The British Irish Conflict Essay, Research Paper

The Irish-British Conflict Throughout history there has been an ongoing saga of war, prejudice, and hatredbetween Ireland and Great Britain. Lately they have been going back and forth over thecontrol and ownership of Northern Ireland. But within the last decade, after forty years ofintense fighting, there have been the greatest strides toward peace on both sides of thefighting. The relationship between Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Great Britain has alwaysbeen a volatile one, marred with shooting, bombings, riots, assassinations, and riots. Thebasis of the fighting has been over the control and ownership of Northern Ireland. Themain split is between religious groups. The Catholics of Northern Ireland want to join theRepublic of Ireland and form one independent island of Ireland. The Protestants ofNorthern Ireland want to remain under direct British rule. (Encyclopedia Britanica Page290) The roots of conflict go back over four hundred years. When King Henry VIIIdeclared himself King of Ireland, it started centuries of British rule. This came after morethan two centuries of increasing British rule and ownership in the country. Later on,during the rule of Elizabeth I, the religious differences widened in Ireland between theIrish Catholic and the British Protestants. Her reign also brought widespread rebellionsand violent protests directly related to the religious differences in the region. (WWW.CNN.COM) British oppression only worsened as time went on. Through the seventeenth andeighteenth centuries, the British passed laws against the Irish Catholics. Some of theseincluded preventing the Irish from bearing arms, restrict their rights to education, stoppingthem from buying and holding land, and banning them from serving in the army, holdingpublic office, entering the legal profession, becoming Military Police, or voting.(WWW.CNN.COM) The Irish continued to oppose the British government, but nothing came out of ituntil 1919. The Irish Republican Army, and their political party counterpart, Sinn Fien,was formed in 1919, dedicated to fight forcibly for complete independence from Britishrule. The IRA started a guerilla war in 1919 to win independence from Great Britain. Through 1919 and into 1920, the IRA harassed the police and military with ambushes,sudden raids, and assassinations. To satisfy the IRA’s demands, the British governmentpassed the Government of Ireland Act. The act split Ireland into two separate states, eachwith a limited power of self-government. The top six counties of Ireland broke off andformed Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland was satisfied with the treaty because there wasstill a Protestant majority. However, the tale was quite different in Southern Ireland,where the catholic majority wanted more freedom from Britain and rejected the act. Thefighting continued until July of 1921. The British Parliament passed the Anglo-IrishTreaty. The treaty, signed on December sixth, 1921, made Ireland a dominion, that is aself-governing country which agreed to swear allegiance to the British Crown. Thedominion was called the Irish Free State. (The World Book Multimedia Encyclopedia) This treaty split the IRA. The part that accepted it became the Army of The IrishFree State. The others that rejected the treaty were called the Irregulars. The Irregularsrejected the treaty because it did not grant Ireland complete independence from Britainand complete union with Northern Ireland. As a result of this, a civil war broke out in theIrish Free State, in which the Irregulars lost, but still operated as an underground, secretorganization. (The World Book Multimedia Encyclopedia) Finally, in 1949, the Irish Free State renounced its dominion status and declareditself the Republic of Ireland. But Northern Ireland remained under British rule. Becauseof the Republic of Ireland’s new independence, the IRA was reunited. The IRA thencarried out continual raids on British installations in Northern Ireland trying to bringNorthern Ireland into a complete union with the rest of Ireland, and to humiliate theBritish and Irish governments. (The World Book Multimedia Encyclopedia) However, the real fighting did not begin until 1968 when the British governmentattempted to break up a Catholic civil rights demonstration. The demonstration soonturned into a riot that set off the next thirty years of fighting and violence, known simplyas “The Troubles”. (WWW.CNN.COM) During 1968 and 1969, a deep split developed in the IRA over strategy and tactics. The more powerful of the two groups that came out of the split was the provisional IRA. This group is filled with younger people who are more geared toward getting what theywant through violence. They are an aggressive group that carries out the bombings andviolence associated with the their movement to reunite Northern Ireland with the Republicof Ireland. They get funding from at home and abroad. The other group that came out ofthe split was the Official IRA. They also work to unite Northern Ireland and the Republicof Ireland; they just use a different method. They get what they want by using politics andgoing after the base of the matter. They are mainly older members that focus on the basisof social change and use very limited violence to achieve these goals.(WWW.CNN.COM) Things were not real violent after the original start of the “Troubles” until bloodySunday. In 1972, British troops opened fire on a peaceful civil rights demonstration,killing fourteen people. Six months later, the Irish fought back with twenty-two separate

bombs that killed eleven people in Belfast, beginning a long pattern of shootings,bombings, and assassinations. In the face of this, Britain declared complete control ofNorthern Ireland, although they could not set up a permanent government due to violenceand fighting. (WWW.CNN.COM) In 1973, the Sunningdale Agreement was produced by three way talks. Theagreement gave the Republic of Ireland some government power in Northern Ireland, butbecause of a protestant uprising and out lash of violence, the Sunningdale agreement failedand the fighting continued. (WWW.CNN.COM) Throughout the seventies and eighties, the conflict between the Irish catholics andthe British Protestantsin Northern Ireland has only gotten worse . Fighting has continuedover the control over Northern Ireland, with both sides thinking that they are in the right. Through this time, the Official IRA posed little threat to the peace efforts because of theirnon-violent attitude. Unfortunately, the Provisional IRA’s strong ties to Sinn Fien hasoften proved deadly for Northern Irish, even innocent ones. They have continuallydisrupted relations between the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Britain. (TheWorld Book Multimedia Encyclopedia) It wasn’t until 1985 that something in the form of progress came about. Britainand Ireland signed a pact that is known as the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The pact allowedthe Republic of Ireland to have an advisory role, but no direct powers, in NorthernIreland’s government. Later, in 1993, Irish leader Albert Reynolds and British PrimeMinister John Major issued the Downing Street Declaration. It gave the people inNorthern Ireland the right to choose their own fate. It also offered Sinn Fien a seat at thepeace talk if violence by the IRA ended. In August of that year, the IRA issued a cease-fire. British Loyalists followed suit and agreed to lay down theirweapons.(WWW.CNN.COM) So in 1996, peace talks were well under way. Unfortunately, when U.S. SenatorGeorge Mitchell of Maine, and chairman of the peace talks, proposed a surrender ofguerilla weapons, the IRA refused and answered with a one ton bomb that killed twopeople in London. The talks resumed later on without the Sinn Fien and theIRA.(WWW.CNN.COM) The largest peace effort yet has happened in the past year. Britain announced thatit would proceed with an independent inquiry into the Bloody Sunday killings of 1972.Small violent eruptions between assorted military groups killed 18 people in protest. Acting against this violence, the British Prime Minister sets a deadline of April ninth,1998, for a peace agreement. An agreement was reached in the multi-party talks, whichincluded the Sinn Fien after the IRA restored its cease-fire in July of 1997. (WWW.CNN.COM) The agreement is a major step toward a more peaceful union between the twogovernments and three regions. The agreement first calls for the accelerated release ofany war criminals that belong to the groups that are maintaining the cease-fire. But themain point of the agreement involves the future of the Northern Ireland government. Theagreements calls for the people of Northern Island to decide whether or not to sty a partof Great Britain or to unite with the Republic of Ireland and form one Ireland. (WWW.CNN.COM) There are many parts of the agreement that have to do with the relationshipsbetween Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Britain. First, it establishes a North-South Councilof Ministers that would work together on issues like transportation and agriculturebetween the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Republic also agreed to add aconstitutional amendment dropping their territorial claim the six counties of NorthernIreland. The agreement also calls for the paramilitary groups that planned all the terroristattacks during the preceding three decades, to give up their weapons over two years,starting in June. Also in the agreement is a promise to drop all previous laws and customsthat generally discriminate against the Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland, and visa-versa inthe Republic of Ireland. (WWW.CNN.COM) The agreement was enacted after a resounding yes vote on both sides of the Irishborder, marking the first time in eighty years that people on both sides of the island votedtogether in a single vote. (WWW.CNN.COM) Throughout history Ireland has been marred by violence and hatred. They havebeen fighting an ancient war of religion and beliefs raging against each other for no reasonbut to keep control of what is now Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has been abreeding ground of fighting, bombings, assassinations, and violence. History has provedto us that territory can be the cause of so much death. The fighting over Northern Irelandand hatred between the Irish Catholics and English Protestants in Northern Ireland hasresulted in a total of three thousand, two hundred and forty-nine people dying. (TimeMagazine Page 38) You can’t help but ask yourself why. It is hard to understand whysomeone would want to take another person’s life over some land and control. But ithappens everyday, and has been happening for over four hundred years in NorthernIreland. Hopefully through these recent peace talks and the recent peace agreement, allthe fighting can come to an end, and the people of Northern Ireland can decide their ownfate instead of two other countries fighting over them. Maybe through this they will beable to be the masters of their own destiny. Sometimes we must step back and letsomeone settle his own problems. If the majority of the people in Northern Ireland want aunited Ireland, then so be it. Leave it up to the people it effects, the people who have seenthe death and destruction, who have lost family and friends in the seemingly senselessfighting.