“WHEN I GROW UP…: HOW EXPERIENCING POLITICAL CRISIS IMPACTS THE CAREERS OF THE GLOBAL YOUTH”

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This Honors Thesis seeks to identify and understand connections between the experiences and future career choices of those who have endured political turmoil during their adolescence. Three case studies shall be assessed to associate the experiences of teenagers with the professions they ultimately pursue—first, the Rwandan Genocide of 1994; second, the Trump Administration in the United States of America from 2016 to 2020; and third, the Troubles in Northern Ireland from the 1970s until 1998. My research identifies strong ties between the individual case studies and corresponding career fields pursued, with survivors of the Rwandan Genocide going into international advocacy and public speaking, teens during the Trump Administration aiming to work in politics or continue the activism they did in their youth, and the young people living through the Troubles pursuing journalism and media; more generally, the findings broadly identify a connection between living through a political crisis during adolescence and pursued careers falling under the broad umbrella of “advocacy work”. The career choices examined likewise allude to the possibility that living through political crises during one’s adolescence often leads to a fervent passion for promoting peace, understanding, and justice in adulthood.
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Introduction

A primary aim in the field of political sociology is to understand the ways in which actors behave politically and the ways in which their political experiences and preferences influence their choices. Much attention and research have gone towards the analysis of such things as voting habits, political activism, and party preferences, namely those of adults. Certainly, the choice to focus on the decisions, actions, and beliefs of adults is a worthwhile pursuit; given an adult’s capacity (due to age, experience, breadth of knowledge, etc.) to participate politically and make informed decisions to that end, it makes sense to research the various factors that influence or determine such decisions.

One finds, however, a lack of significant research on the same topics concerning teenagers. Existing literature regarding teens reveals an interesting contradiction: while widely regarded as passionate, treated as and lauded as the arbiters of the future, and encouraged by their elders to grow up and work to change the world for the better, young people are simultaneously viewed as under-developed intellectually, lacking any ‘real-world’ experience, ridiculed for their supposed self-centeredness, accused of ignorance of the world around them in favor of childlike interests and pursuits. Young people have been used as a gambling piece in dictating policy; though, for example, the voting age in the United States of America is eighteen years of age, teenagers are rarely comprehensively included in legislative discussions. At the very least, young people are referenced to appeal to the morals of older legislators and voters— the use of the rhetorical cliche “think of the children” comes to mind. At best, they are invoked
superficially in policy discussions thought to affect them slightly more directly, as seen in American debates regarding gun violence especially as it pertains to school shootings.

There is, however, no reason teenagers ought not to be studied in the field of political sociology. A crucial facet of adolescence is the experience of exploring the world to develop one’s own outlook and worldview; accordingly, teenagers have been studied to be uniquely “shaped” in different ways than adults by the social and historical contexts they encounter (Mannheim, 1952). If not for the fact that these teenagers will grow up to become the very voters, actors, and main adult figures that will be studied and surveyed, teenagers may very well live through and directly experience moments of political crisis and turmoil, which they will carry with them through their lives. To discount teenagers in political and sociological research is to understate, if not fully nullify, the impacts of their experiences during this pivotal time on the rest of their lives and their future choices.

My research seeks to provide insight into the ways in which experiencing various political crises during one’s adolescence influences the lives of teenagers as they grow older. Studying the psychological, philosophical, or sociological impact on such a wide and varied group would doubtless comprise a lifetime of research; consequently, this thesis shall seek to draw connections between the experiences of teens growing up amidst political crisis or unrest, and their subsequent careers and/or relevant activism. To this end, I shall be analyzing and comparing the experiences, testimonies, and stories of those who lived through instances of political crisis or controversy during their teen years. I shall be assessing three case studies of such instances: the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the Trump administration in the United States from 2016 until 2020, and the Troubles in
Northern Ireland, specifically from 1970 to 1998. Are there any commonalities in the careers undertaken by these individuals, despite the vast and varying differences between each case study? Does experiencing political turmoil specifically during one’s adolescence lead to these career choices, or could anyone of any age living through such times lead to a similar path? These questions shall guide my research as I seek to draw connections between the adult work undertaken by those who have experienced political hostility during their adolescence.
Chapter 1: “Adolescence is a New Birth”: A Literature Review

To best understand each case study and the individual factors which provide the context for the careers and work we will be studying, it is critical to review the existing literature on each case.

For clarity’s sake, I shall also establish a few standard definitions for the terms we shall be using. Critical to the understanding of this Thesis is a common understanding of what is meant by my use of the term “teenager”. There are a series of definitions held by the World Health Organization; “adolescents” are recognized as those within the range of ages 10 to 19, “youth” refers to those aged 15 to 24, and “young people” merges both groups to include those aged 10 to 24 (World Health Organization, 2021). For this paper, I shall be using a variety of specific terms, including, but not limited to “adolescents”, “young people”, “teenagers”, etc.; however, the age range I will be consistently referring to (despite the terminology used) is most in line with the World Health Organization’s definition of “young people”. I find that this age range is less restrictive on whose stories I may cite in my research; further, continued research of the developing brain has indicated that “a definition of 10-24 years corresponds more closely to adolescent growth” (Sawyer, et al., 2018). Not only is 10-24 a more scientifically accurate age range to research when studying adolescents, but research has also indicated that political preferences and beliefs may be established concretely during that timespan as well. A study by Catalist data analyst Yair Ghitza and Columbia University political statistician Andrew Gelman utilized Gallup poll presidential approval rankings and comprehensive survey data to guess an approximate age when political preferences may be formed.
According to their research, events occurring between the ages of 14 and 24 are incredibly formative of an individual's political beliefs, with events occurring at age 18 having nearly 3x as powerful of an impact as those occurring at or after age 40 (Ghitza and Gelman, 2014). Though this research model was noted to be most accurate in predicting the preferences of white American voters, the research done on the processes and impact of various forms of political socialization can be useful to provide evidence for the specific age range I am choosing to research (Cox, 2014). With this definition and age range established, let us proceed.

There exists some general research surrounding the mental and psychological impact that experiencing political crises may have on individuals in the above-outlined age group. A study conducted by the British Psychological Society noted that, while it is understood that young people are almost always involved in some capacity and are impacted by political turmoil (specifically war), the existing academic literature surrounding the topic does not adequately encompass the complex nature and nuance in the ways that the youth are impacted by their firsthand experiences with political unrest. The same study suggests the best way to properly assess such an impact involves a three-fold mission; researchers must thoroughly measure the specific aspects of the political crisis itself, index relevant measures of youth behavioral functioning, and conduct long-term assessments on them (Barber, 2013). This suggestion provides a model which I attempt to use in researching my case studies. Though I am focusing my research specifically on the relevant work experience undertaken by individuals that have experienced political turmoil as teenagers, this model (which I will refer to as the “Barber
Model”) shall prove especially useful in my examination of each case study. In each case study, I will provide a thorough and brief history of the political crisis at hand, followed by an analysis of any first- or second-hand accounts of those in the target age group; for the long-term assessment aspect, I have chosen to evaluate the careers and work experience that have been undertaken by those I have studied. The cases that I shall be studying are as follows: Northern Ireland during the Troubles in the 1970s until the 1990s, Rwanda during and after the 1994 Genocide, and the United States during the Trump Administration from 2016 to 2020. To my knowledge, this study’s suggestions to improve research regarding the impact of crisis on teenagers has not yet been used in the context of comparative political science; this thesis additionally serves an ancillary purpose of assessing the efficacy of using the Barber Model across disciplines.

Rwanda is an intriguing but especially tricky case; when studying a genocide, one runs the risk of finding a very small surviving sample size with which to conduct research. Fortunately, more than enough relevant literature does exist for the purposes of this thesis. One 2019 Time Magazine article highlighted the work of Gadi Habumugisha, a Rwandan man who fled with his sister to an orphanage during the Genocide; it was there where he would be introduced to the photography-based program Through the Eyes of Children, which he would go on to lead (Haynes, 2019). The project taught and continues to teach children living amidst crisis the art of photography, offering a means of self-expression and a coping mechanism during times of duress; as well as lending a voice to the victims, Habumugisha sought to use his camera lens to speak to the perpetrators in an effort to hear their perspective, understand their mindsets, and allow a
path to future reconciliation (Haynes, 2019). Other survivors have gone a different route from Habumugisha’s artistic endeavors, instead using their experiences and traumas to inspire careers in education. Frida Umuhooza was the only member of her family of eight to survive when Interahamwe militia members stormed her hometown of Nyanza on May 7th, 1994 (UN News Centre, 2016). One by one, Umuhooza saw her family members murdered in front of her. Miraculously, she did not die after being clubbed over the head and buried in the ditch in her yard; later, neighbors would hear her cries and rescue the 14-year-old girl from her family’s impromptu gravesite. Over ten years later, Umuhooza went on to publish a memoir of her experience and the horrors she witnessed during the 100-day-long genocide, and she travels the world speaking at churches, museums, and the United Nations to teach others about the crime of the genocide. Consolee Nishimwe, another survivor-turned-author, described her tragic story in a memoir of her own; also a young girl of 14, Nishimwe and her female relatives had to hide as her father and brothers were mercilessly slaughtered (Africa Renewal, 2013). Even at her young age, Nishimwe noticed gender-based disparities in the treatment of Tutsi victims by the Interahamwe, describing the incessant rapes perpetrated against women and girls, only some of whom were killed after, while the men and boys were only murdered. Nishimwe herself was raped by militia members, which, while tragic, served to propel her towards a career in education and activism; she published a memoir in 2012 seeking to “be a voice for the [women] genocide survivors... still not able to share their own stories” (Africa Renewal, 2013). Since her book’s publication, Nishimwe has, like Umuhooza, gone on to be a passionate speaker against genocide and sexual violence around the world, winning
numerous awards for her advocacy and dedication to women’s rights (Women’s Media Center). Clear throughout all of these tragic stories, despite each survivor’s harrowing circumstances, is a strong generational commitment toward renewed peace and education. Each survivor, regardless of their specific career field, has come out of the genocide with undying hope and resilience, never once letting the atrocities they lived through inhibit their dreams of a future without discrimination, violence, and hatred.

Similar sentiments of justice and anti-discrimination are noted while studying teenagers living in the United States during the Trump Administration, lasting from 2016 until 2020. This specific case study is unique in that many of the teenagers whom I shall mention and reference in my research were not yet eligible to participate in the 2016 election when it occurred, yet these same teenagers were found to have strongly-held political beliefs and sentiments when researched after the election itself. A Dynata poll of 604 American teenagers, aged 13-17, was taken to identify early partisanship and party leanings; the results were almost equivalent to the results of the same poll of adult voters, though the teenagers themselves were too young to vote in the election (Miller, 2021). The poll additionally demonstrated the Trump administration’s significant impact on the future political ambitions of the teens surveyed: ½ of the respondents, regardless of gender, demonstrated heightened interest in running for political office because of Trump’s time in office, while the events of the 2020 election specifically resulted in ⅔ of respondents showing an increased interest in running for office. A similar report demonstrates a piqued interest in political activism for adolescents (especially young women) upset by the events of Trump’s tenure (Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2019). Intense
disillusionment was reported by female Democratically-identified teenagers, but the research indicates an uptick in pro-democracy activism. This action demonstrated a significant departure from the projections of past researchers, whose work seemed to indicate that such disillusionment would result in mass disengagement from the political realm (Putnam, 2011). A point of interest in this specific case study is that the research on the work and activism of teenagers during the Trump regime is ongoing; those who were teenagers from 2016 to 2020 may still be included in the age range we are using to indicate adolescence in this thesis! While the literature on this section may demonstrate less concrete action, rather plans and intentions to remain politically active, the focus of this thesis is drawing a link between the activity (either actualized or reported) of those who have lived through political turmoil; such a link, in this case, shall become overwhelmingly clear.

The final case study on Northern Ireland provides perhaps the clearest and most solid link between experiencing political crisis in one’s youth and the career path chosen in adulthood. Eimear O’Callaghan recalled a diary entry she had written at age 16 amidst the sectarian conflict: “came to bed convinced that prayer is our only hope, seeing we haven’t got a gun!” (McKay, 2014). A diary, a book so often connoted with pre-teen secrets, became to O’Callaghan something closer to a newspaper; on the same pages where most young girls would vent their teenage angst, O’Callaghan started each line with an update on the crisis. She noted one entry began with “brilliant pictures of army brutality on TV”, while another lamented a mere “three explosions today, no one seriously injured… something big [should] hurry up and happen soon” (McKay, 2014).
O’Callaghan would grow up to become a journalist for the Irish Times. O’Callaghan’s chosen career path is not uncommon for others like her, growing up at various points throughout the Troubles. Lyra McKee, a fellow journalist, coined the descriptor term “ceasefire babies” referring to those who grew up during or near the end of the crisis in 1998. In her seminal article “Suicide of the Ceasefire Babies”, McKee questioned the epidemic of suicides among Northern Irish millennials, wondering what could explain the phenomenon; though the “ceasefire babies” were too young to have lived through the worst period of Troubles-related violence” in the 1970s, those “babies” would comprise nearly $\frac{1}{5}$ of all reported suicides from 1999 to 2014 (McKee, 2016). A “ceasefire baby” herself, McKee spent her life seeking out and studying the young people who experienced various forms of political crisis at a young age. She determined that her generation was gifted a unique stressor that could have played a vital role in one’s decision to end their life: inherited trauma from their parents and families, those who directly witnessed more violence. McKee noted a “tragic irony… peace [has] claimed more lives than war ever did” (McKee, 2016). McKee, inspired by her adolescent experiences and the deaths of her friends, became a voice for her generation, seeking to both educate others and expose the world’s wrongs. On the hardships of her adolescence, she astutely wrote “it won’t always be like this, it’s going to get better” (McKay, 2019)

Immediately prevalent throughout the findings from each case study is a drastic commitment of teenagers to promote equity and reconciliation, an even stronger tendency towards hope, and the belief in a better future ahead of these periods of crisis. It is no wonder, then, that the resulting careers of these teenage subjects are in the fields of
communication, advocacy, and/or education. These chosen paths appear significantly influenced by (if not clearly connected and responsive to) the experiences from one’s adolescence; professed plans of future work or career dreams can likewise be tied to such experiences as well. When evaluating the careers of the individuals, it is additionally interesting to identify which crises the results “correspond” to. While the overarching aforementioned values align regardless of which crisis was experienced or what career was pursued, it was largely Rwandan genocide survivors who have gone on to work as human rights advocates and public speakers, while those who lived through the Northern Irish Troubles have mostly gone into various careers in media and entertainment, and the interest expressed towards careers in grassroots activism and partisan politics is fairly unique to the American case study; on the whole, all of the careers identified through this thesis’ research may broadly fall under the umbrella of “advocacy work”. It is critical to note, however, that each case study reflects some outliers to these individuals and careers; those in support of the regimes or organizations perpetrating violence and animosity are recognized to continue to align with the beliefs of the oppressors, though the correlations between their experiences, beliefs, and professions are less clear and distinguishable. It is also worth noting that the case studies involving the Rwandan Genocide and the Northern Irish Troubles will reflect a direct connection between experienced trauma and personal biography; given that the case study of Donald Trump’s presidency in the United States discusses teenagers that are still adolescents at the time of this writing, the connection reflects an analysis and prediction of behavior based on opinion surveys and actions undertaken in their youth, rather than relying on personal biography to draw such a link.
This paper’s research is qualitative in nature, with much of the information used in the analysis being a combination of primary documents, news articles, interviews, memoirs, and other secondary sources. These sources will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, following the guidelines of the aforementioned Barber Model. There shall be three chapters, one for each case study. In each, I shall establish the history of the crisis, elaborate further on the foregoing research, and synthesize the history with the stories of the individuals affected; this analysis shall demonstrate how experience of political turmoil in adolescence leads to a vested adult interest in peace and reconciliation, as shown through the various career choices of survivors. As mentioned previously, though career choice is a rather specific metric to assess, such an analysis can ultimately provide further insight into (as well as supplement emerging research surrounding) a much broader academic question: how political turmoil during experienced adolescence impacts the overall life philosophies and behaviors of individuals across the world. This question, while intriguing, is far beyond the scope of this research and will be left for future analysis.
Chapter 2: “Losing Hope is the Beginning of Your Self Defeat”: A Study of the Rwandan Genocide

As stated, this thesis shall be comprised of three individual case studies each examining a different crisis, different individuals, and a different historical context. Each case study shall be divided into various sub-sections, which shall together provide a thorough background on the political crisis of note; such a background will both contextualize and clarify the findings of my research. For this first case study, I shall be assessing the Rwandan Genocide, which took place in April of 1994 and lasted for 100 days. The violence, a campaign of ethnic violence largely influenced by a longstanding history of European colonization, resulted in the deaths of an estimated 800,000 Rwandans, one-tenth of the country’s population dead (Bhalla, 2019). Approximately 95,000 children were orphaned during the Genocide, left struggling with malnutrition and fear; thousands of women became victims of rape and sexual violence at the hands of the militia (Drury, 2019). As shall be elaborated upon in the following chapter, this case study is unique in that the crisis was a result of specific ethnic tensions, between two dominant ethnic groups within Rwanda. While many perpetrators were affiliated with the Rwandan government, this case— not unlike the Troubles in Northern Ireland, as assessed in Chapter 4— is not an instance of inherently state-sanctioned violence; rather, the Genocide occurred during the tail end of the Rwandan Civil War and was incredibly insulated, as the country was left with little international support during the 100-day long ordeal. Now, we shall evaluate the crisis and the impact it had on the lives and careers of adolescent survivors.
2.1 (Pre-)Colonial Precursors to Conflict

When assessing the history of the Rwandan Genocide, scholars often disagree not only on when and where the critical ethnic groups of Hutu and Tutsi developed but also on the nature of the groups’ relationship to one another. Much of pre-colonial Rwandan history has been either undocumented or lost to time, so much of any literature regarding the origins and relationships of the Hutu and Tutsi are primarily theoretical in nature. It is understood, however, that ethnic identification existed prior to European colonialism, and was “quite fluid in practice” (University of Minnesota). Alison des Forges claims that the arrival of three of Rwanda’s now-predominant ethnic groupings into the country occurred in waves, beginning with the Twa, followed by the Hutu, and finally, the Tutsi (des Forges, 2012). Philip Gourevitch further maintains that each ethnic group developed its own specific and particular socioeconomic niche in 19th century Rwanda, claiming that “Tutsis were aristocrats, Hutus were vassals, and the Twa were regarded as irrelevant by both” in a self-described “essentially feudal” regime (Gourevitch, 1998). While this conception of seemingly feudal socio-economic relations appears to hint at age-old tensions between the groups, other scholars, like Professor Josias Semujanga, call this relationship into question; he describes “a triple chieftaincy” in which Hutu and Tutsi political leaders of a given region would share and cooperate in the responsibilities of local government, before colonization (Semujanga, 2003). In fact, while it is difficult to define or even generalize the historic relations between the two groups, it is widely accepted by genocide scholars and Rwandan historians alike that Belgian colonialism in
the early 20th Century lies at the root of negative associations between the Hutu and Tutsi. Semujanga notes that the once-common practice of co-leadership of Hutu and Tutsi chieftains in local government was brought to an end in 1926 by Governor Georges Mortehan, a Belgian colonial politician (Semujanga, 2003). As time has passed since the tragedy, scholars have broadly begun to identify the Genocide as a sort of a byproduct of Belgian colonialism in the region.

It is imperative to consider Belgium’s specific colonial presence as a key factor leading to the Genocide. Rwanda would be “assigned” to Germany during the Congo Conference of 1884, though Otto von Bismarck would allow a fairly *laissez-faire* approach to governance in the region (almost akin to the British practice of salutary neglect in colonial America) (Prunier, 1997). Rather, Rwandan ethnic relations would change indefinitely because of Belgian imperialists, who enforced direct colonial rule in 1916 (Chrétien, 2003). One-fluid ethnic identifications became racialized, as Belgian governors implemented a system of identification cards in Rwandan society denoting the ethnicity of the cardholder. Mahmood Mamdani identifies the three main qualifiers used by the Belgians to justify and distinguish Rwandan ethnicity: “oral information provided by the church, physical measurements, and ownership of herds of cows… [which were used] to take an existing sociopolitical distinction and racialize it” (Mamdani, 2002). The prominent use of such identification cards began to sow the earliest seeds of tension among the population, making “the divisions in society…more pronounced, with the Hutu discriminated against in all walks of life” (Melvern, 2000).
Belgian imperialism explicitly benefited and favored the Tutsi over the Hutu. As the academic concept of Eugenics spread across the world, the Belgians sought to use phrenology as a physical indicator of the differences between the Hutu and Tutsi; these pseudoscientific studies alleged the Tutsis to be of Caucasian (white European) ancestry, given their ostensibly taller stature, lighter skin, and larger skulls (André, 2018). The Tutsi were considered superior to the Hutu by the Belgian ruling class, who “subject[ed] Hutus to forced labor under Tutsi supervision” and deliberately increased opportunities for Tutsi leaders to gain power (André, 2018). Access to education— and consequently, prominent careers in Rwandan society— became reserved for the Christian Tutsi elite class (Melvern, 2000). The reinforcement of self-identification defining one first and foremost as a member of an ethnic group effectively defined the Hutu and Tutsi as ideological combatants against the other; “Hutu was made into a native identity and Tutsi a settler one…[the genocide] was not an ethnic, but a racial cleansing [of the] colonial settler” (Magnarella, 2002).

2.2 A Brief History of Pre-Genocide Hutu/Tutsi Hostilities

By 1957, the majority Hutus had grown weary of subjugation and exclusion from politics at the hands of both Belgian imperial leaders and the Tutsi elite. Nine Hutu scholars joined together to draft the Bahutu Manifesto, a landmark document calling for Hutu solidarity, liberation, and supremacy above the Tutsi. The Manifesto is often considered the pretext for the 1994 Genocide, simultaneously condemning the historical discrimination of Hutus by Tutsis while calling for total disenfranchisement of the Tutsi
in all relevant areas of Rwandan society and banning intermarriage between the two 
groups (Hurst, 2009). Though indeed inflammatory, the Manifesto would not lead to 
significant violence immediately following its publication.

The sudden passing of mwami (king) Mutara Rudahigwa in 1959, however, would 
change everything. Kigeli Ndahindurwa, Mutara’s half-brother, would succeed to the 
throne, shocking Belgian leaders, Hutu activists, and the Tutsi elite alike (Human Rights 
Watch, 1999). Shortly after, on the first day of November, Hutu sub-chief Dominique 
Mbonyumutwa would be attacked by a group of young, pro-monarchy Tutsis; rumors of 
the attack quickly spread, many (falsely) announcing Mbonyumutwa’s death (Gourevitch, 
1998). The attack served as the impetus for the direct conflicts between the Hutu and 
Tutsi prior to the Genocide, as, in the following weeks, Hutu protests unraveled into 
violent riots where Tutsi homes were ransacked and burned (Carney, 2013). Sensing the 
tensions, Belgian officials quickly began promoting Hutu authorities to local positions of 
power. By 1960, Colonel Guy Logiest, a powerful Belgian administrator, declared it his 
mission to “rectify the gross wrong of the colonial order he served” by staging a coup 
d’état replacing Tutsi chiefs with Hutu and intimidating midterm election participants 
into voting Hutu leaders into power (Gourevitch, 1998).

With the sudden influx of Hutu leaders in local government, Tutsi elites began to 
flee the country—among them being mwami Ndahindurwa. This period of violence and 
intimidation against the Tutsi minority would come to be known as the Hutu Revolution, 
which would culminate in the ousting of the Tutsi monarchy in 1960 and, ultimately, 
Rwandan independence from Belgium in 1962 (Human Rights Watch, 1999).
Independence in practice was functionally indistinguishable from pre-independence Rwandan society, except now, Hutu leaders were in charge, pushing Tutsi civilians and officials into exile; Gourevitch quotes historian V.S. Naipaul to describe the behavior of the Hutu government as “‘postcolonial mimic men,’ who reproduce the abuses against which they [once] rebelled” (Gourevitch, 1998). President Grégoire Kayibanda implemented a quota system in the public sector, allocating only 9% of available positions and jobs for Tutsi applicants, further pushing them out of Rwandan society (Holocaust Memorial Day Trust). In 1963, exiled Tutsi living in nearby Burundi attempted a retaliatory attack on Kayibanda’s regime; though they were disarmed before reaching the capital of Kigali, the attempted insurrection provided Kayibanda with fodder and apparent justification to mount attacks on tens of thousands of Tutsi still living in Rwanda (Prunier, 1997). The next year, Kayibanda would threaten the Tutsi in a national speech, proclaiming that if any Tutsi ever sought political power again, they “may well find that the whole Tutsi race will be wiped out” (Rwandan Stories). Kayibanda’s ominous messages grew to become concerning to the entire population, however; by 1973, General Juvénal Habyarimana led a non-violent coup aiming to restore Rwandan unity, which thrust him into the role of the presidency (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

Habyarimana’s administration indeed resulted in a slight decrease in violence against the Tutsi, though at the expense of Rwandan liberty. The new president established a single-party regime that verged on totalitarianism—“Rwandans of whatever age were automatically members of the party…Habyarimana constructed a cohesive monolith, with himself as president of the republic and the party” (Human
Rights Watch, 1999). Outright, systemic targeting of Tutsi individuals lessened during this time, but Hutu extremism grew in the confines of the government. Habyarimana’s wife Agathe and many of her close family members and associates were among those comprising the “little house”, or akazu, an informal circle of extremist elites who sought to influence the regime; later, the akazu would be found to include many influential and destructive actors who contributed to the 1994 genocide (Somerville, 2014).

Habyarimana’s single-party rule would last until 1990, at which point pressure from both Bretton-Woods Institutions like the World Bank, as well as the government of France (Habyarimana’s longtime ally and funder), forced “[the end of] one-party rule in the country” which left the government “splintered into several competing parties” (Lyons and Straus, 2006).

In October of 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a coalition of Tutsi refugees to Uganda, invaded Kigali, marking the start of the Rwandan Civil War. The resulting struggle led to a mass of internally displaced people (IDPs) to the northern side of the city, which would serve as “prime recruiting grounds for those who organized militias” like the RPF (Newbury, 1998). As the RPF continued to engage in guerilla-style warfare against Habyarimana’s army, the president felt pressure to negotiate a peace agreement; by 1993, the Arusha Accords, named after the Tanzanian city the agreement was signed in, brokered a purported plan for peace between the RPF and Habyarimana’s regime (University of Minnesota). Extremist Hutus, including many members of the akazu, saw the Accords as an affront to self-determination, and “were afraid that the Tutsi, who had long been persecuted, would respond in kind if given the chance again to
“govern” (Power, 2002). Many such extremists took it upon themselves to prepare for war; records from 1992 reveal a consolidated total of approximately 581,000 machetes by the Hutu Power militants, and anti-Habyarimana sentiment began to run rampant (Power, 2002).

Due slightly in part to his negotiation of the Accords and slightly in part to the economic crises afflicting the country, Habyarimana’s popularity took a sharp decline in 1992. To maintain a semblance of a hold on the populace, Habyarimana took the decreasing export prices affecting Rwanda’s economy and blamed the economy on the Tutsi (McQue, 2019). When civilians showed fear in response to news of brutal RPF attacks, Habyarimana linked the Tutsi to the battles and conflict. Critical to his propaganda was the use of the state-owned radio station, the Radio-Television Libre des Milles Collines (RTLM); in regions where the literacy rates were especially low, citizens tuned in en masse to hear aural proselytism against the Tutsi (Kellow and Steeves, 1998). The station espoused genocidal beliefs before ever escalating to calls to action, utilizing specific language in RTLM broadcasts to hide dehumanizing rhetoric in layman’s terms (DJs referring to Tutsi with the term inyezi, meaning ‘cockroach’) (Roozen and Schulman, 2014). In addition to the views championed by the station itself, political figures were featured to perpetuate hatred against the Tutsi. Leon Mugesera, the Vice President of the incumbent Hutu party, gave a chilling speech to the Rwandan people, broadcast far and wide by RTLM. “Why,” he asked, “don’t we seize those parents who sent their children and exterminate them… seize all those who bring them and exterminate them all?” (Fletcher, 2014). Despite the Arusha Accords purporting to
provide for a future of peace and inclusion between the Hutu and Tutsi, disdain, hatred, and prejudice perpetuated throughout Rwandan society, laying the framework for the 100 days of terror and barbarity that was the Rwandan Genocide.

2.3 A Timeline of the Rwandan Genocide

On the morning of April 6th, 1994, an airplane carrying both Habyarimana and the Hutu president of Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira, was shot down over Kigali. Both men died in the ensuing crash, the cause of which remains unknown to this day. The death of the Hutu president served as a de facto “starting gun” for the genocide, as RTLM broadcasts announcing the crash immediately made a scapegoat of the Tutsi and blamed the group for Habyarimana’s assassination. Militant Hutu Power dissidents gathered names of prominent Tutsi politicians who rose to positions of power following the Arusha Accords, which were announced over the radio alongside calls to violence against them (“you cockroaches must know you are made from flesh… we will kill you”) (Gourevitch, 1998). By midnight of the 6th, militia leaders had established roadblocks on the streets leading in and out of Kigali. Mass murders would commence the following day, indiscriminately and ruthlessly. Phillip Gourevitch described the killings as cases where “Neighbors hacked neighbors to death in their homes, and colleagues hacked colleagues to death in their workplace. Doctors killed their patients, and schoolteachers killed their pupils. Within days [many] Tutsi populations…were all but eliminated… Throughout Rwanda, mass rape and looting accompanied the slaughter.”
The Interahamwe (a powerful Hutu paramilitary organization) killing ten UN peacekeepers only escalated the violence, prompting a quick withdrawal of foreigners not affiliated with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) from the region (Melvern, 2000). The Belgian government, which had allocated the greatest number of troops to serve as peacekeepers within UNAMIR, sought to withdraw from the mission, though UNAMIR commander Roméo Dallaire immediately stressed the dire situation to the Security Council, requesting additional assistance and a broad expansion of the mission’s mandate. In response, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali made clear the United Nation’s rather isolationist approach, stating that the body “had no stomach” to intervene further regarding either of the general’s requests (Barnett, 2002). Boutros-Ghali further threatened to withdraw UNAMIR completely—a move championed not only by Belgium but the United States as well—unless a ceasefire was successfully negotiated by the following month (Dallaire, 2005). Dallaire continued to maintain communications throughout the remainder of the crisis between UNAMIR and the United Nations headquarters despite the mission’s depleted force and apparent lack of support from its overarching body. The first blatantly genocidal action would occur on April 9th, however, when hundreds of Tutsi in the Pallottine Missionary Church were exclusively targeted and massacred (Rosenberg, 2020). Hutu extremists would spend the month of April mercilessly murdering Tutsi wherever they went, as well as moderate-leaning Hutu and political rivals of various ethnicities. Militias banded together to carry out killings on foot, looted homes, and or waited at roadblocks to identify any travelers along the road; the identification cards that once served only as a direct reminder of
Belgian imperialism became a tool of genocide, anyone with a Tutsi identity card was killed on sight. Despite general disparities in the number of individuals killed in various provinces, the expressed goal of the Interahamwe was to eliminate every single Tutsi in the country (Prunier, 1997). As the militias continued to push through Rwanda, however, they began to kill moderate Hutus—those who would not participate in the slaughter or join the militias when recruited, or those found to be hiding Tutsi families or otherwise aiding their survival. Therefore, the total number of Rwandans killed during the genocide (1,000,000 people) includes the massacred Tutsi and Hutu (RefWorld, 2001).

Facing little domestic opposition outside the RPF, and given that UNAMIR peacekeepers were barred from forcible action outside of self-defense, the Interahamwe appear to have free rein to pursue its planned atrocities. Furthermore, the United Nations continually refrained from referring to the crisis as a genocide, as the use of the word (according to the 1948 Genocide Convention) would require state intervention in the conflict (United Nations, 1948). With essentially one active oppositional force chasing the Interahamwe at its heels and a practically non-existent semblance of international support, Rwanda was left “to its fate” (Gourevitch, 2016)

Luckily, the RPF was gradually making small gains against the extremists. Commander Paul Kagame held fast to his goals of recapturing Kigali and overthrowing the Hutu government, refusing to accept any of Dallaire’s suggestions of a ceasefire until the violence had ended completely (Dallaire, 2005). Starting from the North in Byumba, Kagame led the RPF south, slowly reclaiming cities where the violence had ceased, oftentimes solely because all of the known Tutsi in the region were thought to have been
(or were) killed. The RPF took over cities by cutting off crucial supply lines to the militias, resorting to violence at times; meanwhile, Kagame steadfastly sought to recruit new fighters, raiding cities to save any survivors or Burundian refugees to join the Front.

By June of 1994, the RPF had almost fully surrounded Kigali and spent much of the month fighting the interim Hutu leadership for control. Dallaire reported Kagame’s success in exploiting the military’s focus on the genocide over the protection of the city, calling him “a master of psychological warfare” (Dallaire, 2005). It was on July 4th that the RPF would successfully regain control of Kigali, taking back Gisenyi two weeks later; Hutu leaders and generals then fled the government’s temporary home base into the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Interahamwe violence had eliminated ten percent of Rwanda’s population, and the exodus of exiled Hutu militia members accounted for 30% of the state’s remaining citizenry (Rucyahana, 2007).

The immediate aftermath was far from peaceful. Due to the mass flight of Hutus into the DRC, génocidaire refugee camps were established along the state’s borders; the RPF, seeking to prevent a resurgence of genocidal violence, invaded across the border in 1996 and 1998— such incursions led to the First and Second Congo Wars. Domestically, Rwandan society was left in utter shambles following the 100 days of violence; most buildings (both public and private) had been sacked and destroyed, local infrastructure was damaged, the population had decreased in total by 40%, and survivors were traumatized, injured, or suffered a myriad of long-term effects following 100 days of extreme violence and rape (Radio Netherlands, 1995). The RPF’s pursuit of justice was
stringent and inefficient. Kagame’s government immediately announced its intent to prosecute all participants in the genocide, though the events of 1994 severely depleted the legal system’s human and infrastructural capacity to do so. By 1999, almost 125,000 people were still being detained by the government awaiting trial, though only 30% of pre-genocide Rwanda’s attorneys remained alive, in the country, or continuing to practice (Boctor, 2009). While the government implemented supplemental courts to alleviate the backlogged legal system, the United Nations was establishing a tribunal to try the ringleaders of the atrocities. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) was formally established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 955 at the end of 1994; the Tribunal would be housed in Arusha, Tanzania, with jurisdiction to try cases of genocide, Geneva Convention violations, and other crimes against humanity (Human Rights Watch, 1999). 96 leaders would be indicted before the body completed its charter in 2016.

July 4th became known as Kwibohora, Liberation Day, and is celebrated yearly to commemorate the RPF’s victory in Kigali and the effective ending of the 100 days of violence (Republic of Rwanda, 2020). Kagame served as a de facto leader following the genocide, but assumed the presidency formally in 2000 and has led the country since. It has been almost 30 years since the violence ceased, and much debate and scholarship has gone towards understanding the reasons why the genocide occurred, what can be learned from the events of 1994, and the implications of the event in international history. The literature surrounding survivors, the general aftermath, and those most impacted by the crisis often focuses on adults, or more recently on the now-adult
children born of genocidal rape at the hands of the *Interahamwe*; the extent to which research focuses on teenage survivors, to say nothing of the literature’s focus on their career endeavors, is much lesser in comparison—admittedly, this information is difficult to acquire, given the massive death toll of the crisis and the niche focus group in question. Still, such information may be extrapolated and shall be detailed below.

2.4 Surviving to Educate: Stories of Rwandan Genocide Survivors

This section of the chapter will evaluate the literature surrounding the experiences of teenage survivors of the Rwandan Genocide in the context of the aforementioned history of the crisis. In Chapter 1, I have already briefly summarized the findings of my research; here, I will elaborate on the literature and provide an in-depth view of the information to study them in the context of the Genocide itself. This will be concluded by a brief analysis of the findings in terms of my guiding question of whether there are connections to be drawn between the careers pursued by those who have experienced political crises during their adolescent years.

When I first began researching the Genocide, the first (and only) group I originally sought to study were the Tutsi; a thesis focused on the impact of political turmoil on a future career should, I thought, reflect the experiences of those directly impacted by the event itself. In pursuit of research focused on teenage Tutsi survivors, I was able to uncover the heartbreaking stories of Consolee Nishimwe, Imaculée Ilibagiza, and Frida Umuhoza. All three of these individuals suffered immense brutalities during their youth, and all of them have since pursued careers in advocacy, education, and
healing. Both Nishimwe and Umuhoza were 14 years old when the Genocide began, but the two girls’ stories could not have been more different.

Umuhoza recalled her 18-person family hiding in her grandfather’s house in early May of 1994; they were approximately a two-hour-long drive from Kigali, and her family had begun to accept their fate. When the militia stormed the house, Umuhoza’s family was ordered out to the yard, where each person was forced to choose the tool with which the Interahamwe would kill them: “you had a choice between a spear, a club, a machete, or a knife… in my village, to be shot, you had to pay. They said we were too cheap for a bullet” (UN News Centre, 2016). Before being clubbed in the head, one of the last things Umuhoza was able to see was her mother’s beheading at the hands of the militia (Mbugua, 2019). She did not know how long she had been unconscious, but she woke up to feel herself being buried alive alongside her family; Umuhoza waited for hours until the militiamen left before screaming for help, at which point a neighboring couple helped her escape her impromptu grave; she was the only surviving member of her entire family (UN News Centre, 2016). Umuhoza continued to face minor acts of violence by various other militia members until her town was liberated by the RPF (Kwibuka26, 2020). Now, Umuhoza lives in Australia with her husband and children, working as an author and advocacy speaker across the world. She has written two memoirs, *Frida: Chosen to Die... Destined to Live* and *In the School of Resilience*, both of which detail not only her survival but her journey with religion and forgiveness (About the Author). While her books discuss her faith and her experience during the genocide, her work as an anti-genocide advocate seeks to educate the world on the dangers of ignoring genocidal
rhetoric. She has spoken at the United Nations, various non-profit organizations focused on international politics and conflict prevention, as well as numerous Holocaust memorial sites across the globe. Umuhoza consistently espouses the importance of forgiveness in her advocacy work, referring to it as “a gift I need[ed] to give myself… the only thing you are in control of”; she hopes that by both increasing education surrounding genocide as well as calling for mutual understanding, respect, and forgiveness, a world without such violence and hatred can be possible (In Conversation with Clayton, 2020).

Consolee Nishimwe, on the other hand, survived the 100-day Genocide with her mother and sisters hopping between various hiding spots. At 14 years old, Nishimwe recalled experiencing discrimination as a Tutsi before the violence even began, describing the RTLM broadcasts she heard calling her and so many other Tutsis “cockroaches and snakes, explaining how they were going to kill [Tutsis] (Africa Renewal, 2013). Upon hearing the announcements of Habyarimana’s death and the mass calls to action over the radio, Nishimwe’s family packed their belongings and hid for three months. Nishimwe’s father was the first to be killed before her brothers died at the hands of the militia as well. The women in her family were lucky to survive with their lives, but still suffered at the hands of the Interahamwe; after watching them kill the men in her family and burn down her childhood home, Nishimwe recalled the militia taking turns raping and torturing the women they came across— herself among them (Africa Renewal, 2013). Because of the sexual abuse she faced, Nishimwe contracted HIV at the age of 14. The women in her family survived the remaining weeks of the Genocide by hiding in the ceilings and basements of nearby homes, where they were forced to stay silent as they heard militia
members ruthlessly slaughter the homeowners and celebrate their deaths (Local Legacies, 2014). As a victim of genocidal rape herself, Nishimwe became keenly aware of the role that gender seemed to play in the carrying out of the violence; she had seen firsthand her own male family members die at the hands of the militia, and while she and her sisters fled from the Interahamwe on foot, she noticed how it was often women and young children who were left alive in homes across her town who took in her family to shelter them, who rescued her and nursed her back to health following her assault (Local Legacies, 2014). Her family was sheltered by neighbors until the RPF liberated Kigali, at which point she, her mother, and her sisters had to find some way to return to a normal life. It was having these female role models with her that Nishimwe said allowed her to process her grief and move past the experience; being able to speak with her remaining family members about the pain they collectively endured made Nishimwe recognize how powerful speech could be to facilitate growth. She began to speak to and with other survivors, feeling that she “needed to keep talking about what happened, so those who cannot yet speak about their experiences… can hear their own story through [her]” (Local Legacies, 2014). At age 24, ten years later, Nishimwe moved to New York City, where she wrote her memoir Tested to the Limit: A Genocide Survivor’s Story of Pain, Resilience, and Hope (Degroot, 2021). In her book, she details her process of healing, stressing the importance of mental health counseling as well as the strong support system she created with the female survivors in her life; her continuous advocacy against genocide is intrinsically linked to her outspoken support of women’s rights and activism against sexual violence. Her experience of the Genocide was bipartite: not only did
Nishimwe witness the brutal killings most commonly attributed to the act of genocide, but she also came to recognize the role that gender played in determining the specific acts of violence inflicted upon herself and hundreds of other women. It was women who were raped by the militia members, it was sexual violence that was used as a tool of both genocide and the patriarchy, and it became Nishimwe’s goal to advocate for women’s rights, genocide survivors, and assault prevention. Since publishing her memoir, Nishimwe has served as a panelist at dozens of American universities (including Yale, Georgetown, and Marquette), a keynote speaker for the United Nations, and a collaborator with the Genocide Survivors Foundation (Degroot, 2014). Nishimwe’s perseverance and advocacy earned her several accolades, such as winning the Study of African American Life and History Living Legacy Award in 2013 and being named one of 50 Global Heroes for her work against sexual violence by the Together for Girls Organization (Women’s Media Center). Throughout her career in activism and education, Nishimwe has felt “obligated, like other social activists, to contribute… to stop these horrible deeds”, believing that “[her] voice, in [her] capacity as a survivor” should be used to prevent harm and inspire hope in others that the world can be a better place (Africa Renewal, 2013). Keeping in mind her personal mantra, “losing hope is the beginning of your own self-defeat”, Nishimwe has, like Umuhoza, taken the pain she experienced and channeled her energy toward speaking out to change the world (Local Legacies, 2014).

Immaculée Ilibagiza is another young woman who, like Nishimwe and Umuhoza, pursued a career in advocacy and education inspired by the atrocities she survived. A 24-
year-old studying engineering at the National University of Rwanda, Ilibagiza had returned to her hometown in western Rwanda for Easter when the Genocide began. She had grown up a devout Catholic, and as the violence spread following Habyarimana’s assassination, Ilibagiza accepted a rosary from her father as he urged her to take shelter with a kind Hutu pastor in their village; on April 15th, eight women including Ilibagiza quietly huddled together in a 3x4-foot bathroom where they would hide for the remainder of the 100-day Genocide (Imaculée). For 91 days, the women had no contact with their families or anyone outside of the small bathroom. Ilibagiza’s anxiety and uncertainty turned to anger, which began to ebb as she began to pray daily on her father’s rosary; using a bible and a dictionary, she began to teach herself English (Hoffman, 2019). The women shared the 12-square-foot bathroom for almost three months before the RPF arrived in Kigali. On July 4th, 1994, Ilibagiza escaped her hiding spot to find her country in ruins and learn her family was dead. During the 91 days, she had lost 40 pounds, and doctors feared for her survival; Ilibagiza slowly regained her health, though two of the other women died shortly after (Hoffman, 2019). Before emigrating to the United States in 1998 to pursue a career with the United Nations, Ilibagiza met the man she learned had murdered her mother. Having devoted her time in hiding to prayer, she greeted him with kindness, telling him she forgave him (Imaculée). As was the case with Umuhoza, Ilibagiza struggled in her faith to find the courage to forgive, saying “how can I hate

1 There is an unknown number of Hutus who were known to have “resisted demands by the state military and local militias to deliver Tutsis over for the slaughter” and helped them instead (Rothbart, 2016). An overwhelming majority of interviewed Hutus known to have helped save the lives of persecuted Tutsi were devoutly religious, much like Ilibagiza’s pastor. Other instances where Hutus helped save Tutsis often occurred involved neighbors or family friends.
what they do and want to do the same? Do I want to be Hitler or Mandela?” (Hoffman, 2019). In a way, this same sense of forgiveness might also be recognized in her acceptance of a position with the United Nations— the same international body that largely ignored the violence ravaging her home, she now sought to work with to advocate against genocide. While in New York, Ilibagiza wrote her survival story in Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust, which quickly became a New York Times best-selling autobiography and inspired a documentary, “The Diary of Immaculée” (Cook). Her autobiography launched her career as an author, writing about peace, genocide prevention, her Catholic faith, and the power of forgiveness. Her activism against genocide has earned her dozens of awards, including several honorary doctorate degrees, the 2015 National Speaker’s Association’s Master of Influence Award, and the Mahatma Gandhi International Award for Reconciliation and Peace (Immaculée). In 2007, Left to Tell was adapted into a play entitled “Miracle in Rwanda”, which was performed at the United Nations for the 25th anniversary of the Genocide (Hoffman, 2019). Dubbed by many “the Rwandan Anne Frank”, Ilibagiza has dedicated her life to promoting peace, forgiveness, and her belief that “there is a potential in every human being- in the worst person- … to be an angel” (Poverty Cure, 2011).

It was during my research of survivors like Ilibagiza, Umuhoza, and Nishimwe that I realized that focusing only on the victims of the Genocide would not tell a complete story, would not truly describe how living through genocide might influence one’s life—much less their future job; the effects of the Rwandan Genocide were felt not only by those who endured violence but by those who perpetuated it as well. After all, before the
Interahamwe grew to become the largest paramilitary group responsible for the mass killings, the group began as the youth sector of Habyarimana’s political party, the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (Iaroslavtsec, 2018). Unsurprisingly, due to the size of the group and the combined intensity and relative brevity of the Genocide, there exists little if any literature on the future career paths of former Hutu génocidaires. What is known is that only 41 individuals were ever convicted by the ICTR, and despite domestic efforts to charge offenders, an overwhelming majority of those responsible for the direct carrying-out of the Genocide faced few legal consequences (Iaroslavtsec, 2018). Even despite the lack of research on the careers of former teen perpetrators, I would be remiss to exclude the findings of the literature that does exist that details the beliefs and philosophies of the surviving génocidaires. While no specific numbers are known, it is understood that a majority of those recruited by the Interahamwe were young men, often living in poverty; it is also unclear just how many of these men willingly joined the militias, as intimidation tactics and violence were often used against them when enlisting new recruits (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

In some cases, certain individuals continued to perpetrate harm against the Tutsi. Following the RPF’s victory in Kigali, some Hutu militia leaders fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Having raised families there, often alongside Tutsi refugees, several leaders seem to have passed on their fervent Hutu Power beliefs; 53-year-old Aloize Mbanza served as a Rwandan military officer during the Genocide when he was in his early 20s, and now spends his time “indoctrinating a new Hutu generation in Congo” (McGreal, 2008). Several of these former officials wanted by both the Rwandan
government and the now-defunct ICTR continued to perpetrate atrocities against Tutsis living in the DRC, working within the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) (McGreal, 2008). Though the FDLR as a body was not directly responsible for the killings and violence in 1994, its leadership became comprised of individuals serving the Interahamwe or working for President Habyarimana before the Genocide. People like Major General Sylvestre Mudacumura and Colonel Faustin Sebuhura “oversaw the massacre of about 50,000 Tutsis” (McGreal, 2008). Though certainly a concerning organization in the early 2000s, the FDLR no longer poses as severe a threat to Rwandan national sovereignty or the Tutsi living in the DRC; attempted invasions into Rwanda at the turn of the 20th Century were upended by the Rwandan government, and in 2015, the organization was found to have less than 1,500 combatants left—only those who refused to comply with Congolese officials ordering the group to disarm remain (Global Security, 2015). Ultimately, international consensus agrees that “the FDLR should be seen …as the embodiment of the legacy of the genocide in Rwandan press and government discourse” (Stys, 2014). Again, it is notable that as far as it pertains to this thesis, the actions of these militant ex-génocidaires are demonstrations of their personal beliefs that are not reflected through their choice of vocation, the two things that this body of work seeks to connect. Furthermore, there is little information detailing what age FDLR authorities were when they participated in the 1994 Genocide; scholars suggest that a handful of individuals involved with the killings would have been in their early 20s at the time, though a substantial majority of those perpetrating the violence would have been adults. Finally, it is critical to acknowledge that the FDLR is made up of a small number of former teenage
génocidaires, and their adult involvement in perpetuating violence cannot accurately represent the actions or beliefs of all of the then-teenaged perpetrators.

Contrarily, there is more literature detailing the healing processes and guilt experienced by perpetrators of the violence. As stated, it is unclear how many individuals were coerced into or forced to comply with the militias; a psychological study detailing the recovery process of génocidaires has identified crisis-generated traumas for both victims and perpetrators, with 13.5% of a 269-person sample of incarcerated offenders reaching the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder and 41% suffering from clinical depression, both associated with trauma exposure (Schaal, 2012). The same study further indicated a desire by the perpetrators to change and “desperately seek redemption” (Barnes-Ceeney, 2019). A similar 2019 report evaluated the “perversion of social capital” during the Genocide, a factor that drew even unwilling participants to engage in violence; through rehabilitation and re-education during a period of incarceration, the studied perpetrators all demonstrated a reformed understanding of social capital as well as of Rwandan cultural identity and community (Barnes-Ceeney, 2019). Furthermore, testimony provided by female perpetrators expresses similar sentiments of conflicted guilt and an understanding of morals and values altered by the persistent violence. Fortunate Mukankuranga, who was convicted of murder in 2007, confessed to and begged forgiveness from the children of two men she had slaughtered during the Genocide; one son, an adolescent at the time of the Genocide himself, embraced her and treated her with kindness, embodying the same compassionate spirit of forgiveness as many of the aforementioned survivors (Ojewska, 2020). Mukankuranga’s
time in prison appears to have truly changed her, as she promises to “live in peace… be more loving and caring about people” upon her release from prison (Ojewska, 2020). Though these studies, too, do not apply universally to all perpetrators, they offer valuable insight into the lives led by some perpetrators as they’ve grown and matured.

When evaluating the case study, on the whole, several things are immediately notable. First, there appears to be some link between some survivors’ experiences in their adolescence with the successes they have achieved through their advocacy work. All of the subjects assessed in this case study have gone on to become authors and genocide prevention advocates. Two have been influenced by and continue to promote their faith in their career, and another two were direct victims of genocidal violence. Other, older survivors surely experienced fame in similar career pursuits; hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina attained international fame for housing hundreds of Tutsis fleeing Interahamwe violence in the Hôtel des Mille Collines, while others shared their own stories of everyday survival, like Denise Uwimana in her memoir *From Red Earth* (Gretener, 2019). A coalition of graduate student survivors organized Groupe des Anciens Etudiants Rescapés du Génocide (GAERG), a center to offer psychological assistance and career counseling to adult survivors after polls demonstrated significant rates of clinical depression amongst 35% of Rwandan adults (Rwampera, 2019). A similar organization, Association des Etudiants et Eleves Rescapes du Genocide (AERG), provides those same services to those who were young children or orphans during the outbreak of violence (AERG). Some survivors were barely old enough to remember the crisis, like Gadi Habumugisha, who was two years old in April of 1994; growing up in an
orphanage with an affinity for art, Habumugisha would grow up to lead the photography initiative Through the Eyes of Children, which offers children a way to express themselves and tell stories of their traumas through art (Haynes, 2019). Other child survivors were slightly older, and their memories have allowed them to pursue similar careers. Jacqueline Murekatete was nine years old during the Genocide, one year too young to be included under this thesis’s working definition of “adolescence”, and grew up to establish the Genocide Survivors Foundation, which serves to advocate against genocide and provide mental, legal, financial, and educational assistance to survivors (Murekatete, 2019). The careers pursued by survivors of any age promote incredible healing and advocacy work in the world, but the work done by those who experienced the crisis in their adolescence has a resounding impact that is unique to their age group. Not too young to have forgotten or misremembered the crisis, yet not too old to risk not having enough time to tell their story, the adolescents who survived the Rwandan Genocide occupy a unique position when it comes to their advocacy work and its impact. Fully conscious of the tragedy they and their loved ones survived, those who were teenagers at the time of the Genocide were not only able to commiserate with fellow survivors, but the development of the internet during their adolescence seems it could also have lent itself well to sharing stories to others far away and curating their passions for education and advocacy. Through their chosen careers, they have been able to reach millions of people, fight for dozens of causes, and share their experiences with those who don’t know of the tragedy or those who cannot share their own. Most importantly, their youth (as well as, in some cases, their faith) seems to have allowed them to retain a sense
of optimism and hope at the prospect of a better world in the future; not too young to be ignorant or too old to be jaded, the survivors in this case study have been able to successfully teach themselves to hope, effectively reach others, and foster that same belief in the hearts and minds of millions in the aim of achieving a non-violent world.

When it comes to the perpetrators, the values and beliefs one may extrapolate from the available literature appear to differ at times. Some experienced mental distress and prayed for redemption upon reflection of their crimes, while others continue to harbor ethnically-motivated hatred from afar. When compared to the studies of surviving victims, whose career paths and values appear much more cohesive, it is hard to make a definitive statement about the impact of the genocide (and a perpetrator’s role in it) on the future careers or beliefs of those who committed the acts. It must again be stressed that this deficiency comes from the lack of available literature on the topic, and such a statement would be fairly speculative in nature. Further, it might seem fairly natural for groups of people impacted by such a traumatic event to focus their careers in the field of advocacy, especially compared to populations that have not directly experienced such a phenomenon. This case study was chosen to distinguish a direct link between the experiences of teen Rwandan Genocide survivors and their choice of career, a link which, while seemingly logical, is undoubtedly clear. Criticisms of these aspects of this chapter, while valid, are reserved for future analysis.
Chapter 3: “He Tweets, We March”: A Study of Donald Trump’s Presidency in the United States

The next case this thesis shall be analyzing will be the United States of America, during Donald Trump’s tenure as President from 2016 until 2020. Not only is this case markedly more recent (at the time of this writing) than the other case studies being evaluated, but the turmoil experienced during this administration differs in several critical ways. The policies, ideologies, and rhetoric advanced throughout the Trump administration (which shall be described in depth in this subsequent chapter) were especially multifaceted, involving both foreign and domestic affairs and causing outcry among dozens of sectors and factions in America. When compared to both the Troubles and the Genocide, there is a relative lack of physical violence both perpetuated by and targeted against one cohesive group; any violence that did occur was most often perpetrated by either the state or insurgent groups in support of Trump’s regime against various oppositional forces and movements. The violence that did occur was largely motivated by (or appeared to be emboldened by) the divisive rhetoric espoused by many authorities working under Trump’s regime. There is additionally a growing body of research pointing to systemic problems within the very foundations of the government, the notion that this presidency was a symptom, not a cause, of problems in American society (Ahmed, 2017). This chapter shall explore the campaign process, the 2016 election, and Trump’s tenure, before evaluating the reactions and planned careers of the teenagers living through his presidency. It must again be noted that given the relative recency of this administration (at the time of this writing), the nature of the data discussed
in this chapter is slightly different than the other case studies; much of the literature mentioned in this case study is based on public opinion polls and empirical estimates of continued involvement in youth activism efforts, rather than biography.

3.1 The Road to the 2016 Election

In 2016, as per the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, two-term President Barack Obama was ineligible to run for reelection (Legal Information Institute). As early as 2015, politicians in both the Democratic and Republican parties began to announce their participation in the upcoming primary elections.

Among Republicans, a record number of 17 candidates sought to compete for the party nomination (Linshi, 2015). Senator Ted Cruz was first to announce that he was running in the primaries on March 23rd of 2015; senators Marco Rubio and Rand Paul followed suit in April, followed by businesswoman Carly Fiorina, surgeon Ben Carson, governors George Pataki and Mike Huckabee, and senator Rick Santorum in May, governors Rick Perry, Chris Christie, Jeb Bush, and Bobby Jindal, Senator Lindsay Graham, and businessman Donald Trump in June, and governors Scott Walker, Jim Gilmore, and John Kasich in July (Bialik, 2016). Trump’s announcement speech engendered much scrutiny; his confirmation of his intent to run came between controversial remarks referring to the United States as “a dumping ground for everyone else’s problems” and discussing immigration on the Southern border, claiming that Mexico is “sending people that have lots of problems…they're bringing drugs, they're
bringing crime, they're rapists” (C-SPAN, 2015). Such anti-immigration sentiments would go on to become a hallmark of Trump’s campaign.

Meanwhile, across the aisle, former First Lady and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced her intent to run in mid-April, closely followed in May by Senator Bernie Sanders and Governor Martin O’Malley, governor Lincoln Chafee in June, senator Jim Webb in July, and legal professor Lawrence Lessig in September (Gambino and Pankhania, 2016). Early poll results seemed to bode well for Clinton, whose extensive career in politics and tenure as First Lady during her husband Bill’s presidency in the early 1990s) afforded her name recognition and a sense of legitimacy (Coelho, 2016). During this time, Bernie Sanders consistently ranked him a close contender; despite changes in the numbers throughout early 2016, however, Clinton continued to poll the highest of the two (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Low polling numbers for many candidates from both parties prior to the Iowa Caucus in February led several hopefuls to pull out of the race entirely; 12 Republicans remained in the running while Clinton, Sanders, and O’Malley competed for the Democratic nomination (Gambino and Pankhania, 2016). In Iowa, Clinton and Sanders nearly tied, before Hillary was announced to have won by 0.3%; Ted Cruz secured Iowa over Trump by 3.3% (The New York Times, 2016). Following the caucus, O’Malley suspended his campaign, as did Santorum, Paul, and Huckabee (270toWin, 2016). The remaining primaries from March until April placed Clinton and Sanders in a close race for the nomination; following the last primary in Washington, D.C., Clinton secured the nomination with 2,814 delegates of a required 2,383 to Sanders’s 1,893 (Bloomberg,
Days later, Sanders officially announced his endorsement of Clinton, the first woman to receive a presidential nomination for a major American political party (Foran, 2016). While the Democratic primaries continued through June, Cruz and Kasich’s campaign suspensions in May designated Trump the presumed Republican candidate (Collinson, 2016). Clinton and Trump would go head to head in November for the office of the presidency.

Trump’s poll rates differed drastically from Clinton’s on the road to the primaries, fluctuating as high as 45% and low as 29% (Real Clear Politics, 2016). The inflammatory statements espoused in his announcement speech marked the beginning of a tendentious campaign full of dog-whistles and bigotry. During the first Republican debate, moderator Megyn Kelly questioned Trump on past misogynistic statements he had made, including jabs at Rosie O’Donnell calling her a “fat pig” and Hillary Clinton, saying “if [she] can’t satisfy her husband, what makes her think she can satisfy America?”; later, Trump would go on to say Kelly’s temperament was due to “blood coming out of her wherever” (Gambino and Pankhania, 2016). In a 2016 debate, Trump openly bragged about his own genitalia, shortly before invalidating allegations of sexual assault by his campaign manager and hinting that women seeking abortions deserve “some form of punishment” (Gambino and Pankhania, 2016). In October, a 2005 audio recording of Trump casually describing sexual misconduct came to light; he brushed off the statements as “locker-room talk” (Pennington, 2016). Various other statements were made through the course of his campaign, ranging from mocking a physically disabled reporter at a rally to calling for an immigration ban on Muslims and encouraging Black voters to support him by
saying “you’re living in poverty, your schools are no good, you have no jobs, 58 percent of your youth is unemployed. What the hell do you have to lose?” (Freeman, 2016).

While Clinton chose center-left Virginia senator Tim Kaine as her Vice President, Trump came under fire for his selection of Indiana Governor Mike Pence, a staunch conservative who advanced anti-LGBTQ+ legislation during his tenure in Indiana (Stack, 2016). Yet, Trump’s appalling statements and constant activity on Twitter kept his press coverage high; he appeared to use this as a campaign tactic, embodying the notion that “all press is good press”.

The Presidential debates revealed even more about Trump’s character and intended presidential platform. During the primaries, a scandal regarding Clinton’s use of a personal email address during her tenure as Secretary of State came to light, which Trump referenced throughout both the debates and his campaign; declassified FBI documents revealed no criminal intent in the act (Parker, 2016). Clinton used the debate to further expose the rampant misogyny, racism, and xenophobia in Trump’s statements during and before the campaign; Trump refused to shake hands with Clinton, lurking behind her throughout the debates (Gambino and Pankhania, 2016). The final debate led to much uncertainty after Trump ambiguously suggested that he’d “keep [the country] in suspense” when asked if he’d concede should he lose (Gambino and Pankhania, 2016).

3.2 The 2016 Election

The process by which presidents are elected in the United States was the result of a long and arduous process in the early days of the country’s history. Thirteen colonies
were established along the country’s northeastern coast in the 1600s, which the King subjected to economic policies of “salutary neglect”\textsuperscript{2} until the government’s war debt prompted him to levy taxes on the colonists to pay it off. Such “taxation without representation” led to an outcry amongst the colonists, who fought against England for independence and sought to form a new government (National Constitution Center, 2021). The first attempt to establish a system of governance, the Articles of Confederation, set up a weak regime that lacked an executive authority. Ultimately, the United States Constitution was written, which outlined the government structure as it exists today; the document established the Electoral College, in which states would be internally divided into districts represented by electors proportional to the population who cast votes reflecting the cotes of the citizens to elect a president reflecting the votes of the citizens (Beeman, 2009). This, in turn, would distinguish the popular vote— the total number of votes cast by eligible voters across the entire country— from electoral votes— those cast by the electors. Of 538 electoral votes available, a candidate would need at least 270 to win. Since the ratification of the Constitution, this system has been used to elect the President of the United States; there have only been only five instances of candidates winning the popular vote that lost the electoral vote, including the Election of 2016 (Edwards, 2019).

By November 8th of 2016, media coverage of both candidates’ campaigns had been extensive, and nearly every polling organization in the country predicted a Clinton

\textsuperscript{2} This policy had been described as the English government administering “appointments to overseas, salaried position slots ranged from revenue collectors in various ports to military advisory positions and judges in the imperial courts…[though he] never actually visited…to check economic, social, or political conditions” (Perkins, 2012)
win; Spreadex Trading’s fixed-odds the night of the election reported Clinton’s projected
electoral vote range from 307-322 compared to Trump’s projected 216-231 (Spreadex
Trading, 2016). In a shocking departure from projections, Trump secured 304 electoral
votes to Hillary’s 227, largely due to his acquisition of key “swing” states (Ives, 2020).
As stated prior, Clinton won the popular vote by almost 3,000,000 votes (Federal
Election Commission, 2017). Given her loss in the race despite attaining the popular vote,
many politicians called for a reevaluation of the country’s electoral system, with some
supporting its complete elimination (LoBianco, 2016). The miscalculations of polling
institutions prompted many to call their beliefs in the American electoral system into
question, as did Trump’s oft-quoted allegations of “fake news” perpetuated by social
media and news websites (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Later investigations would
allege and corroborate foreign interference in the election by the Russian government
through social media in an effort to breed further hostilities in American politics and
sabotage Clinton’s campaign (United States Senate, 2020).

A businessman and television star with zero experience in government, Trump’s
platform centered around conservative talking points, and he unified his voter base
through rallies and merchandise that became synonymous with his campaign: a red
baseball cap emblazoned with his iconically jingoistic campaign slogan, “Make America
Great Again” (Spodak, 2017). Chief among his campaign promises were plans to repeal
the Obama-era Affordable Care Act, heavily restrict immigration and build a wall along
the Mexican border, ban gun-free areas in schools, cut taxes, and strengthen law
enforcement in the wake of an epidemic of police brutality (Ballotpedia).
3.3 The Trump Administration, 2016 - 2020

By the time he lost the 2020 election to former Vice President Joe Biden, Trump had only accomplished a handful of these promises. Using the power of the executive order, he signed off on two orders referred to as the “Muslim Ban”, which restricted immigration of individuals from several Middle Eastern countries\(^3\) and indefinitely barred travel from Syria (Federal Register, 2017). E.O.13767 authorized the construction of his infamous border wall, the costs of which Trump had promised his base that Mexico would foot; the federal government shut down in late 2018 as he unsuccessfully demanded millions of dollars to finance its creation, which never came to fruition (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2017). Additionally, Trump left the Paris Agreement climate treaty, confirmed the appointment of three right-wing judges to the Supreme Court with an aim to reverse the landmark decision *Roe v. Wade*\(^4\), signed off on a gag bill restricting government financing of non-governmental organizations seeking to provide reproductive health services, and passed a bill revoking Obama-era gun control policies (Garrett, 2017). Along the border, Trump enacted a “zero tolerance” policy mandating legal action against all cases of undocumented immigration; in cases where families were caught crossing the border, parents were arrested and their children were taken into the custody of the state (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2022). During an

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\(^3\) E.O. 13769, the original “Muslim Ban”, was replaced by E.O. 13780, which expanded the list of countries from strictly those in the Middle East to include countries in Africa and Southeast Asia, as well as Venezuela.

\(^4\) As of May 2022, a draft decision of the Court revealed a possibility for *Roe* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (reaffirming the right to access birth control) to be overturned (Gerstein and Ward, 2022).
uptick in racially-motivated hate crimes, Trump directly encouraged the use of force by law enforcement and “prioritized investigation of ‘black identity extremists’ [engaging in] premeditated, retaliatory lethal violence” (Venook, 2020). The extent of Trump’s authoritative incompetence was arguably most palpable throughout his final year in office when the COVID-19 pandemic took the entire world by storm. When the first known cases of the virus were reported in early 2020, Trump immediately downplayed its severity, falsely proclaiming a sense of control over the outbreak (Rutledge, 2020). In reality, he failed to secure strengthened supply chains to ensure sufficient amounts of masks, leaving American hospitals inundated with patients yet lacking protective equipment (SSCC, 2021). Eleven days after the World Health Organization identified the outbreak as a pandemic, the United States reached 10,000 cases of the illness, the most of any other country at the time (Iati, et al, 2020). As case numbers rose in tandem with the death toll, it became clear that Trump, afraid that bad news would tarnish the public’s view of him, made the conscious choice to mislead the country rather than maintain composure and honesty in the face of the crisis; his campaign of misinformation included but was not limited to referring to the virus with racial epithets, promoting unproven COVID treatments on social media, and undermining the authority and knowledge of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (SSCC, 2021).

Trump’s presidency ended following the 2020 election, but his tenure continues to prompt both sociological research and federal investigation. As many individuals aged 10-24 during his presidency largely remain within that age group at the time of this writing, the most available literature is comprised of polls and empirical knowledge
derived from the myriad youth activism that arose as a reaction to (or in support of) Trump’s presidency. This next section shall evaluate the impact of his presidency on American teens and postulate the possible effects it may have on their future occupations.

3.4 Impact and Inspire: Indexing the Teenage Response to Trump

When evaluating the impact of a presidential election on members of a population, it is beneficial to first analyze electoral demographics; the percentage of youth voters from 2016 will then be compared to the 2018 midterms and 2020 presidential election to assess whether political participation among the youth changed throughout the four-year term. Given that the United States’ voting age is 18, several individuals in the age group this thesis evaluates can be studied in the election’s voting demographics. An assessment of voting records by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) reveals that nearly 24 million Americans aged 18-29 participated in the 2016 election; these voters made up 19% of the total vote, 55% of whom supported Clinton while 37% voted for Trump (Tufts University, 2016). The same report also reported an increase in racial diversity among youth voters, and that young people of color largely supported Clinton by a greater margin than young whites. Census reports additionally found young voters to be the only age group demonstrating increased participation, with a 1.1% increase since 2012 (File, 2017). By the 2018 midterm elections, Brookings reports identified young voters as even more solidly supportive of Democratic candidates, reflecting an increased voter turnout since the previous midterm election; in both 2016 and 2018, youth turnout remained
fairly low (Frey, 2019). By 2020, Pew reported that though young voters affiliated less with the Democratic party than in 2018, they made up 38% of new voters and 15% of the total vote (Pew Research Center, 2021).

At the same time, many adolescents were too young to vote in these elections; despite this, Dynata polls reflect a demonstrable interest in and knowledge of politics by Americans aged 13-17 (Miller, 2021). The survey reflects a significant impact on youth political ambition by Trump and his presidency. Overall, ⅓ of the 604 surveyed teens reported low interest in running for political office— 21% felt the government did not have their interests in mind— while 50% of respondents said they became more interested (Miller, 2021). Notre Dame political scientist David Campbell noticed a heightened interest in political involvement, however, especially among teen girls and racial minorities; an “upsurge in protest activity”, mainly by Democratically-aligned teen girls, showcased how “the disillusionment, rather than driving them out of politics, pushed them into political activity” (Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2019). A similar study by the Institute of Politics at Harvard University finds 56% of the surveyed teens “hopeful about the future of America” and 36% politically active, with Black teenagers and other racial minorities the most active among them (Della Volpe, 2021). Varshini Prakash, the co-founder of the Sunrise Movement, wrote in a Medium post that “Trump’s victory has blown over the barriers between young people and political engagement… activists across the progressive landscape are throwing themselves into political organizing with enthusiasm, unlike anything we’ve seen in our lifetimes. We can’t help but see this as a
silver lining to the social and environmental catastrophe that is Trump’s presidency” (Prakash and Jaye, 2017).

Pushed into political activity American teens certainly were. Of the hundreds of issues raised by the Trump administration, several garnered significant attention from the youth. For example, Trump’s election led directly to the growth of Sunrise, a political action committee founded in 2017 advocating for progressive action on climate change. Born out of collegiate divestment leaders’ desires to center the environment in mainstream politics, Sunrise seeks to pressure politicians into supporting climate-friendly policies through protests and rallies (Meunier, 2021). Notably, 250 Sunrise activists participated in a sit-in at the Capitol in the week following the 2018 midterms, demanding tangible climate action outside Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi’s office (Schwartz, 2021). Integral to its successes (which include the election of progressive Congressmembers like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) is the structure of the movement itself; by creating local “hubs” or chapters for the movement across the country, Sunrise has gained access and provided educational tools to over one million volunteers ready to advocate for the environment (Meunier, 2021). Given that Trump’s tenure facilitated the United States’ departure from the Paris climate agreement as well as a large-scale effort to deregulate federal environmental agencies, Sunrise leaders aim to work within existing political structures to achieve comprehensive policy changes and gains (Baker, 2020). Through what Prakash herself refers to as the marriage of direct action and political organizing, the movement has shot to fame as a formidable advocate for climate activism — all thanks to the effort of politically-motivated teens.
Environmental policy is one of many issue areas of Trump’s presidency targeted by youth activists in America. Gun control, immigration, reproductive justice, systemic racism, and police brutality all became focal points of various youth movements across the country during his 4-year term. Trump’s time in office ushered in surprisingly little gun-related legislation; though his promise to ban gun-free zones never came to fruition, Trump reversed policies regulating the sale of firearm accessories throughout his first year in office (Phillips, 2018). The 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, instead, would be what pushed gun rights further into focus during his presidency. 17 people were killed during the shooting; three days later, a rally was held in Fort Lauderdale, where MSD senior X Gonzalez made an impassioned speech calling out politicians receiving financial support from the National Rifle Association (NRA) and calling “B.S.” on excuses and arguments made in favor of looser gun ownership laws (Gonzalez, 2018). Gonzalez and fellow survivors soon established Never Again MSD, a student-run political action committee working to end mass violence through gun control legislation (Witt, 2018). The PAC later organized the March for Our Lives, a demonstration in Washington D.C. following a nationwide series of school walkouts and protests; the March would go down in history as “the largest youth protest in Washington since the Vietnam War” (Witt, 2019). While the PAC’s direct protest action largely ended that year, its persistence in continuing education and advocacy for tighter gun regulations marked a departure from past responses to instances of gun violence. Where mass shootings had previously “been met with collective mourning followed by inaction”, the students behind Never Again MSD pushed hard for
legislative change⁵, which came in the form of a Florida bill strengthening statewide regulations on gun ownership and a heightened (and continued) focus on gun control in mainstream American politics (Witt, 2019).

Teens likewise showed up to protest Trump’s immigration policies and the family separations at the border. Rallies were held across the country following Trump’s enactment of Executive Order 13769 (Frandino and McGurty, 2017). Though not led by teens themselves, adolescents across the country attended, citing a sense of obligation to fight the xenophobic policies; 19-year-old Sharda Mohammed protested outside John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City, saying “nobody should be banned based on where they came from or their religion” (Savage, 2017). Individual protests also occurred, with Texas teens protesting at the state capitol during their quinceañeras (Romo, 2017). Later, in response to the 2019 separation of children from their parents, American and Mexican adolescents protested in cages at the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland (Nebehay, 2019). From January until June of that year, 2,500 children had been separated from their parents⁶, with over 13,000 in custody and 6 dying from the reportedly inhumane conditions of the Border Patrol facilities they were detained in (Nebehay, 2019). The demonstration prompted Michele Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to denounce the conditions of detention (UN News, 2019). Ultimately,

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⁵ In a departure from his campaign promises, Trump vocally supported the demands of the movement; beyond a ban on gun accessories issued in December of 2018, no substantive federal laws were passed (Shear, 2018).

⁶ Due to criticism, Trump had rolled back some of the harshest aspects of the policy in June of 2018, though the policy still remained in place (Parks, et al., 2018).
Trump’s “zero-tolerance” immigration policy would be officially reversed by President Joe Biden in January of 2021 (Ainsley and Soboroff, 2021).

Arguably the greatest instances of teens activism arose in response to Trump’s stances on women’s rights and reproductive justice as well as police brutality. Immediately following Trump’s election, a Hawaiian woman named Teresa Shook established a Facebook event for a women’s march in Washington D.C., “a peace march…that is really about protecting women's rights, human rights and the rights of the environment, which all of us should care about” (Davis, 2017). Impelled by Trump’s misogynistic statements and actions throughout the campaign process, over 600,000 people arrived in Washington the day after the inauguration to protest the new president (Waddell, 2017). Donning pink beanies and signs bearing slogans like “stop the war on women”, “keep your policies off my body”, “he tweets, we march”, and “stronger togetHER”, marchers sought to communicate a sense of unity amongst the opposition (Weber, et al, 2017). Unique to the Women’s March was its creation of the Youth Ambassador Program, established to “provide a platform of civic engagement where [young women] can make their voices heard”; with commitments to uphold principles of nonviolence, diversity, community, and respect, girls as young as 12 both attended the March and empower change in their hometowns (Pettway, 2017). Empower, they did. Speaking of the 2019 iteration of the March, 17-year-old Youth Ambassador Malakiva Kannan noted the movement’s immense power. “When I saw the Women’s March,” she said, “I finally understood: silence has never uplifted us… every time women speak up with compassion, the world is forced to listen” (Kannan, 2019). Others, like 16-year-old
Yaa Boachie, marched to make a statement: “as a whole, the youth is not taken as seriously as we could be… when you silence one generation, it doesn’t help anything” (Rosenblatt, 2019). After 2020, march attendance declined, but the movement’s momentum was sustained and pushed elsewhere—towards the polls. Women’s March Inc. launched voter registration drives for the youth as well as candidate preparation at the 2017 Women’s Convention, which played a significant role in the results of the 2018 midterms; a record-breaking number of women and racial minorities won positions in Congress, an achievement political consultant Tresa Undem attributed in some part to the march being “the first time [these politicians] felt hope” (North, 2020).

Meanwhile, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement additionally gained traction with American youths in the summer of 2020. Established in 2013 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of an African-American teenager named Trayvon Martin, the movement gained international attention for rallies against police brutality and systemic racism in the American criminal justice system; movement action generally subsided during Trump’s presidency until a series of killings in 2020 prompted national outrage (Khan-Cullors, 2016). The 2020 murders of Black Americans Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, mostly by law enforcement officers, led to massive BLM rallies across the country. A Yale University study on adolescent political involvement reported 70% of the 5,000 teens surveyed as engaged with the BLM movement in some way; while co-author Cortney Simmons noted the stress of such a movement might be thought to deter participation, she argued that “these experiences and emotions… can motivate adolescents to address the injustices they witness and
encounter in their lives” (Hathaway, 2021). Participation in BLM protests was especially high amongst African-American respondents, who were also more likely to engage with media related to the movement and experience violence while protesting when compared to their white counterparts (Baskin-Sommers, et al. 2021). American teens were also studied to have led protests themselves, independent of Black Lives Matter as an organization. A group of high schoolers in Texas organized a local rally, which they supplemented with fundraisers and educational teach-ins at their respective schools (Zaveri, 2020). 15-year-old Josh Wood drafted petitions to remove police officers from his school district in Maine, and 17-year-old Fiona Akilo Stawarz organized racial justice rallies at her high school, where she also plans to charter a Black Student Union (Gray, 2020). The movement’s end goals are two-fold, seeking not only to influence policy but to alter the discourse surrounding race in America (Dunivin, et al., 2022). In continuing to not only mobilize, but also educate, the teens involved with the Black Lives Matter movement bring it closer to achieving both every day.

At the same time, Trump’s presidency seemed to bolster some white supremacist activity among young people. In 2017, a rally of over 200 white nationalists protesting the removal of a Confederate statue in Charlottesville, Virginia, led to a riot injuring 20 and killing 1 (Spencer, 2017). This “Unite the Right” rally was organized in part by neo-Nazi Richard Spencer, who’d voiced his support for Trump as early as 2016 (Serwer, 2019). A broad study of the rally’s participants by the Anti-Defamation League found the protesters to be “overwhelmingly young and male”, though it did not articulate any of their ages (Anti-Defamation League, 2017). Trump’s response to the violence— claiming
violence on both sides of the riot while suggesting the protestors included “some very fine people” — was considered by critics to imply a tacit endorsement of white supremacist violence; having been previously endorsed by former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke, Trump’s lack of condemnation for the rally raised many red flags (Scherer and Altman, 2017). Later, in January of 2021, a rally of Trump supporters in Washington would storm the Capitol protesting election results bearing Confederate flags and Nazi apparel (Ray, 2021). Interestingly, only 10% of identified insurrectionists were between the ages of 18 and 24; an overwhelming majority of the Capitol rioters were over the age of 35 (Pape and Ruby, 2021). While Trump’s presidency largely inspired a generation of activists with self-proclaimed goals of careers in politics or social justice, it also emboldened fringe reactionaries to organize as well.

COVID-19 reshaped the nature of this activism in a major way; BLM protestors continued to take to the streets during the earliest days of the pandemic, but by and large, movements increased their social media presence to educate and raise awareness (UN Women, 2021). These teenagers are well-acquainted with the internet by virtue of growing up with nearly unfettered access, making them adept at utilizing the platforms to achieve never-before-seen ends. “Generation Pandemic”, as University of Pennsylvania senior Max Strickberger refers to his fellow Gen-Z peers, is a cohort of young people “dealing with isolation and altered dreams” (Strickberger and Jinich, 2022). Interviewing adolescents and adults from across the country, Strickberger sought to learn the future ambitions of his peers; 19-year-old Grant Williams dreams of a career in medicine due to the lasting impact of his therapist, while 23-year-old musician Chase Hansen hopes to
one day sign a record deal and perform again with his band (Strickberger and Jinich, 2022). If Trump’s administration inspired anything certain in the youth of America, it was a sense of ambition. Though further research on these teenagers’ professions is left for future analysis, Trump’s presidency can be considered to have drastically influenced the career aspirations of American teenagers. Their demonstrated interest in partisan politics or grassroots work (exhibited through countless examples of participation in activism) serves as an indicator of not only their future vocations but of great potential for change in their country.
Chapter 4: “Only One True Moral Denomination”: A Study of The Troubles in Northern Ireland

The final case this thesis will evaluate shall be the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The crisis, a pseudo-religious ethno-nationalist conflict, allegedly began in 1966 (though little scholarly agreement exists to confirm this), and is considered to have ceased in 1998; in this thesis, I shall specifically be examining the conflict from 1970 until the end. Like Rwanda, Northern Ireland experienced a litany of violence perpetrated by and targeted against individual, identifiable groups. Arguably the lengthiest crisis being assessed, the Troubles arose, similar to the previous case studies, out of the long-lasting effects of imperialism. Unique to this case, however, is the presence and deeply-rooted impact of religious sectarianism. Where the Rwandan Genocide was almost entirely centered around racialized notions of ethnicity, and the conflicts arising under the Trump administration primarily demonstrated an ideological divide above all else, religion was utilized in Northern Ireland to sow division; it is necessary to note, however, that the inclusion of religious affiliation, denoting Catholics or Protestants, was done to “mark ethnic identity, rather than doctrine” (Finnegan, 2016). Another distinction within this case study is the involvement and support of third-party international actors. The Rwandan Genocide is infamous for the lack of a large-scale response by the international community, and while Trump’s administration led to an influx of negative opinions by fellow states, the Troubles is unique in the sense that various nations involved themselves as stakeholders in the ethno-nationalist dispute: the peace agreement which put an end to the violence was brokered by an American representative of then-president Bill Clinton’s
administration, while the Provisional IRA was materially supported during periods of active conflict by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi (Ivory, 2018; Devenport, 2011).

Similar to the previous study of the United States, the effects of the crisis continue to be studied in real-time, as sporadic occurrences of violence persist well into the 21st century despite the conflict’s official resolution. This chapter shall address the history of Northern Ireland and the developed associations of ethnicity, religion, and politics, the timeline of events leading up to the 30-year conflict, as well as its resolution; I shall finish by re-evaluating the literature in context with the history to examine the impact of the crisis on the lives and future careers of the teens who lived through it.

4.1 Pre-Colonial Ulster to the Partition of Ireland

Northern Ireland, a small region known best in modernity as a constituent of the United Kingdom, is a state whose history is rife with complexity. Tommy McKearney describes the state as “the product of English colonialism, sectarian machinations by a British state… one discriminatory government between 1920 and 1972, and a prolonged bloody conflict thought the final years of the 20th century”; much like the previous case studies, Northern Ireland’s very existence must be understood in terms of its colonial history (McKearney, 2016). It is unknown to scholars when the Gaels first arrived in Ulster, the northernmost of four provinces in Ireland, but they had been residing there for centuries prior to the 16th-century conquest by the English House of Tudor (Green, 1911). To homogenize his kingdom, King James I embarked on a campaign to repopulate Ulster with Protestant Crown loyalists (McKearney, 2016). The 1609 campaign was
referred to as the Plantation of Ulster, during which time British companies assisted the
King in stealing land from the local Gaelic population, while the settling English
“planters” sought to convert the Gaelic-speaking Catholic Irish to Protestantism (Bardon,
2001). The practice of Roman Catholicism was further discouraged by the passage of
various legislative restrictions on Catholic participation in society; the Test Act of 1763
limited public employment offerings to only those affiliated with the Anglican Church,
the Disenfranchising Act of 1728 banned Irish Catholics from voting, amongst other so-
called “Penal Laws” (Ulster Historical Foundation). Struggles between the Protestant
loyalists and Irish Catholics in Ulster continued until the late 1700s; Protestant laborers,
encouraged by the British to suppress Irish anti-monarchism, formed what would become
known as the Orange Order (McKearney, 2016). The Order, named to demonstrate
allegiance to King William of Orange, continued to fight against Irish nationalism for
centuries.

The dawn of the 19th century brought with it a host of new obstacles. The 1800
Acts of Union, passed jointly between the Parliaments of both Ireland and England,
established the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland as a singular state entity.
The passage of the Acts prompted much enmity amongst the Irish, as they robbed Ireland
of its sovereignty and there were no explicit provisions included in the text to facilitate
the restoring of political rights to Irish Catholics (Davis, 1982). The Repeal Association
campaigned to revoke the Acts to little avail; the incidental passage of the Catholic Relief
Act in 1829, which granted Catholics freedom of worship and the right to Parliamentary
participation, would be the movement’s most substantial gain (Delaney, 2008; UK Statute
Law Database). Despite the passage of the Relief Act, Irish citizens across the United Kingdom suffered widespread poverty as a lasting effect of the colonization of Ulster. Such poverty, in concert with epidemic disease and potato blight, decimated the Irish population by nearly 2 million during the Potato Famine of 1845; as fungal infections shrunk viable harvests of the country’s only cash crop and typhus spread quickly within Irish workhouses,7 those who did not die during the Famine emigrated to America (Boylan, 2016). By the turn of the 20th century, in the wake of famine, colonization, and continued discrimination by the English, nationalist Catholics began fighting for “home rule”— the right to self-governance and domestic autonomy under the British Crown. The earliest bills to propose home rule in the late 1800s did not ultimately pass through Parliament. It was at this time when the ideological divide between the (usually Catholic) Irish nationalist supporters of home rule and the (typically Protestant) Irish loyalist supporters of continued union with Britain became clearly delineated; an Irish Parliament promoted under home rule was feared by the British to feature a Catholic majority and exclude minority Protestant voices (Biagini, 2018).

The first two decades of the 20th century continued to set the stage for the sectarian conflict between Northern Ireland’s Catholics and Protestants. The third bill for home rule was introduced to Parliament in 1912, garnering heavy opposition from unionists who began to take up arms through the founding of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF); Irish nationalists insistent on implementation of a passed bill responded by

7 Though starvation is widely considered to be the primary cause of death during the Irish Potato Famine, in reality, famine diseases like typhus fever claimed the most lives; starvation and malnutrition did exacerbate the epidemic diseases, however (Boylan, 2016).
creating their own paramilitary group, the Irish Volunteer Army (Coogan, 2002). The third bill passed Parliament in 1914, despite the efforts of the UVF, but follow-through was halted following the outbreak of the First World War. Members of the Irish Volunteer Army enlisted in the 10th and 16th Division regiments of the UK’s volunteer army, while UVF associates joined the 36th Division infantry (Imperial War Museum). As both groups fought abroad, Irish Volunteer members left in Dublin staged a weeklong insurrection in 2016. On April 24th, Patrick Pearse arrived on the steps of the Post Office to read aloud a proclamation of “Ireland’s national right to freedom and sovereignty”; working alongside the socialist Irish Citizens Army and 200 members of the sister organization Cumann na mBan, the Volunteers took control of bridges, transport, municipal buildings, and communication links across Dublin (Kelley, 1990). Initially unaware of the Easter Rising, British officials were quick to quash the rebellion. In killing civilian activists and executing movement leaders, “England… transformed [the Volunteers] from foolish extremists into martyred heroes of the Irish Republic” (Kelley, 1990).

Indeed, the Republican separatist party Sinn Féin (Irish Gaelic for “we ourselves”) enjoyed great popularity in the aftermath of the Easter Rising, winning landslide victories in Parliament in the 1918 elections (Amiel, 2021). The popularity of home rule subsided in favor of a more radical movement for Irish sovereignty; the Irish War of Independence soon followed (O’Halpin and Ó Corráin, 2020). In the south, former Volunteers established the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which utilized guerrilla tactics against the British military; up north, Protestant loyalists violently retaliated
against the Catholics. The fourth and final home rule bill passed Parliament in 1920, putting in motion the partitioning of Ireland; ideally, the bill allowed for two parliaments in both the north and south, both under the control of the United Kingdom (Jackson, 2003). The War resulted in the passage of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which authorized each region’s parliament to decide whether to remain in the United Kingdom or declare independence (McKenna, 2022). Unionist MPs in the north voted to remain in the UK, while the south declared its independent sovereignty. The 26 counties in the south would belong to the Republic of Ireland, while the remaining 6 were in Northern Ireland, a constituent of the United Kingdom (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

4.2 1969-1972: The Beginnings of the Troubles

The partition of Ireland led to a majority Protestant population within Northern Ireland, while citizens of the Republic were predominantly Catholic. The Protestant majority maintained 40 years of political control in the North following the partition, during which time the legislature granted the government comprehensive powers to enact many unfair judicial practices against any opposition and opened the doors for anti-Catholic discrimination in all sectors of life (Waller, 2021). The subjugation of Catholics remained a constant on nearly every level of Northern Irish policy. Though making up just less than half the state’s total population, Catholics lacked proportional representation in government; as voter eligibility was determined through property ownership, generational poverty dating back to the plantation of Ulster positioned Northern Irish Catholics lower on the socioeconomic ladder with substantially less political
representation (Waller, 2021). Demonstrations of rebellion against Protestant authorities cropped up throughout the first 50 years of Northern Ireland’s existence; civil rights activists calling for an end to biased electoral redistricting, the repeal of the 1922 Special Powers Act, and the reinstatement of economic rights under law marched in Derry midway through the 1960s (McKearney, 2016).

Scholars largely agree that the beginning of the 30-year-long conflict was roughly around 1969. Sporadic demonstrations throughout the 1960s became sustained civil rights protests following the Burntollet Bridge Ambush in January of 1969; a pro-democracy march on Derry was attacked by counter-protesters as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) looked on, sparking outrage among the city’s Catholic residents. The second-largest city in Northern Ireland, Derry contained a higher proportion of Catholics than the capital of Belfast; despite this, many citizens recounted thinking of Derry “as the focal point of discrimination [by the government]... a Catholic community that was total demoralized” (Munck, 1992). That August, the RUC responded to counter-protests in Derry with tear gas and water cannons, killing six and injuring over 100; the 3-day riot, referred to as the Battle of the Bogside, led to an exodus of Catholic refugees from the North as well as a call to action by Pope Paul VI against the violent rioting (McGreevy, 2019). Through the end of the 1960s, riots in Belfast protesting Orange Order violence were met with a large-scale weapon sweep, arbitrary detention of suspected Catholic activists, and a 36-hour long curfew by the British Army (Fraser, 2013). In December of 1971, the UVF would bomb a bar popular amongst nationalist
Catholics, killing 15 and inspiring retaliatory bombings by the Provisional IRA\(^8\) (Bardon, 2001). The following January, unarmed Catholic protestors rallied in Derry against the lack of due process for nationalist activists; in what would become known as Bloody Sunday, British officials gunned down 14 peaceful marchers to suppress the demonstration (Waller, 2021). Bloody Sunday became a hallmark of the extent of the violence, highlighted by Republican nationalists to demonstrate the importance of independence from Britain (Cowell, 2018).

### 4.3 Decades of Violence and Gradual Peace

Throughout the rest of the 1970s, violence continued. A pattern emerged wherein British negligence and hostilities would be met with retaliatory bombings by the Provisional IRA, who fought for a united, independent Ireland (Melaugh, 2022). Roughly 2,000 people were killed over the course of the decade, over 50% of whom were civilians (Sutton, 1994). Domestic movements on both sides of the conflict began calling for peace in the region, though bombings continued. Sensing civilian war-weariness simultaneously against the determination of the IRA to retaliate, the British government attempted some political concessions. The rolling back of internment without trial was considered a brief win for nationalist protestors until it was revealed that prisoners would no longer be granted political status and would not be granted trials by jury; in response, 500 prisoners at Her Majesty’s Prison in Maze organized a hunger strike in 1981 (Coogan, 2002).

\(^8\)1969 culminated in an ideological divide within the original Irish Republican Army, with the Provisional sect advocating for the use of domestic violence as critically important in the fight for Northern Irish independence. The organization’s use of violence was condemned by many, who considered it a terrorist organization (BBC, 2014).
The removal of “special category” or political prisoner status undermined the power of paramilitary leaders held in prisons, negatively impacting the authority they were able to exert while incarcerated (Cobain, 2020). Before the hunger strike, convicted “Provos” had refused to wear their uniforms or clean their prison cells to regain their status as political prisoners (Melaugh, 2022). By 1981, it became apparent that the government was ignoring the prisoners’ requests, and IRA leader Bobby Sands formally organized and announced the prisoners’ strike (Cobain, 2020). Newly elected Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher stood firm in the decision to rescind political status to prisoners, seeing the choice as a means to challenge the legitimacy of the Provisional IRA (Bell, 1993). The deaths of Sands and nine other prisoners sparked outrage amongst nationalists; in the same way that Bloody Sunday revived nationalist sentiment amongst the population, the hunger strikes compelled action by serving as a sobering reminder of the country’s “history of suffering because they were Catholic and Irish” (Bell, 1993). For the duration of the decade, the IRA continued to mount bombings against the British forces. Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi provided significant numbers of arms to the Army, seeing Libyan support of Northern Irish independence as an act of retaliation against Thatcher’s neo-imperialism9 (Devenport, 2011). Meanwhile, the UVF imported weaponry from South Africa. Margaret Thatcher narrowly avoided an assassination attempt by the IRA in Brighton, one of the dozens of bombings that would occur through the rest of the decade.

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9 The United Kingdom had been a proponent of American president Ronald Reagan’s 1986 bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi, which were rumored to have claimed the life of Gaddafi’s own daughter (Devenport, 2011).
Before peace talks could be negotiated, the 1990s would bring another uptick in violence. English helicopters and planes along the border with the Republic were shot down by IRA snipers in 1990; UVF volunteers slaughtered IRA members and Catholic civilians throughout the spring of 1991 (The Irish Times, 1998). The first ceasefires occurred in 1994, following an IRA bombing in Belfast responding to a mass shooting by the British in Derry (The Irish Times, 1998). The initial truce lasted almost two years. An IRA bombing in London reignited hostilities. Violence continued until 1997 when the ceasefire was reestablished following the shooting of British officer Stephen Restorick (the last soldier killed during the conflict) (Williams, 2009).

The second ceasefire led to the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Recognizing the demands of the loyalist Protestant majority, the Agreement also acknowledged the prominent percentage of citizens seeking Irish reunification; the treaty marked the first time that Northern Ireland was officially recognized as a constituent state of the United Kingdom, leaving open the possibility of a future independent state (UN Peacemaker). Major concessions were made by both parties to the treaty: the IRA’s signature implied “acceptance of the legitimacy of the six-county state and the de facto acknowledgment of the unionist veto”, while the Unionist’s agreement marked a departure from prior preferences of a Protestant-only government (McKearney, 2016). By and large, though reactionary subsidiary paramilitary organizations have engaged in acts of political violence since the Agreement’s acceptance, the treaty succeeded in brokering a peaceful cessation of the violence.
4.4 Expressing Pasts: Analyzing the Careers of Troubles Survivors

As noted in Chapter 1, the case of the Troubles provides arguably the clearest link between the impact of a crisis experienced in adolescence and one’s future profession. The duration of the crisis itself lends itself well to the analysis of multiple generations of teenagers and the variety of career paths they have chosen. There is an incredible variety among the specific jobs chosen, though all of the jobs fall into the general field of communication and media.

There is a sizable group of individuals who pursued careers in journalism after living through the Troubles in their youth. Susan McKay was born in Derry a decade before the Troubles began and has dedicated her career as a reporter to sharing stories of the crisis, especially in light of the 2020 Brexit vote. For McKay, preserving the legacy of the Troubles is a matter of ensuring such partisan violence never rears its head again; speaking of an interview with the family whose young son had been murdered by the UVF, she considered her job “an extraordinary honor” despite “the residue of sadness that is never entirely dispelled” (McKay, 2018). Her work additionally served to highlight the voices and experiences of other survivors working in journalism alongside her own. In an Irish Times article on fellow reporter Eimear O’Callaghan, McKay emphasized the ideological impact of the crisis on Irish youth. One of O’Callaghan’s diary entries from May of 1972 read “came to bed convinced that prayer is our only hope, seeing we haven’t got a gun!” (McKay, 2014). The entry appears to adopt a similar line of thinking as the Provisional IRA, which split from the original Army out of a sense that violence would accomplish much more for Irish unity than civic action alone. Other entries began with
simple updates on the daily bombings; O’Callaghan’s diary from age 16 reflects not only a heightened focus on the current events of the time but an attention to detail that hints at an apparent interest in the reporting she would grow up to do.

Chris Moore, a reporter for the *Belfast Telegraph*, was 22 when the building of the newspaper he wrote for was the target of an IRA bombing. A filing cabinet in his office saved his life, though nearly 10 others in the vicinity were killed. Though he credits the Troubles as a major influence on his decision to pursue journalism, the trauma of reliving the violence in pursuit of a story was hard to overcome; “as a journalist,” he wrote, “I found…out attempts at trying to make sense of the madness became madness itself” (Moore, 2018). Others like Lyra McKee and David McKittrick felt the same way. In “chronicl[ing] the fatalities… as unemotionally and objectively as [possible]”, McKittrick found himself deeply affected by revisiting stories of tragedy (McKittrick, 2018). Sharing the stories of those killed during the same conflict he survived, he considered his work a testament “to what happens to a community that attempts to resolve difference through violence”(McKittrick, 2018). Educating future generations on such dangers, he hopes, will prevent them from occurring again.

Lyra McKee, on the other hand, grew up at the tail end of the crisis. She considered journalism “a way to right all wrongs”; her calling to the job was born from a desire to investigate the impact of the crisis on her own generation (McKay, 2019). McKee described her peers as “Ceasefire Babies… the Good Friday Agreement generation, destined to never witness the horrors of war but to reap the spoils of peace” (McKee, 2016). These Ceasefire Babies, she noticed, faced a new set of struggles beyond
the experience of living through sectarian violence; ⅕ of reported suicides across
Northern Ireland from 1999 to 2014 were committed by those in her generation, and she
sought an explanation. Her article “Suicide of the Ceasefire Babies” examined the
phenomenon of these young deaths, and identified a primary cause: generational trauma.
It was not adult survivors who experienced firsthand the violence of the 1970s who were
dying by their own hands, but their children, whose lives had been shaped indelibly by
the after-effects of violence; “everyday rituals,” she wrote, “like watching your feet as
you walked to school because the police were searching the area for a suspect device, or
getting hit by rocks flying over the ‘peace wall’” instilled a sense of caution and fear in
her generation (McKee, 2016). Imparted upon these children, too, was a deep sense of
guilt; “how much had we really seen,” McKee asked, compared to older generations
(McKee, 2016)? Her article, which brought her near-instant acclaim, described the work
of Dr. Siobhan O’Neill, whose psychological research confirmed the impact of
intergenerational trauma on the Ceasefire Babies’ choice to die. Sharing the stories not
only of the conflict itself, but its legacy, became McKee’s journalistic *raison d’être*.
Unfortunately, it was in pursuit of this goal that McKee lost her life; while covering a
2019 police riot in Derry, she was fatally shot by a rogue gunman’s bullets (McKay,
2019). Lyra’s legacy lives after her, both through her written work and her unending
belief in a peaceful future for Ireland.

Beyond journalism, other Troubles survivors found other jobs by which to
communicate the experiences of their youth. In 1977, 19-year-old Jake Burns decided to
form a band with his friends. Inspired by the British punk band The Clash, Belfast native
Burns sought to write songs about his own experiences growing up during the Troubles (Link, 2009). The band, Stiff Little Fingers, released its debut single “Suspect Device” in 1979. The opening line “inflammable material planted in my head / it's a suspect device that's left 2000 dead” referenced the civilian death toll of the 30-year conflict; despite the tragic opener, the song ends on an encouraging note, referring to the listener as a suspect device about to “blow up” in the face of the oppressors seeking to perpetuate violence (Stiff Little Fingers). A clear message of resistance to violent political authority, “Suspect Device” sparked controversy amongst critics; many alleged the band took advantage of the conflict for its own commercial success, claiming the song trivialized and sensationalized the violence (Link, 2009). Nonetheless, Stiff Little Fingers developed a cult following amongst Northern Irish youth, who recognized the songs to portray their own experiences from various perspectives (Link, 2009). The band’s follow-up single, “Alternative Ulster”, “described the foul brew of brutality and boredom that characterized their experience” (Collin, 2003). With lyrics like “what we need is an alternative Ulster / take it and grab it, it’s yours”, Burns sought to speak to what he considered “the over-riding reality of life in Belfast for a teenager in the mid-70s… the sheer tedium of having nowhere to go and nothing to do when you got there” (Scott, 2017).

Other musicians chose to utilize their platforms to dedicate specific songs to the victims of violence. Paul Hewson, best known under his stage name, Bono, was almost twelve years old when Bloody Sunday occurred in January of 1972. He, however, was living in Dublin at the time, and would not directly witness any of the sectarian violence up north. After responding to a note on a school bulletin board from a classmate seeking
to start a band, Bono tried to learn guitar and sang covers with his new friends; after abandoning the guitar, he became the lead singer for the band U2 (Henke, 1983). Despite forming in 1976, it took the group 4 years to achieve a semblance of mainstream success. In 1982, the band’s manager Paul McGuinness suggested performing in the New York City St. Patrick’s Day parade to promote the release of their second album, *October*. After booking a float, McGuinness learned of a plan to posthumously name IRA leader Bobby Sands as the parade’s honorary marshal; according to Bono, “U2 had grown disillusioned with the incessant fighting…and felt the IRA’s tactics were definitely not helping to bring about peace”, and the band performed at the Ritz instead of on a float (Henke, 1983). Later that year, at a concert in Belfast, Bono announced a new song written after the experience in New York called “Sunday Bloody Sunday”. Both “a song of hope and a song of disgust”, the track’s release was the band’s first politically-oriented statement (Henke, 1983). The song’s lyrics recall the heartbreaking violence and ultimate futility of the conflict: “the battle's just begun / there's many lost, but tell me who has won?” (U2). Bono, however, was not the only singer to criticize the senseless bloodshed. Dolores O’Riordan, front-woman of the Limerick-based rock group The Cranberries, found herself heartbroken over the deaths of two young boys at the hands of the Provisional IRA. In March of 1993, the group planted bombs in trash cans in downtown Warrington, a town in England, the detonation of which cost 12-year-old Tim Parry and 3-year-old Jonathan Ball their lives (Darnton, 1993). Ten years older than Parry was at the time of his death, O’Riordan recounted her process of writing the song “Zombie” in memory of the two boys: “I was quite young, but I remember being devastated about the
innocent children being pulled into that kind of thing” (Slater, 2019). Both “Sunday Bloody Sunday” and “Zombie” would top their respective rock charts, simultaneously providing enjoyment and solemnity through their portrayal of the tragedies.

Conversely, Lisa McGee, a screenwriter from Derry, promised herself she would never let her adolescent experiences of the Troubles influence her career; the portrayals she saw in her youth depicted life as “gray and masculine and humorless”, a far cry from the teenage years she remembered, where she developed her sense of humor to cope with the daily uncertainty (Blake, 2019). McGee’s longtime passion for writing led her towards a career in television screenwriting, where she went back on her childhood promise and began to draft a script focused on Northern Irish teenagers in the 1990s. The result was “Derry Girls”, a tongue-in-cheek portrayal of femininity and adolescence amidst the backdrop of the Troubles’ final years. Set in Derry in the early 1990s, the show follows a cohort of 16-year-olds— Erin Quinn, Orla McCool, Michelle Mallon, Clare Devlin, and Michelle’s British cousin James Maguire— and their antics as they navigate Catholic school, family drama, teenage angst, and the ongoing events of the Troubles (Brennan, 2020). McGee allowed stories of her own teen years to serve as inspiration for the antics of the show’s protagonists; the girls’ trip to see Bill Clinton during his 1995 visit mimicked McGee’s experience in the audience as a teen, and the Quinn family dynamics in the show were modeled after her own (Blake, 2019). For her, “Derry Girls” was not just a way to communicate the stories of her past to a new generation— writing the show has allowed McGee to come to terms with her trauma. “I’ll never forget the day the ceasefire was called,” she said in an interview with the Irish Mirror, “[and] the day of
the Omagh bomb… etched in my memory” (Gallagher, 2020). Like Lyra Mckee’s pursuit of journalism, Lisa McGee saw her career as a screenwriter as a means to understand “the legacy of trauma in Northern Ireland”; “a member of a generation straddling peace and conflict”, McGee’s adolescence afforded her both a sense of innocence and an understanding of the violent fighting going on at the time (Blake, 2019).

Whether through television, music, or journalism, careers in communication appear to be the mainstays of those who lived through the Northern Irish Troubles in their teen years. The clear tendency towards careers in mass communication calls to mind the time-honored tradition of storytelling throughout Irish history. Not only that, but the findings of this case study point to a common thread amongst all three studied: a broad correlation between experienced crisis and advocacy work, as well as a general tendency to believe in the power of hope, education, and unity as forces that can change the world.
Conclusion

The aforementioned Barber Model suggests a tripartite method with which to analyze “a clearer understanding of the impact of political conflict on young lives”: measuring the crises themselves, evaluating relevant measures of youth behavior, and conducting a long-term assessment of this behavior (Barber, 2013). This thesis has, in laying out the context and history of each studied crisis alongside an analysis of the behaviors of impacted teens and their (planned or accomplished) career paths, assessed each case study using this very method. As the Barber Model pertains primarily to psychological research, further analysis in that field is yet to be completed to determine the model’s efficacy in that context. However, I find the model to be particularly useful in political analysis; this thesis’s use of the Barber Model allowed for ample exploration of the subjects studied in terms of the different experiences they lived through, which in turn allows a connection to be drawn between the experiences of adolescents living through political turmoil in adolescence and the careers they pursue.

Taken together, the analyses of the three different case studies presented serve as a microcosm through which to evaluate how the experiences of one’s youth can dictate their future behaviors. Though the crises studied vary drastically from each other in terms of the history, the events that occurred, and the specific vocations pursued, this thesis identifies a common trend in which individuals turn towards a broad assortment of advocacy-based careers after living through a period of political turmoil. Where teens in Northern Ireland wound up primarily working in journalism or media, teen survivors of the Rwandan Genocide turned to public speaking and international advocacy, and
American teens professed to desire a career in activism or party politics. Each specific profession this thesis has found to be “associated” with a particular case is directly linked to the nature of the crisis experienced. American adolescents disillusioned with the bureaucracy of the federal government began and continue to seek out avenues to make their voices heard, hoping to enact change and prevent a future administration from infringing on the very rights they witnessed be violated. Northern Irish teens upset at the decades-long violence used their words to demonstrate the futility of the conflict, both for an audience of their peers and for future generations. Teens who experienced the Rwandan Genocide took the traumatic experiences they survived and sought to advocate against such atrocities ever occurring again. All of the jobs chosen or desired by the teenage survivors of political strife involve education and advocacy in some way, shape, or form; a rather logical conclusion, it appears that experiencing such tension prompts individuals to ensure that their generation is the last to live through similar transgressions. Whether in sharing their own stories or in fighting for a more just world, these individuals are guided by the experiences of their youth. As I have conveyed through this thesis, there is a clear relationship between the careers chosen by adults and the political turmoil they experienced in their youth.

A truly comprehensive evaluation of every instance of political crisis across the world and throughout history would be an impossible task, but this thesis hopes that the evaluation of three drastically different case studies can sufficiently point to the trend of individuals across the world pursuing educational/advocacy-based careers in their adulthood due to the political ordeals of their youth. As noted, further analysis is required
to assess the long-lasting impact of the Trump administration on the careers of American teenagers, alongside hundreds of other ongoing crises across the globe. This thesis aims to serve as a springboard for any future research regarding the impact— on the careers, behaviors, outlooks, even lives— of adolescents living through political crises.
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