

ABSTRACT

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Title: HAND-ME-DOWN REBELLION: A MULTIMEDIA APPROACH TO RECORDING AN IRISH FAMILY HISTORY

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Northern Ireland has been part of the United Kingdom since 1921, shares an island with the Republic of Ireland, and is stricken with identity problems. The capital city of Belfast has been a place of discontent between Catholics and Protestants for decades. Belfast is primarily Protestant, yet in the Gaeltacht Quarter of West Belfast, Catholic families make up the majority of the population – a result of the systemic separation and oppression of Catholics in housing, jobs, and opportunities. Religious separation translates into political tensions, with citizens split between a nationalist movement for a united Ireland (the belief the counties in Northern Ireland will one day return to Irish government) or a sense of loyalism for Great Britain. My project will examine these divisions through the lens of my own family history. Growing up, my Catholic Belfast-raised maternal grandparents only waved the Irish flag, sang Gaelic songs, and never once mentioned their affinity for England. For two people with a strong sense of national and personal identity connected to Ireland, I wondered how they could have left their families in Belfast and moved to America with four young children. The history of Irish migrants dates back to the 1600s as a result of many factors: imprisonment, job insecurity, escape from famine and oppression, etc. The history of Irish migrants has not included my grandparents: until now. This multimedia project consists of personal interviews with my maternal grandmother, interviews with professors of Irish Thought and Migration, as well as filmed footage and photographs from personally significant places in Northern Ireland. As a whole, the project explores the identity of Northern Irish citizens and Irish migrants in the United States from the 1950s to today, focusing these broader issues through the lens of the story of my grandparents Kathleen and Patrick O’Neill.