



The IRA

Tim Pat Coogan

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This updated edition of the best-selling history of the IRA now includes behind-the-scenes information on the recent advances made in the peace process. With clarity and objectivity, Coogan examines the IRA's origins, its foreign links, bombing campaigns, hunger strikes and sectarian violence and its role in the latest attempts to bring peace to Northern Ireland. Meticulously researched and featuring interviews with past and present members of the organization, this is a compelling account of modern Irish history.

The IRA Details

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Author : Tim Pat Coogan

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From Reader Review The IRA for online ebook

Jessica says

I...did not like this book, which was disappointing since the history of the IRA and Irish history is of interest to me and a professor had said this was one of the best books to read about the IRA. However, the book was so full of minutiae that it was hard to see the big picture. Despite this being the first edition made available to American audiences, Coogan does not explain certain elements of British and Irish politics/politicians and historical events that Americans might not be familiar with, and assumes that readers know what he is talking about when he references certain people or things. I also found the writing to be not great, the sentences were long and rambling (and often confusing) and the incessant typos were distracting.

I did find some of the chapter topics incredibly interesting and I wish he had spent more time on them, such as the IRA's connection with the Nazis during World War II and the Hunger Strikes of the 80s/Bobby Sands. I would love to read a better written book about this topic.

Joe Kendall says

This is an excellent book on the history of the IRA. Tim Pat Coogan, though biased, does his best to be objective in his writings. Much of the book is dense and hard to follow because of all the names and places being mentioned along with the jumping back and forth through time. But this is in effect a history book and well written for a history book at that. Coogan does not glorify the IRA's actions, instead demonizing all the useless violence in Northern Ireland, saying that much of what the violence was about could have been solved democratically. Coogan does put blame on all parties involved though, pointing out each of the major mistakes that the many different sides did trying to solve the Irish problem. I would recommend this book to anyone that is interested in Irish history or the IRA its self. It is a very informative and interesting read.

Tracy says

A must read for those interested in Irish history.

Karen says

Can anyone recommend a good book about the contemporary history of the Irish-English conflict? Reading about Brexit makes me realize I don't know much about that at all. ~ Dave Ritchie

Best book I've read is Tim Pat Coogan's The IRA. Just finished this, which is excellent though not that accessible if you're not a giant nerd like me, but the author is a sociologist from Belfast whose research revolves around The Troubles and so I'd bet some of his other work is more so. ~ Sarah Jaffe

Otherwise, though not a book, I would recommend Sarah Jaffe's three pieces on the centenary of the Rising, and contemporary Irish nationalism. Links below:

* <https://thebaffler.com/latest/unexecu...>

* <https://thebaffler.com/latest/irish-e...>

* <https://thebaffler.com/latest/austeri...>

Tim Parlin says

i would call this an exhaustive study of the history of the IRA. seemed like it took a whole year to read. i wanted to learn more about this century long struggle and now i know about every god damn bombing or botched attack that ever happened. ask me something about the IRA. anything.

Bap says

See my review of Coogan's book Michael collins. Coogan proves to be even a clumsier writer here than in his other book. But once again, the subject matter, the IRA, makes it worthwhile to read.

Today Ireland is gorged with prosperity and the EEC makes one wonder what all the fight was about. In any event the Irish catholics in Ulster will win the issue of unification in the bedroom as the Prods become a minority over time even in the area that they gerrymandered to continue Protestant ascendancy.

James Winter says

My review here is about the early 1990s edition published by Rhinehart before the Good Friday Agreement and Omagh Bombing. Firstly, the text is incredibly small and hard to read. Secondly, the book itself needs a context, I believe. If you've read say, Coogan's "The Troubles" first, you'll then be able to better understand this one. As a reader with a sufficient understanding of Irish history, even some of this text's players, dates, and legislative references went over my head. I'm going to read Coogan's "The Troubles" and come back to "The IRA." I hope my rating will change.

Jay Coleau says

Very detailed, great source on the subject.

Donna Davis says

I found myself living in Toledo, Ohio during the early 1980s. One of the things I read daily was "The Toledo Blade", the only major newspaper in town. A furious debate was raging between readers of the paper and sometimes, the Blade's editorial staff. It was about the Irish, and specifically Clan na Gael, an organization headquartered in Toledo that supported the reunification of Ireland, and that raised funds for humanitarian aid to the people of Northern Ireland.

The Blade's editor suggested the CNG was sending more than bandages, medicine and food to Belfast. The Blade suggested that guns were going there too, an accusation hotly denied by the group's spokesmen.

And since I seldom met a controversy that didn't interest me, my voice was soon raised also, on the side of CNG. My husband and I had no money at all, but somehow we managed to buy a ton of their literature, and were spellbound during the hunger strikes. We went to hear Bernadette Devlin speak at University of Toledo, and I won a wheelbarrow full of whiskey in a Clan na Gael raffle. And while I only remained in the Midwest for a few more years, my interest in the Irish Struggle followed me home to the Pacific Northwest when I left.

I found this tome on the Irish Republican Army during one of my annual pilgrimages to Powell's City of Books in Portland, Oregon. The book is a meal, over 800 pages of dense, small print. Coogan was present during the years of the bombings and the hunger strikes, and his scholarly devotion has ferreted out an immense store of information on the things that occurred before he was born. His treatment of the organization is less sympathetic than I had imagined, but it's enormously readable and full of memorable vignettes, some of them funny, some of them painful, and some a strange combination of the two.

If you think you want this book, you're going to have to search for it. For those that aren't ready to dive into all 800+ pages, there is a clearly labeled section on the period mentioned above, which is most likely the period readers want to know about. It's also a fine addition to a home library. I'm certainly keeping my copy. For those fond of Google as the fount of all knowledge, it's also worth noting that these events unspooled prior to the satellite era. I'm not saying you can't find any information online, but it won't be as useful—and probably not as accurate—as what's in this book. Highly recommended to those seriously interested in the subject.

Nicholas Whyte says

The first edition of this book was published in 1969, and the pre-1969 text takes up slightly more than half of my fourth edition from 1994. This earlier core is an excellent historical analysis of a paramilitary movement which had at one point been central to Irish politics and had steadily been moved more and more to the fringes, as decade after decade crucial members of the leadership either defected to democratic politics or died (often through violence). Coogan has got deeply into his subject and assembled names, dates, numbers (though I can't quite believe that the I.R.A. still had 30,000 members by the late 1920s - they would surely have had more of an impact if that were the case) and has a detailed picture of who the I.R.A. were and also why it didn't really matter that much in the context of how politics developed in the Irish Free State, and eventually the Republic of Ireland.

Unfortunately the book is probably more often bought and read for the second half, the post-1969 story, which has several very serious flaws.

First, from the narrative point of view, Coogan skips over the 1969 split between the Provos and the Stickies with indecent haste and almost no detail, in stark contrast to the chapter and verse he gave for the divisions between the 'mainstream' I.R.A. and other micro-groups in the previous four or five decades. It means that the subsequent description of the activities of the Provisionals and the Officials is almost without context of why they became two separate organisations. There are other gaps, but this is the most serious one and it is pretty huge.

Second, from the analytical point of view, Coogan has the Dublin journalist's tin ear for Northern politics. He makes little of the differing agendas of the British Government, the mainstream Unionists, and the Loyalist paramilitaries. The 1974 power-sharing executive and Brian Faulkner are barely mentioned. In the short paragraph on the 1982 Assembly, almost every detail is wrong apart from the name of the body and the year in which it was elected. This persistent indifference to accuracy on such points may well reflect the interests

of his subject matter and core readership as well as his own preferences, but it means that the casual reader expecting to find guidance on the wider Northern Irish political situation here will be not only disappointed but misled.

Third, from the organisational point of view, the claim on the back cover that the fourth edition has been 'completely updated and revised' is simply incorrect. While the earlier material is clearly the work of a historical thinker presenting his material in a careful structure, the successively bolted-on chapters for the later editions are poorly organised and sometimes repetitious, with no pause for global reflection.

Fourth, from the moral point of view, the missing element - for those of us who are not in Coogan's core audience, the readership in the Republic, who may be more likely to have an instinctive understanding of this issue - is any serious analysis of how and why opinion in the Twenty-Six Counties swung both against and in favour of the Republican agenda over the years. I remember vividly both the H-Block demonstrations of 1981, and the post-Warrington demonstrations of 1993. Coogan gives many other examples of popular support for Irish prisoners but deep popular disapproval of the barbarous acts that they have committed, going back over the decades. I'd love to read some decent unpacking of how and why the plain people of Ireland have been able to discriminate between men and method in this way, and am disappointed that Coogan, well-placed to do so, has not provided it.

Having said all that, there are some other interesting points in the second half. I hadn't realised that Greek Cypriots were so closely involved with the arming of the Provos - not only as middle-men for Arab suppliers (as is to be expected given the geography and geopolitics) but, Coogan suggests, directly as well. More recently, Coogan's analysis of the correspondence between the I.R.A. and the British government in the early 1990s is detailed and useful, though unfortunately lacks a balancing perspective from the British side (not that there is likely much that could be added, but the gap is there). More tellingly than perhaps intended, his profile of Gerry Adams betrays hypnotised fascination with his subject rather than any real unpacking of said subject's political agenda.

Anyway. There are many better books than this about Irish history since 1969 (and in fairness Coogan may have written one or two of them himself). But the first half is an excellent micro-study of a dangerous fringe movement. And I'm grateful to him also for quoting one of my own father's best lines, regarding a small rabid Catholic movement of the 1950s: "Perhaps it was only a lunatic fringe, but it was still of interest as a symptom. One can learn something of the tendencies in a society by observing on which particular fringe of it the lunatics break out."

Adriana Moura says

This is a fundamental book to anyone trying to understand the Irish fight for freedom and in general the Irish history in the 20th century. With the eye of a journalist and the mind of a historian, Coogan manages not only to explain the several phases of the Irish Republican Army history, but also to enter their motives, strategies and mindset.

The book was originally published in 1969, at a moment when the civil rights campaign seemed to take over from the physical force, and the IRA seemed to be close to its last moments. However, by the time the book hit the bookstores, the repression against the civil rights movement started a whole new life for the organization, entering its most active phase since the Civil War. Therefore, further editions evolved from a history book to a work of investigative journalism.

Don't expect impartiality, however. On part 1, Coogan makes clear from the beginning he is against any form

of violence, taking a critical view of the group's actions. It changes dramatically from part 2, published in 1977, on: now the journalist cannot pretend he doesn't understand the upsurge of violence, and though keeping a careful approach that still favours peace, he turns his outlook completely in benefit of the the fighters he is chronicling.

This "real-time history", so to say, is one of the strengths of the book, but also one of its weaknesses. Coogan often assumes the reader is familiar with events, places and dates that were on the news shortly before each new release. Thirty or forty years later, those events may have faded from most memories and say nothing to someone who not only isn't Irish (or British), but who wasn't even born at the time, like me. In that sense, The IRA didn't age so well. On the other hand, Coogan has the ability of turning even the most intricated concepts into something accessible - he can explain in a single phrase a concept I was struggling for two years to reach.

The book, from the 1977 edition, comes to a conclusion: the only definitive way of ending all kinds of trouble in Ireland is eliminating once and for all the British presence in the island. Ending partition is the only thorough solution. Forty years later, and in Brexit times, that conclusion is still relevant, and highlights the book's importance.

C. A. Powell says

I read this back in 1983 when the conflict was in the news on a daily basis. It was a couple of years after the hunger strikes and when Margaret Thatcher was the UK Prime Minister. I was engrossed by it and found it very compelling to read. Of course, it has been updated since and would probably cover the entire length of the conflict. I would recommend it to anyone who likes to read about recent history.

The Black and Tan Summer: Ireland's Turbulent Year of 1920

Racquel McDonnell says

I started reading this book because I like to know 'why?' I've written a book and one of my characters is x IRA, I needed to know the reasons behind her characteristics, why she behaves the way she does and what drives such a spirit to seek revenge as she sees fit.

Being of Irish decent, this era of Irish history plays a major role on how the country and the people became who they are today.

Aside from the acts of terrorism, the development of such an army to protect the people against oppression and tyranny. To look behind the scenes of how the I.R.A came to be.

My character is hit hard by events of that day and deep within her is a craving to seek the revenge for the wrong done to her, to take matters into her own hands and hurt the ones responsible for the loss of her family. She has the contacts, she needs a way back and she needs to settle the score.

I.R.A is hard going and is the size of a small brick. But interesting, an insight to an era that was always hush hush, a taboo subject not to be spoken about or indeed mentioned.

I'm pleased that my children are going up in this era where information is freely available and a greater understanding of world events, to make their own decisions and understand without prejudice.

Torben says

Martin McGuinness was in the RA!??

S. Sigerson says

Tim Pat Coogan is generally recognized as the foremost living author on modern Irish history. Born in 1925 (when the Civil War was only two years ended) Coogan grew up in the maelstrom of Ireland's tumultuous 20th century. As a journalist, he covered much of this history as it happened, interviewing many of the major players, and also having personal contacts throughout the Irish political scene. At the same time, he maintains a critical perspective on the unique phenomenon of the IRA. With sympathy for its patriotic goals, acknowledging its pivotal role in establishing the Republic of Ireland, yet this study pulls no punches on its errors, frailties, foibles; its excesses & atrocities.

A cautionary tale, for anyone who thinks of starting a little army...
