have been very unsettling. But the political message that it sends is still more interesting. First, this card attacks the Good Friday agreement which Gerry Adams, alongside leaders of the unionist and loyalist community, was pivotal in negotiating. By stating “repatriate sectarian Irish” and “it’s time to go home now,” this card declared that not only were the nationalists not welcome in

¹⁶ Lauren Harte, “UDA Christmas Card to Charlie Haughey Found among Papers,” *Belfast Telegraph*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/republic-of-ireland/uda-christmas-card-to-charlie-haughey-found-among-papers/37754279.html>.

Northern Ireland but also that it was not their home. This is a refutation of the Good Friday Agreement's declaration that it is "the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both."¹⁷ Second, this card accuses nationalists and Sinn Fein of being fascists. By including blood-red swastikas on the shamrock, the card equated this Irish National symbol with the infamous Nazi logo. A variation of this image made this accusation clearer. It stated "repatriate sectarian fascist Irish" underneath the shamrock.¹⁸ By mailing these cards the unionists were telling the nationalists that they were no better than the genocidal Nazis.¹⁹ This card sends a message to nationalists and demonstrates the totality of the ideological conflict of the Troubles: even threats are imbued with political rhetoric.

Murals, one of the most striking aspects of the Troubles' visual culture, were also utilized by loyalists to intimidate nationalists. According to sociologist Bill Rolston, the leading authority on murals in Northern Ireland, after 1985 murals depicting armed paramilitary members began to appear, and "by the early 1990s...military imagery was the most common theme in loyalist murals. Balaclavas and automatic weapons abounded, whether military men were shown in action or posing with their weapons."²⁰ According to Rolston, this "increase in loyalist militarism" in murals was part of the broader unionist-loyalist political and paramilitary response to the Anglo-Irish agreement.²¹ While these images can be seen as the paramilitaries' visual equivalent to the politicians' "Ulster Says NO" campaign, they are much more frightening due to

¹⁷ "The Belfast Agreement," 2.

¹⁸ *Repatriate Sectarian Fascist Irish*, n.d., paper, n.d., Loyalism (general) box 1, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

¹⁹ This relation would have been furthered by the widely publicized and long-remembered fact that after Hitler's death in April 1945, the Nazi flag flew at half-mast over the Irish embassy to Lisbon.

²⁰ Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support 2: Murals of War and Peace* (Belfast : Beyond the Pale, 1995), iii, <http://archive.org/details/drawingsupport2m0000rols>.

²¹ Bill Rolston, *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), 43.



Figure 10. A military-style mural in east Belfast, 2023.

the increase in violence by loyalist paramilitaries, particularly killings, in the period after the agreement.²²

Due to their content, abundance, and large size, these militaristic murals would have been “obviously threatening to any nationalist lingering in [a] loyalist area,” particularly if, as Rolston points out in one instance, they “espouse ethnic cleansing.”²³ These murals are both a threat and an intimidating show of force. Take for example a mural come across by Rolston in East Belfast in 1992 which depicted four UFF men clad head to toe in black.²⁴ The men were armed with a revolver, pump-action shotgun, AR-15 assault rifle, and a rocket-propelled grenade launcher respectively.²⁵ They had their weapons at the ready and aimed at unseen enemies. This mural was an impressive and terrifying display of the UFF’s arsenal and military organization. It sent to their adversaries a clear message of strength and portrays their lethality.

However, there is disagreement among scholars as to the function of these sorts of murals. Neil Jarman, a sociologist who focuses on the material culture of Northern Ireland, sees them as “part of an internal debate concerning power.” For Jarman, due to their location often within the geographic center of neighborhoods they were “not part of the conflict between the two communities.”²⁶ A 2002 BBC interview with Marty Edwards, a Derry/Londonderry-based mural painter, offers a resolution to this scholarly disagreement. Edwards described how he “would usually paint paramilitary paintings for UDA people, UVF people in their own estates [housing developments].”²⁷ He went on to say “usually we’re left to our own devices, to come up

²² McKittrick, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 193.

²³ Rolston, *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland*, 43; Rolston, *Drawing Support* 2, iii. Rolston, iii. The mural in question, come across by Rolston during the height of the Bosnian war in 1994, states that “There is no such thing as a nationalist area of Northern Ireland, only areas temporarily occupied by nationalists.

²⁴ Rolston, *Drawing Support* 2, 6.

²⁵ Rolston, 6.

²⁶ Jarman, “Troubled Images,” 149.

²⁷ Marty Edwards, BBC eyewitness: Murals for the Future, Marty Edwards, interview by Gilberto Arriaza, 2002, BBC webpage archive.

with something that's really intimidating, will antagonize Catholics.'"²⁸ At first glance Edwards' statements are contradictory. How can one paint murals that will antagonize Catholics if they are in neighborhoods run by the UDA and UVF—areas Catholics would rarely dare to enter? But upon stepping back from Edwards' statement we can find a solution to this disagreement. Mural painters created the images with the intention of intimidating nationalists and participating in the conflict between communities. However, due to their location, they were likely not seen by many Catholics.²⁹ These murals intended to send a threat to any nationalist who may have come across them although the message was rarely received.

It is crucial to note the visual similarity between these militaristic loyalist murals and the photo calendars of masked gunmen which I examined in the Introduction and Chapter 1. Produced during the same period, their similarity demonstrates a common loyalist-unionist visual language across mediums—a fact also demonstrated elsewhere in this thesis with the common use of motifs such as the Union Jack, the Red hand of Ulster, and barbed wire, alongside others. This violent imagery on murals shows that they were not solely directed towards Catholics but had loyalists as an intended audience—the aforementioned visually similar calendars were designed for personal use by loyalists and created to send a message to those within the community. As a result, it is necessary to consider the various effects that these murals had on those living in loyalist neighborhoods in which they were housed.

Firstly, as Edwards describes, they had a practical purpose of “mark[ing] the territory bounds” for loyalist paramilitaries within Protestant neighborhoods.³⁰ This was crucial as violence occasionally erupted between the UVF and the UDA, and each group wanted to stake a

²⁸ Edwards.

²⁹ A contributing factor to this was that mural vandalism was common during the Troubles and images located in locations visible and accessible to many nationalists would be vulnerable.

³⁰ Edwards, BBC eyewitness: Murals for the Future, Marty Edwards.

claim to their particular housing estates and streets. More significantly, as I discussed in Chapter 1, these sorts of images painted on walls would have had a profound psychological and social effect on the community. To some, it could be seen as a message that the paramilitaries were going to protect the community from violent republicans. But the negative effects on the community were likely more lasting. As the Northern Irish legislator Chris Little described in a 2015 interview, “paramilitary murals glorify terrorism [and] promote fear.”³¹ These images would have intimidated those living in the neighborhood and contributed to the normalization of violence. It was once peace had been established and these images no longer served a critical purpose that they realize they had to be removed. As one Belfast community official described in a 2013 interview, communities “want[ed] to transform” and protect their “young children” by removing images of “masked gunmen.”³²

Regardless of the intended audiences, the physical realities of the mediums and objects that these images appeared upon allowed unionists to send highly provocative messages in safety. Additionally, the visual nature enabled unionists to express themselves politically in ways that were creative and quite disturbing. This resulted in a political discourse that was unique and frightening.

Another way that unionists utilized the visual culture was to send a message to those outside of Northern Ireland entirely. The most famous example of this is the “Ulster Says NO” campaign, organized by Ian Paisley, alongside other unionist leaders. This campaign was in

³¹ “DUP and Alliance at Odds over Repainting of Freedom Corner,” *The Belfast News Letter*, June 5, 2015, sec. Politics, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1686077140/abstract/1723031A2C0B4C2BPQ/7>.

³² Tricia Tongco and Shweta Saraswat, “Should Paramilitary Murals in Belfast Be Repainted?,” *The Atlantic*, May 27, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/05/should-paramilitary-murals-in-belfast-be-repainted/276266/>.

protest of the Anglo-Irish agreement signed in November of 1985. This agreement facilitated collaboration between the governments of Ireland and the UK on issues of mutual concern, namely ones dealing with security, legal matters, cross-border cooperation, and the broad umbrella of “political affairs.”³³ After efforts to find a political solution to the conflict—the Sunningdale agreement of 1973, the constitutional convention of 1975-1976, and the Northern Ireland Assembly of 1982-1986—continuously proved unsuccessful due to staunch opposition from unionists, the government of the UK refused to include unionist politicians in the crafting of the agreement. This exclusion, coupled with the perception that the agreement granted Dublin authority in the affairs of Northern Ireland, resulted in outrage from unionists that ultimately was expressed in the “Ulster Says NO” campaign.

The high point of this campaign was an enormous protest in front of Belfast’s city hall eight days after the agreement’s signing. Over 100,000 people gathered in the city’s center, seven percent of Northern Ireland’s population at the time, and the crowd stretched for several city blocks, as depicted in a photograph on a commemorative poster produced by the campaign (fig. 11).³⁴ People even sat on the rooftops of neighboring tall buildings to watch the unionist leaders speak. It was at this protest that Northern Ireland’s unionist MPs signed a pledge to resign their seats in protest of the Anglo-Irish agreement. They carried out this threat the following year, standing for election under the “Unionist Solidarity” campaign discussed in Chapter 1.

³³ McGarry and O’Leary, “The Anglo-Irish Agreement,” 66.

³⁴ “Ulster Says No Poster Placard, the Troubles and Beyond Exhibit” (Ulster Museum Belfast, n.d.).



Figure 11. A commemorative poster showing the view from Belfast city hall during the rally. On the right of the image are stickers and a rosette that were part of the Campaign.³⁵

As a mass protest movement, the Ulster Says NO campaign produced a plethora of objects to convey their message to the rest of the world. These objects included signs, pins, posters, banners, stickers, mugs, matchboxes, and even a mixtape. Most of these objects were nearly identical in their appearance, with the words “Ulster Says NO” emblazoned on them in large block letters. This phrase was a message of defiance and displeasure that the campaign sought to convey to the government and people of the United Kingdom. They did this through the simplest possible design that consisted solely of the text and in typical unionist colors of red, blue, and white. The imagery of the movement was so memorable and widespread that the Ulster

³⁵ *Ulster Says NO Poster Exhibit*, n.d., n.d., Loyalist Conflict Museum.

Museum, Northern Ireland's premier museum, describes the movement's poster as "iconic" (fig. 12).³⁶ However, participants in this campaign did not passively rely on the objects to convey their message. They would mob and wave the posters in the faces of ministers of the UK government's Northern Irish Office. The ministers had to be escorted by police as they went to their cars, and once in their cars, the protestors would even put the posters over the windshield.³⁷

Some objects from this campaign broke the mold created by the poster. The Ulster Club produced a handbill with the same iconic phrase and lettering; however, in a quite clever move, they added a large red hand, the historic symbol of Ulster, in a thumbs-down position (fig. 13).³⁸ Additionally, at the rally in Belfast, protestors burned a quite well-made effigy of Margaret Thatcher, the prime minister of the UK at the time.³⁹ In a possible reference to the failed royal assassin Guy Fawkes, the protestors hung a sign around the effigy's neck that declared "Thatcher, Traitor." This violent image of protest made it onto the BBC news broadcast and into the homes of individuals across Britain.

The news coverage of the rally contributed to the dissemination of the movement's message and the objects were likely designed with this aspect in mind. The text of the word "NO" on the sign was printed large enough and, in enough contrast, to be legible in video and photographs of the crowd. Due to the BBC's and RTÉ's coverage of the rally, these signs helped broadcast the unionist message to those living in Britain and Ireland. This was crucial as these were the two countries that were party to the agreement. Additionally, the base of the platform

³⁶ "Ulster Says No Poster Placard, the Troubles and Beyond Exhibit."

³⁷ One of these protestors was Sir Jeffery Donaldson, the future head of the DUP who resigned in disgrace on Good Friday 2024. "The Anglo-Irish Agreement 30 Years On," *BBC News*, November 15, 2015, sec. Northern Ireland, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-34808797>; Henry Bodkin, "Who Is Jeffrey Donaldson? Unionist Stalwart, Ex-British Army Soldier and Devout Protestant," *The Telegraph*, March 29, 2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/03/29/jeffrey-donaldson-dup-unionist-sex-offence-claims/>.

³⁸ Ulster Club, *Ulster Says NO*, 1985, paper handbill, 1985, Ulster Clubs box, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

³⁹ *Paisley's Never Never Never Speech*, n.d., BBC Digital Northern Ireland accessed January 27, 2024.



Figure 12. The iconic “Ulster Says NO” poster.

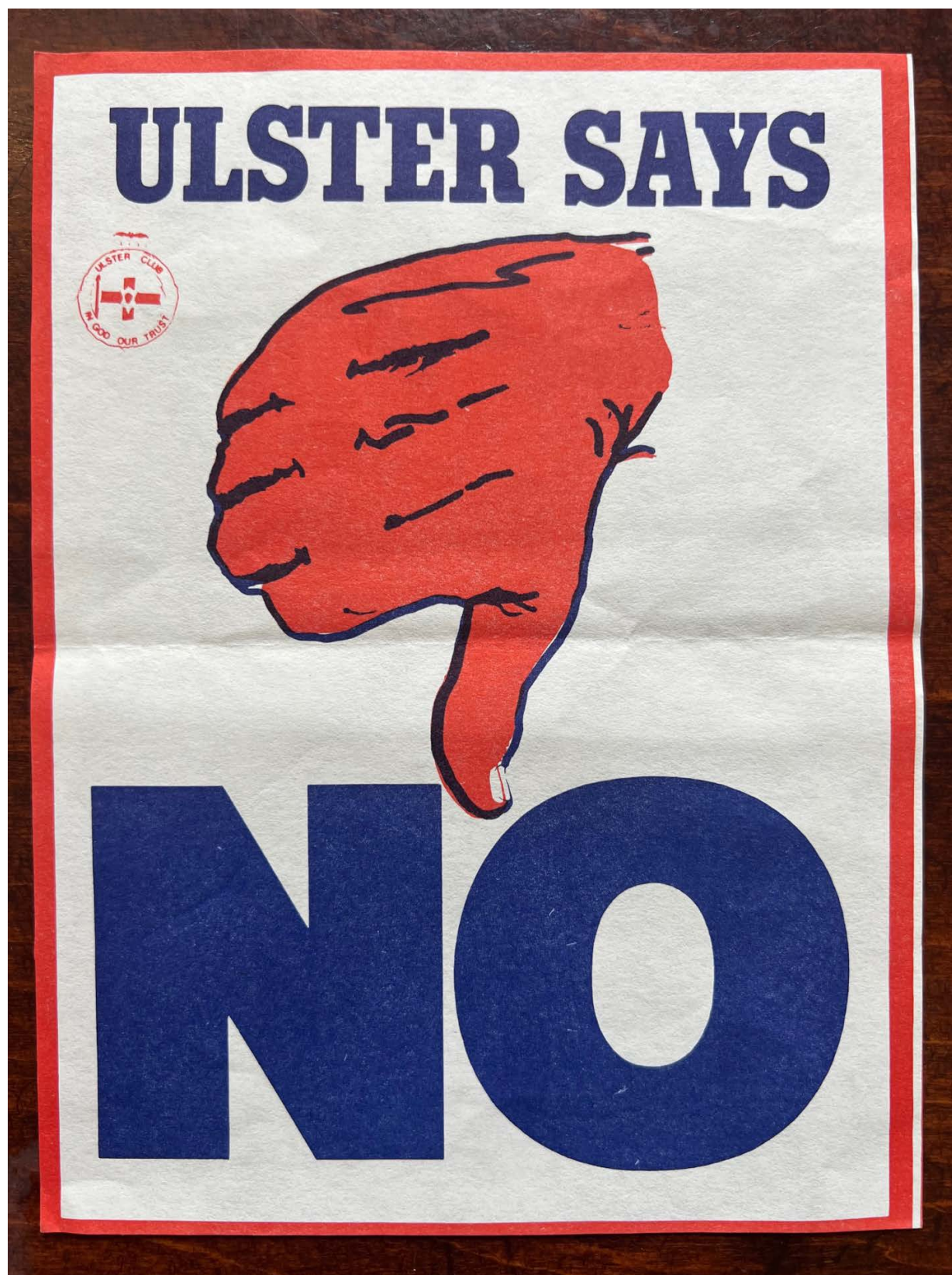


Figure 13. The Ulster Club produced handbill including the red hand in a thumbs-down position.

that the MPs stood on was covered with a banner with two lines of text reading “Ulster Says NO/We Will Not Have it.” The first line of this banner was easily visible in shots of the MPs on the platform.⁴⁰ In closeup shots, particularly of Ian Paisley, stickers “displaying “Ulster Says NO” are visible on their lapels.⁴¹ These design choices for the campaign’s objects enabled the loyalists to get their message across to those outside of Northern Ireland through photographs and video.

The Ulster Says NO campaign demonstrates how unionists sought to communicate with those outside of Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Deeply disgruntled with the political situation, and without any substantial influence in the government of the UK, they had to find a way to broadcast their feelings loudly and clearly. They often resorted to visual culture to try to achieve this goal.

Throughout the Troubles, the unionists relied upon flyers, postcards, murals, banners, and other objects to get their message across to those outside the community. They used these artifacts to separate themselves from other unionists, intimidate the nationalists, and show their political dissatisfaction to those living outside of the UK. Their messages likely got across with varying levels of success; however, the use of these objects as a method of expression and communication by unionists was an integral part of the political culture of the Troubles.

⁴⁰ *Paisley’s Never Never Never Speech.*

⁴¹ “Loyalist Parade in Belfast” (RTÉ, November 22, 1985), RTÉ Archives.

Chapter 3: Crossover

Up to this point, I have exclusively examined unionist artifacts; however, nationalists, by producing artifacts of their own, also participated in the visual and material culture of the Troubles. These objects were often quite similar to those produced by unionists, such as pins, murals, and calendars. In this chapter, I will be exploring the overlaps between the visual and material cultures of unionism and nationalism. These overlaps occur particularly in the form of similar mediums, subject matters, and messages. While there were many instances of these overlaps, particularly in medium, I will be focusing on the overlaps which have a clear historical development, are the most surprising, or both. These overlaps demonstrate that the objects produced by these traditions were not a vestige of the ideologies' political expression, but rather they were an integral part of the Trouble's political culture. They demonstrate that the visual and material was an arena of political exchange, contestation, and expression, and ultimately it was another theatre for an ideological conflict that had completely absorbed the society.

A common medium used by both loyalists and nationalists was murals. Compared to other aspects of the Troubles, such as political pamphlets, murals have a surprisingly short history. Despite the nationalist-painted "You are now entering Free Derry" mural being the conflict's most famous wall painting, the origin of mural painting in Northern Ireland traces its history back to images of the Protestant King William of Orange produced by craftsmen in the first quarter of the 20th century.¹ It was not until the nationalist hunger strikes in the early 1980s that mural painting became part of the nationalist tradition.² These traditions most often covered different subjects and themes. The loyalists focused on William of Orange, the Red Hand of

¹ Rolston, *Drawing Support* 2, i.

² Rolston, i. The genesis of the "free Derry corner" is from the early Troubles period; however, as it does not contain an image, I am classifying it as graffiti rather than a mural.

Ulster, historical themes, and memorials while the nationalists focused on the hunger strikes in the early 1980s, military images, elections, historical and mythological themes, repression, and internationalism.³ Despite these differences, murals are significant as they are evidence of an exchange within the political culture of the Troubles. Loyalists were the first to use them in Northern Ireland as a form of political expression and then they were adopted by the nationalists. The use of murals in both traditions shows that there was a transfer of method. Crucially it was not solely an artistic exchange but an exchange of forms of political expression. Despite these groups' fierce opposition to one another politically, they recognized and emulated each other's methods of political expression in an effort to further their political goals.

As part of its exhibit "The Troubles and Beyond," the Ulster Museum displayed a stark example of a topic shared by nationalist and loyalist imagery: a mural from each tradition, made in the same year, each depicting the Irish mythological hero Cú Chulainn (see figs. 14 and 15). Cú Chulainn, a part of the ancient nation of Ulaid who inhabited Ulster, is the central figure in the Uliad mythic cycle. In his most famous and final act, he tied himself to a standing stone so that, despite his injuries, he could remain on his feet during a battle with the evil queen Medb. It was during the Gallic Revival of the late 19th century that ancient Irish mythology returned to the popular consciousness in Ireland and soon became intertwined with the nationalist movement. But as demonstrated by this exhibit, during the Troubles both republicans and loyalists identified with this Irish legend, and both sides appropriated the figure for use on multiple murals across Northern Ireland.

In the words of the leading scholar on murals in Northern Ireland, Bill Rolston, the nationalists saw Cú Chulainn as "representing the desperate gesture of the republican and

³ Rolston, *Drawing Support*, ii–v.

socialist revolutionaries who declared a republic in the face of overwhelming odds.”⁴ So much so that a bronze statue of him is housed in the center of Dublin’s general post office, the site of the declaration of the Irish Republic during the 1916 Easter Rising.⁵ Based on this perception, the artist of the mural now housed in the Ulster Museum modernized the character of Cú Chulainn. Although he is still strapped to the standing stone, he has traded out his sword and shield for the equipment of a paramilitary gunman: he wears jeans and a military jacket, his black mask and gloves lay in front of him, and an AK-47 lays by his side.⁶ Here he is also portrayed as a martyr for the nationalist cause: there is a bandage tied around a bloody leg wound, his head is slumped to one side, and the Irish republican bird has replaced the mythical crow.

However, the mural does not simply draw a parallel between the two individuals. It places the modern gunman in a line with past nationalist efforts. Firstly, the image includes the motif of the Celtic knot painted in the colors of the Irish flag around the border of the image. This traditional Irish motif returned to prominence during the Gaelic Revival movement, and the Irish tricolor is closely associated with the Easter Rising. Similarly, this mural contains an excerpt about Cú Chulainn from the early 20th-century Gaelic language poem *Mise Eire* [I Am Ireland]. This poem is, in both language and content, a product of the Gaelic revival movement. However, what is particularly significant is that its author, Patrick Pearse, was executed by the British for his participation in the 1916 Easter Rising. Through visual and thematic elements largely based on the revival movement and the Easter Rising, the nationalist painter of this mural sought to elevate the republican paramilitary to mythical status and tie him into a tradition of martyrdom for Ireland.

⁴ Rolston, *Drawing Support 2*, iii.

⁵ Rolston, iii.

⁶ Danny Devanney and M. Lyons, *Cúchulainn*, 2000, Mural, 2000, BELUM.P1.2001, Ulster Museum.



Figure 14. The nationalist mural of Cú Chulainn now housed in the Ulster Museum

Although Cú Chulainn was a figure popular within the nationalist community decades before the Troubles started, this fact did not stop loyalists from incorporating him into their imagery as the conflict progressed. The catalyst for this adoption was the book *The Cruthin*, written by the staunch loyalist scholar of ancient Britain Ian Adamson. In addition to his scholarship, Adamson (OBE) was a medical doctor, a one-time Lord Mayor of Belfast, and lived on the deeply Catholic Falls road during the height of the Troubles. Written in 1974, the book became popular with the loyalist community in the 1980s.⁷ This historical chronicle centers around the fact that ancient tribes lived in what is now Ulster until Gaelic invaders pushed them out. Anderson uses this point to argue that “the Irish Gaels suffer[ing] under later English domination is but one side of a coin...the claim of the Gael to Ireland is by the sword only, and by the sword it was it reclaimed in later days by the descendants of those Ancient Peoples [those ancestors being the Protestant Scots who settled in Ireland starting in the 17th century].”⁸ Crucially for the loyalists, he argued that Cú Chulainn and his Ulaid tribe were a part of these original inhabitants and that his feats recorded in legend were against the invading Gaels.⁹

However, the loyalists’ claim to Cú Chulainn is more than a genetic ancestry. This book has been instrumental in the portrayal of Cú Chulainn as, in the words of the loyalist mural in the Ulster Museum, “the ancient defender of Ulster.”¹⁰ That is, an ancient defender against the Gaelic hoards—the presumed ancestors of the current Irish nationalists. In this way, loyalists see a direct parallel between the ancient conflict and the modern one. The loyalist version of the mural portrays Cú Chulainn as an ancient warrior but still draws a clear line between the mythic hero and the modern armed struggle. It does this most conspicuously by portraying a silhouette

⁷ Rolston, *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland*, 35.

⁸ Ian Adamson, “The Cruthin: The Ancient Kindred” (Pretani Press, 1986), 15. Originally published 1972

⁹ Adamson, 16.

¹⁰ David Craig, *Cúchulainn: Ancient Defender of Ulster!*, 2000, Mural, 2000, BELUM.P4.2001, Ulster Museum.



Figure 15. The unionist/loyalist mural of Cú Chulainn now housed in the Ulster Museum.

of a gunman cast on the map of Ulster behind Cú Chulainn.¹¹ Accompanying this image is the statement that “down through the years his shadow has cast a new breed of Ulster defender.”

Loyalist paramilitaries often portrayed their actions as defending their communities against republican paramilitary violence and they are looking to Cú Chulainn as a predecessor.

Additionally, the loyalists lay claim to the ancient hero by depicting him with the modern flag of Northern Ireland painted on his shield, thereby pushing back against nationalist uses of the hero.

This mural depicted Cú Chulainn both as a heroic champion of the Northern Irish state and, similarly to the nationalists, as the spiritual predecessor to the current armed struggle.

The similarities between these two murals demonstrate more than a shared cast of mythological figures and exposure to each other's visual cultures. They also show the ways that loyalists and nationalists contested history and myth through visual mediums. By the time these murals were created, Cú Chulainn had appeared on multiple murals produced by each side, and loyalists and nationalists would have been well aware of the other side's use of the hero. Thus, the continued use of the myth in their murals was about bolstering their side's claim to Cú Chulainn as a symbol of their community and diminishing the rival community's claim. These claims were crucial as they glorified and justified the armed struggle. It was through the visual culture that the two sides contested these crucial ideological points.

Another shared medium of political expression was coins. Until Ireland adopted the Euro in 2002, the Irish Pound was closely linked with British currency. Without going into too many specifics, during the Troubles, they were almost always identical in terms of monetary value and in physical shape (although they were minted with different images). During the Troubles, both loyalists and republicans regularly defaced coins with political messaging, and while this sort of

¹¹ Craig.

defacement was unique to coins and stamps (which are discussed later in this chapter), due to their proliferation they warrant an examination. The history of the political defacement of coins in Ireland is long. The numismatist Bruce Mosher has written a survey of 2,400 examples of these coins, and included in his report are examples of coins with mint dates in the early to mid-18th century that were defaced with pro and anti-monarchical sentiments.¹² It seems that with every political event in Irish history, there has been a corresponding defacement of coins: the Act of Union in 1801, the Young Irelander rebellion in 1848, and the Irish War of Independence in the early 20th century.¹³ The Troubles were no different. Nationalists and unionists defaced both British and Irish pounds with a variety of messages. These coins are a crucial instance of a way that the material and visual culture was utilized for political contestation and exchange during the Troubles.

The nationalist defacement of coins had a straightforward logic. Nationalists would almost always focus their defacement on the monarch's portrait stamped on the coins.¹⁴ The political message was quite clear. They saw Queen Elizabeth as the embodiment of the United Kingdom and a symbol of British imperialist domination of Ireland. By stamping over her portrait, they were attacking her and the government she represented. However, their defacement of coins had other purposes. Take, for example, figure 16, a £1 coin minted in 1983 and defaced with the acronym RIRA (Real Irish Republican Army), an offshoot of the paramilitary Irish Republican Army that became prominent in the late 1990s.¹⁵ Due to the coin's denomination, it

¹² Bruce R. Mosher, *Bruce R. Mosher Irish Political Tokens Collection*, 2020, 63, 96, 102, <http://archive.org/details/IrishPoliticalTokenInventory>.

¹³ Bruce R. Mosher, 102, 94; *George V Bronze Penny Stamped 'NO ENGLISH RULE,'* 1919, 1919, CM.5473-2018, Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge.

¹⁴ Bruce R. Mosher, *Bruce R. Mosher Irish Political Tokens Collection*, 198.

¹⁵ *1983 £1 Coin Defaced with "RIRA,"* date of defacement unknown 1983, date of defacement unknown 1983, NIPC/PA/COIN, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.



Figure 16. A British £1 coin defaced with RIRA (Real Irish Republican Army)

would have been difficult for even those politically opposed to take these defaced but high value coins out of circulation. As a result, these sorts of coins would have likely been in circulation for a while, a possibility reinforced by signs of wear on the coin and small chips on its edges. In circulation, the currency would have spread an anti-governmental message and promoted the name of the Real IRA as it passed through the hands of nationalists, loyalists, and neutrals alike. To this point, multiple sellers that Bruce Mosher spoke with in building his collection attest to

having received these coins as change in corner stores, taxis, cafes, and other ordinary locations during the Troubles.¹⁶

It is worth comparing this Troubles-era coin to a coin from the Irish War of Independence held in the collection of Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum. This coin is a bronze penny with "No English Rule" stamped over George V's head.¹⁷ For both the Revolution era coin and Troubles era coin the stamping of the currency was a political act in itself. The perpetrators damaged the coin produced by those they see as their oppressors and repurposed it as a tool to distribute their political messages. However, the defacement of the Troubles coin possesses aspects that its predecessor does not. By stamping the name of their organization, rather than solely a political statement, the Real IRA was to some degree making their own currency by defacing the £1 coin. They were laying claim to the production of alternative coinage that was free from the imagery of the British government.

Due to the proliferation of Irish currency in Northern Ireland, loyalists were also able to engage in the defacement of the currency of their political opponents. The collection of the Linen Hall Library has examples of Irish coins defaced with the names of the UVF, UDA, UFF, and Ulster Vanguard (see fig. 17 for a UVF defaced coin). Similarly to the RIRA coin examined previously, these loyalist organizations also utilized coinage to both get their name in circulation and express a political message. However, the political message was less shocking when an acronym was carved over the Irish Harp rather than the portrait of the Queen. This point is reinforced by the fact loyalists sometimes only defaced the reverse side of the coin that featured either a fish, bull, or bird, depending on the denomination.

¹⁶ Bruce R. Mosher, *Bruce R. Mosher Irish Political Tokens Collection*, 37, 57, 62, 83, 84, 85, 86.

¹⁷ *George V Bronze Penny Stamped 'NO ENGLISH RULE.'*



Figure 17. A UVF defaced Irish 10p coin

However Irish coins that loyalists defaced with political slogans sent a clear message. For example, an Irish 50p coin in the collection of the Linen Hall was defaced with the words “Ulster is British,” reiterating the status of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom (fig. 18).¹⁸ This defacement made a claim both culturally and politically. It reinforced the loyalists’ perception that saw themselves as ethnically British and rejected the Republic of Ireland’s claims to the territory of Northern Ireland. In an equally clear but more crude instance, loyalists utilized the Republic’s succinct Gaelic name to illustrate what they thought of the country; they defaced a 10p coin with the phrase “Eire Stinks” (fig. 19).¹⁹ An Irish two-shilling coin, also held in the

¹⁸ *Irish 50p Coin Defaced with “ULSTER IS BRITISH,”* n.d., n.d., NIPC/PA/COIN, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

¹⁹ *Irish 10P Coin Defaced with “EIRE STINKS,”* n.d., n.d., NIPC/PA/COIN, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

Linen Hall's collection, was defaced with the word "Foreign" (fig 20).²⁰ The defacement not only emphasized the previously mentioned loyalist cultural claims to Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom's territorial jurisdiction over the county but also it showed a clear perception of the medium in which the phrase appeared. By labeling a circulating coin as "Foreign," this defacement was able to send a message to anyone who used the coin. It sought to elicit xenophobic responses from loyalists and proclaim the alien nature of the Irish Republic to nationalists.



Figure 18. A Loyalist-defaced Irish 50p coin

²⁰ *Irish 10p Coin Defaced with "FOREIGN,"* n.d., n.d., NIPC/PA/COIN, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.



Figures 19 & 20. Loyalist-defaced Irish coins

Baked into this method of political expression is a recognition of exchange. In their everyday lives, loyalists would have come across coins defaced with nationalist political sentiments and vice versa. This would have likely fueled a campaign on both sides seeking to get the numerical and propagandistic edge and deface larger amounts of coins. Bruce Mosher states that, while researching his collection, he spoke with multiple former employees of large manufacturing concerns who attested to defacing Irish coins while under the direction of the management.²¹ Due to defacement by loyalists and republicans, the physical money supply had become an arena of political contestation. Moreover, they were arguing very similar ideological points. By defacing these coins, each side was rejecting the territorial and cultural claims of what they saw as a foreign government and those they saw as a foreign people. These coins provided an additional venue in which to wage an ideological war that had absorbed the society.

Figure 21, a British £1 coin, quite neatly illustrates this point. In a typical move, a republican stamped the letters “IRA [Irish Republican Army]” over the portrait of Queen Elizabeth. However, this coin then came into the hands of loyalists. They then stamped the letters “UDA” over the republican defacement in a diagonal, taking care to stamp the letters D and A twice. By stamping over the republican message, loyalists sought to visually and physically dominate their opponent’s message. They could have used an implement to simply hammer over the republican message, thereby making it illegible, or removed the coin from circulation altogether. Instead, they left enough of the republican message for the viewer to discern it (they did not touch the “I”), and vigorously stamped their own message over it. They wanted the viewer to see the loyalist inscription overpowering the republican one and recognize the corresponding point. In this instance of loyalists recognizing the efforts of the republicans and

²¹ Bruce R. Mosher, *Bruce R. Mosher Irish Political Tokens Collection*, 197.

countering them, the coin became a physical space where rival groups and ideologies competed to get their messages across.



Figure 21. British £1 coin defaced by nationalists and then loyalists. Photo courtesy of Bruce Mosher

Another shared medium of political expression was postage stamps. During the Troubles, both nationalists and loyalists overprinted British postage stamps with political messaging. However, unlike the case of the coins, this method of political expression clearly originated from

the nationalists. In 1971 the British government released three postage stamps as part of the “Ulster ’71” festivities celebrating the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Northern Irish state. Due to high levels of tension at the time, the post office was quite careful to avoid topics that could be seen as political such as depictions of the Stormont parliament building or 18th-century estate houses.²² Instead, the post office opted to feature paintings of Northern Irish landscapes, accompanied by a small portrait of the queen in the top right corner. In response, Sinn Fein, operating under the cover name Irish Republican Philatelic Office (IRPO), defaced many of the three-pence stamps featuring a painting titled “Londonderry Landscape” (fig. 22).

Despite being similar in size, stamps were much easier than coins to imbue with political messaging as they could be printed over rather than having to be carved, hammered, or stamped. As a result, Sinn Fein was able to pack a plethora of political messages on the postage. On the stamp, Sinn Fein printed three lines of text over the painting that read: “Saoirse Éireann [Irish independence]/Fight for United Ireland/1916-1971.”²³ In addition, they printed an x over the portrait of the Queen. By declaring “Saoirse Éireann,” they were rejecting British control over Northern Ireland. Similarly, by saying “Fight for United Ireland” they were encouraging the use of violence to end British control on the island. Furthermore, by printing the dates “1916-1971” they reframed the commemorative stamp from a celebration of the 50th anniversary of Northern Ireland to a 65th anniversary celebration of the Easter Rising. This commemoration was further reinforced by the medium, as the 1916 Easter Rising was centered around the rebels’ armed takeover of Dublin’s General [i.e. central] Post Office. Finally, by stamping an x over the Queen’s head they were rejecting a symbol of British rule.

²² Andy Pendlebury, “Stamp History 1971 Ulster Paintings” (British Postal Museum, August 1994), 4,11.

²³ UK 3p “Ulster 71” Commemorative Stamp Stamp Overprinted with “SAOIRSE ÉIREANN/FIGHT FOR UNITED IRELAND/1916-1971, n.d., n.d., NIPC/PA/STAM, Linen Hall Library Northern Irish Political Collection.

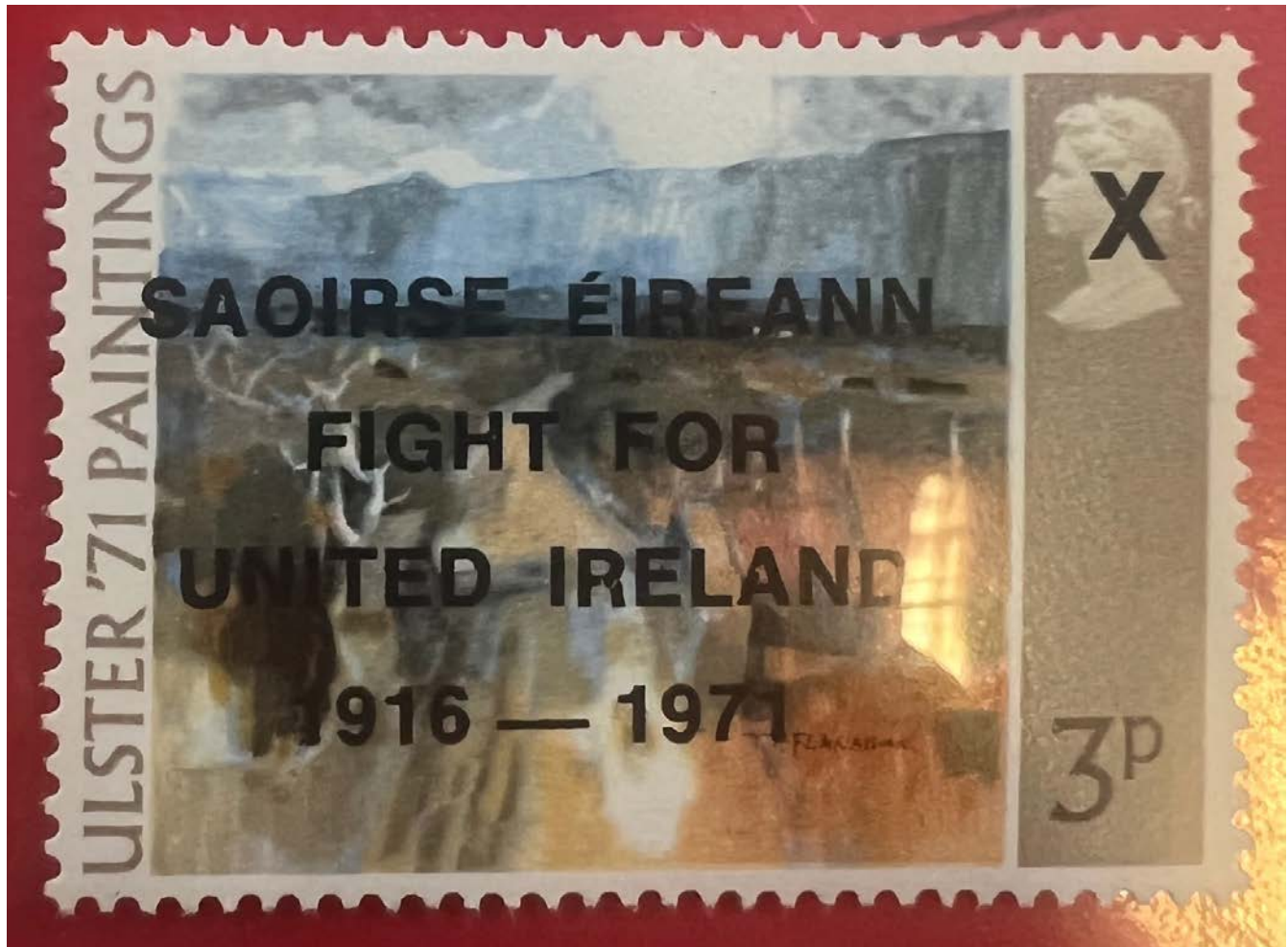


Figure 22. Ulster '71 postage stamp overprinted by Sinn Fein under the cover name of the IRPO

These “Ulster ’71” stamps were not the only postage defaced by Sinn Fein. Three months later, they also printed the phrases “Support Sinn Fein” and “Dáil Uldah [a proposed Ulster parliament distinct from Stormont]” over more typical postage featuring a central portrait of the Queen (fig. 23).²⁴ Sinn Fein put both their defaced “Ulster ’71” and their defaced common stamps to good use. They initially sent one hundred pieces of mail featuring the stamps to publications and other destinations.²⁵ They also raised funds by selling the overprinted stamps

²⁴ Matin Modarressi, “The Northern Ireland ‘Stamp War’, 1971–2,” *History Ireland* 29, no. 5 (October 2021): 50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27198279>.

²⁵ Modarressi, 50.

for 10p, a 7p markup from the plain stamp.²⁶ Despite efforts of the postal authorities, many of these stamps got to their destination and received a postmark. Sinn Fein also recognized the appeal of this postage to stamp collectors and sold postmarked versions (and thus possessing proof that they worked) for £2.²⁷ Through this stamp initiative, Sinn Fein was able to send a political message, raise funds, and humiliate British authorities.



Figure 23. A 2 ½ P stamp defaced by Sinn Fein under the cover name of the IRPO

²⁶ Modarressi, 50.

²⁷ Modarressi, 50.

Although the Sinn Fein/IRPO stamp defacement campaign was short-lived and the only republican one of its kind, it had surprising influences later in the Troubles. Those influences were not on subsequent nationalist political campaigns, but rather on the unionist and loyalist “Ulster Says NO” campaign. A central sentiment of “Ulster Says NO” was dissatisfaction with and alienation from the government of the UK. During the talks between the Thatcher administration and the government of the Republic of Ireland regarding the Anglo-Irish agreement, unionist leaders were shut out from the discussions at Hillsborough Castle.²⁸ Because of this lack of say in their own affairs, unionists felt as if the government, and a conservative one at that, had gone behind their backs. As a result, as previously mentioned, they expressed extreme anger towards the British government and engaged in anti-governmental demonstrations, including the defacement of stamps.

During the campaign, unionists systematically defaced 1p, 4p, and 5p stamps in a way that appears very similar to the crop of postage defaced by Sinn Fein. They printed “Ulster says NO” directly over the portrait of the Queen in thick black letters (fig. 23).²⁹ This move makes practical sense. As discussed earlier, the unionists employed a visual barrage during the “Ulster Says NO” campaign, seemingly printing the slogan on everything they could get their hands on. Influenced by the efforts of Sinn Fin over a decade earlier, they realized that a postage stamp was an excellent way to distribute their message, particularly in an era where people sent many more letters than today. And these stamps were used for correspondence: a 4p stamp in the Tower Museum’s collection has a postmark. Furthermore, like Sinn Fein, the unionists would have realized the opportunity for them to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the British government

²⁸ McGarry and O’Leary, “The Anglo-Irish Agreement,” 77.

²⁹ *UK 1p, 4p, 5p Postage Stamps Overprinted with “ULSTER SAYS NO,”* 1985, 1985, Story of Derry Exhibition, Tower Museum Derry/Londonderry.

by printing their slogan of dissent over a representation of governmental authority. However, what is shocking about this artifact is that unionists printed over the image of the Queen. This anti-monarchical sentiment would have been usual for republicans, but it is almost unthinkable that those who defined themselves as “loyalists” defaced an image of the reigning monarch.



Figure 24. Postage stamps defaced as a part of the “Ulster Says NO” campaign

This defacement shows both the depth of unionist dissatisfaction and the existence of a shared political culture during the Troubles. Despite the unionist political tradition and name stemming from their support of the United Kingdom, they became so alienated that they were now willing to subvert one of the state’s core institutions, the postal system, and deface an image of the head of state. But it is unlikely that the unionists would have done this on their own. Instead, they were following a path already forged by the nationalists. Defacing British stamps with anti-governmental sentiment was a preexisting part of the political culture of the Troubles

that the unionists then adopted. The visual and material culture provided a means by which to express the unionists' anti-government political sentiment.

As demonstrated by these shared themes, subject matters, and mediums, visual and material artifacts were an area of exchange and contestation just as much as any other aspect of the Troubles' political culture. In the way that both nationalists and unionists engaged in armed conflict, participated in hunger strikes, and lobbied outsiders to achieve their political goals, so too they both produced a visual and material culture to achieve these goals. These artifacts were not just a reflection of their ideology but a concrete method by which they sought to promote their side's political goals. Furthermore, it was not solely that both sides participated in the production of these objects and images but rather that they were in dialogue with each other's products. They were deeply aware of the messages the opposing side wanted to convey and the methods that they used. And they were willing to incorporate the other side's methods for their own gain. The objects that these traditions produced were of critical importance for combatting the opposing side's ideology, but they also suggest something more. As I have demonstrated in this chapter and Belinda Loftus suggests in her book *Mirrors Orange and Green*, although rooted in opposition, there is a mirror-like parity to the visual traditions of the unionist and nationalist communities.³⁰ This implies broader similarities between the two communities than they might initially realize, namely around a deeply ingrained culture of political extremism. Ultimately combatting these cultures of extremism may be a solution to a lasting peace.

³⁰ Belinda Loftus, *Mirrors: Orange & Green* (Picture Press, 1994).

Conclusion

In the collection of the Linen Hall Library there are two nearly identical cheap plastic lighters (fig. 25). They are the same model made by the same manufacturer. They are white and rectangular with rounded edges, and they both have an image of crossed rifles printed on them. Their only difference is what was printed above the rifles. On one, “Provo’s Rule,” a reference to the Provisional IRA, was printed in green in addition to the Irish tricolor. On the other, “Proud to be a Prod,” common slang for a Protestant, was printed in blue in addition to the Union Jack.



Figure 25. The two lighters in the collection of the Linen Hall Library

In this thesis I have demonstrated the critical role of the visual and material culture in the broader political culture of the Troubles. I have shown that these objects and images should not be dismissed as just reflections of the ideology of the political community that produced them. Rather, they were something more. Unionists produced these artifacts for consumption within their community to further their specific ideological, political, and community-building goals.

Furthermore, unionists utilized these objects to send messages of ideological separation, intimidation, and political defiance, outwards to other unionists, nationalists, and those not in Northern Ireland. However, nationalists also utilized the visual and material culture, resulting in an exchange of topics and mediums of political expression between the two communities, of which these lighters are an excellent example. However, this was more than an exchange of forms of political expression. The visual and material culture was an arena where opposing ideologies contested political ideas and competed against one another, in some cases physically. With this variety of uses, the visual and material culture was critical in the political culture of the Troubles.

I have also demonstrated how the visual and material culture had deep repercussions on the communities that produced it. Caroline Campbell, the head of the Irish National Gallery who grew up Protestant in Belfast during the Troubles, describes this effect well in a 2023 op-ed for *The Telegraph*: “[loyalist] images of balaclava-clad men brandishing guns, or exhortations to remember the glorious dead, supplied the stuff of nightmares. As a young adult, I kept a hockey stick by my bed when I was alone in our house because I feared that armed men might break in during the night.”¹ These artifacts had harmful ramifications that often went beyond their explicit intentions and hurt the next generation.

While some aspects of this project are likely unique due to the prolonged nature of the Troubles, this thesis illustrates that an in-depth examination of the objects produced by groups in ideological conflict is extremely fruitful. Furthermore, as these lighters and other objects I examined illustrate, during the Troubles individuals and organizations were able to produce large numbers of acceptable quality objects that were customized to feature their political ideology. As

¹ Caroline Campbell, “King Billy vs Bobby Sands – How I Grew up in Fear amid Belfast’s Murals,” *The Telegraph*, October 30, 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/artists/belfast-murals-caroline-campbell/>.

the cost and difficulty of producing customized consumer goods have only dropped since the Troubles, studies along these same lines of this thesis are likely for new historical moments.

These two lighters, along with many other objects that I examined, demonstrate the intensity of the Troubles' ideological conflict and raise questions about its aftermath. Individuals and organizations imbued nearly every imaginable object with political messaging, including ones I have not mentioned such as teaspoons, baby bibs, keyrings, and wine, just to name a few. Several stores in Belfast's Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods still sell these kinds of objects. The continued willingness to surround oneself with these highly political objects and images does not inspire confidence in the ability of either community to become less hardline in its political views, a change that will likely be necessary for permanent peace. There have been efforts to reduce the amount of militaristic imagery, particularly regarding murals, but many images of masked gunmen still exist on the walls of Northern Ireland. The existence of these objects and images in communities' daily life hinders the ability of the community to move on.

But what does "moving on" mean? There are new political conflicts that continue to come up on matters that these communities care deeply about. Furthermore, they continue to use many of the same means that they did during the Troubles. In late 2022 posters appeared in public places in loyalist communities that sought to contest the Northern Ireland protocol for Brexit.² These posters featured an image of Ireland's Prime Minister and declared "Peace or Protocol it's Your Decision. The Possibility of a Return to Violence is Very Real." We must hope that these are echoes of a troubled past and not harbingers for what is to come.

² "A Return To Violence," *Extramural Activity* (blog), December 19, 2022, <https://extramuralactivity.com/2022/12/19/a-return-to-violence/>.

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