Easter Rising 1916: How to Remember the Terrible Beauty Born

Zachary Becvar
Governors State University

Ellen Walsh
Governors State University

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Begins in late 12th Century with High King Rory O’Connor and Henry II. Over the next several centuries, the British government banned Irish culture (Statutes of Kilkenny), made Catholics second-class citizens by not allowing them to hold public office (Pentals Laws), dissolved the Irish parliament (Act of Union), failed to address the Great Famine, and held up passage of Home Rule.

The Irish Response
1798- Theobald Wolf Tone leads uprising of United Irishmen
1860s- Irish Republican Brotherhood, Clan na Gael formed
1880s- Dynamite War led by Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa
1913- General Strike, Irish Civilian Army founded
1914- Howth gun running

The Course of the Rising: April 24-29 1916

Uprising is planned for 1916 after the funeral of O’Donovan Rossa. A failed attempt to smuggle guns into Ireland on the German freighter The Aud causes the Rising to be pushed back from Easter Sunday to Easter Monday.

April 24th: General Post Office and several other positions captured by rebels who were members of the IRB, ICA, and Irish Volunteers. P.H. Pearse reads out The Proclamation outside of GPO, declaring an Irish Republic.
April 25th: British troops arrive in Dublin. Civilians begin looting due to lack of civil order.
April 26th: British take heavy losses fighting in Mount Street Bridge area. The gunboat Helga begins to shell Dublin from the River Liffy.
April 27th: Massive damage to rebel-held areas from the Helga shelling.
April 28th: Rebels evacuate the GPO.
April 29th: To avoid any further loss of life or property damage, P.H. Pearse and rebels surrender to British forces.

Leaders of the Rising are court-martialed and sentenced to be executed. Soldiers are transported to POW camps in England and Wales.

Aftermath of the Rising
British actions to punish the leaders of the Rising lost initial public support as leaders were executed from May 3-12. The British also faced criticism for brutality in putting down the Rising, including the execution of Francis Sheehy Skeffington and the fighting in North King Street. British actions were largely viewed in the context of involvement in WWI and fighting Germany.

Changing Views 100 Years On
Ireland became a Free State in 1922. The Rising was constantly politicized by different factions, all claiming the legacy of 1916 after achieving independence. As politicization increased over time, some politicians started to wonder if the Rising should be celebrated at all.

The Centenary celebrations restored the humanity of the story of the Rising and highlighted the sacrifices made by the rebels.