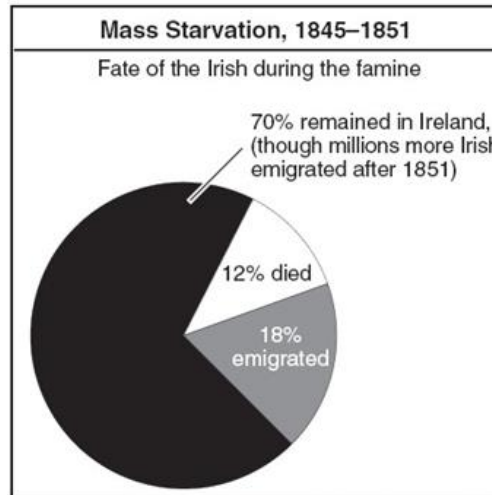
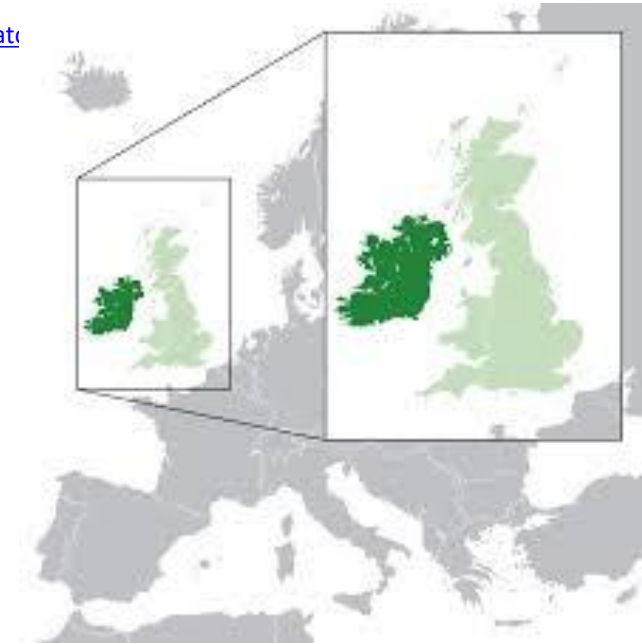


Aim #13: Why is the Irish Potato Famine so Important?



IR Reactions; Irish Potato Famine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8Rbj7H0eX4>



Source: R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972*





Source: The Irish Potato Famine, 1848. The fleeing of the peasants.

How does the author's point of view affect the way he presents his ideas?

Gallery Walk: Is it a natural disaster or man-made ?

How does famine impact the lives of ordinary people?

- A famine is an extreme scarcity or shortage of food. According to [Oxfam International](#), famine is caused by “triple failure:”
 1. **Production Failure:** Crops fail due to a bacteria or a natural disaster like a drought or flood makes it difficult to maintain crops
 2. **Access Failure:** Food is too expensive or located too far away for regular people to get it
 3. **Response Failure:** There is not the infrastructure & services to respond to the famine and/or the governments does not intervene quickly enough to address the famine

Instructions:

- Start from any document and move around the room.
- For each Document, write down the **Cause** (What is the cause & is PF, AF, RF?) & the **Effect**.

An enduring issue is a challenge or problem that has been debated or discussed across time. An enduring issue is one that many societies have attempted to address with varying degrees of success.

Bigger Picture

Working with a partner, generate some ideas for enduring issues.

- What have been the themes we have covered in class so far that could help you develop an enduring issue?

Task:

- Identify **and** define an enduring issue raised by this set of documents
- Argue why the issue you selected is significant **and** how it has endured across time

In your essay, be sure to

- Identify the enduring issue based on a historically accurate interpretation of *at least three* documents
- Define the issue using relevant evidence from *at least three* documents
- Argue that this is a significant issue that has endured by showing:
 - How the issue has affected people or has been affected by people
 - How the issue has continued to be an issue or has changed over time
- Include relevant outside information from your knowledge of social studies

In developing your answer to Part III, be sure to keep these explanations in mind:

Identify—means to put a name to or to name.

Define—means to explain features of a thing or concept so that it can be understood.

Argue—means to provide a series of statements that provide evidence and reasons to support a conclusion.

The Famine began quite mysteriously in September **1845** as leaves on potato plants suddenly turned black and curled, then rotted, seemingly the result of a fog that had wafted across the fields of Ireland. The cause was actually an airborne fungus (*phytophthora infestans*) originally transported in the holds of ships traveling from North America to England.

Winds from southern England carried the fungus to the countryside around Dublin. The blight spread throughout the fields as fungal spores settled on the leaves of healthy potato plants, multiplied and were carried in the millions by cool breezes to surrounding plants. Under ideal moist conditions, a single infected potato plant could infect thousands more in just a few days.

The attacked plants fermented while providing the nourishment the fungus needed to live, emitting a nauseous stench as they blackened and withered in front of the disbelieving eyes of Irish peasants. There had been crop failures in the past due to weather and other diseases, but this strange new failure was unlike anything ever seen. Potatoes dug out of the ground at first looked edible, but shriveled and rotted within days. The potatoes had been attacked by the same fungus that had destroyed the plant leaves above ground.

Prime Minister Peel came up with his own solution to the food problem. Without informing his own Conservative (Tory) government, he secretly purchased two shipments of inexpensive Indian corn (maize) directly from America to be distributed to the Irish. But problems arose as soon as the maize arrived in Ireland. It needed to be ground into digestible corn meal and there weren't enough mills available amid a nation of potato farmers. Mills that did process the maize discovered the pebble-like grain had to be ground twice.

To distribute the corn meal, a practical, business-like plan was developed in which the Relief Commission sold the meal at cost to local relief committees which in turn sold it at cost to the Irish at just one penny per pound. But peasants soon ran out of money and most landowners failed to contribute any money to maintain the relief effort.

The corn meal itself also caused problems. Normally, the Irish ate enormous meals of boiled potatoes three times a day. A working man might eat up to fourteen pounds each day. They found Indian corn to be an unsatisfying substitute. Peasants nicknamed the bright yellow substance 'Peel's brimstone.' It was difficult to cook, hard to digest and caused diarrhea. Most of all, it lacked the belly-filling bulk of the potato. It also lacked Vitamin C and resulted in scurvy, a condition previously unknown in Ireland due to the normal consumption of potatoes rich in Vitamin C.

Out of necessity, the Irish grew accustomed to the corn meal. But by June 1846 supplies were exhausted. The Relief Commission estimated that four million Irish would need to be fed during the spring and summer of 1846, since nearly £3 million worth of potatoes had been lost in the first year of the Famine. But Peel had imported only about £100,000 worth of Indian corn from America and Trevelyan made no effort to replenish the limited supply.

The British government's efforts to relieve the famine were controversial. Prime Minister Charles Trevelyan replaced PM Peel and was in charge of Irish relief efforts during the famine. He believed in minimal intervention and attempted to encourage the Irish to be more self-reliant. He wrote, "...Besides, the greatest improvement of all which could take place in Ireland would be to teach the other people to depend upon themselves for developing the resources of the country, instead of [relying on] the assistance of the government on every occasion..."

The Irish landowners themselves were expected to provide relief. However, when the poor and starving ran out of money to pay rent, the landlords soon ran out of funds with which to support them. The British government limited their help to loans, soup kitchens, and providing employment on road building and other public works. Throughout the famine, many Irish farms continued to export other high-quality foods to Britain because the Irish poor did not have the money to purchase them.

I did not see a child playing in the streets or on the roads; no children are to be seen outside the doors but a few sick and dying children. In the districts which are now being depopulated by starvation, coffins are only used for the more wealthy. The majority were taken to the grave without any coffin, and buried in their rags: in some instances even the rags are taken from the corpse to cover some still living body.

On arriving at Cappagh, in the first house I saw a dead child lying in a corner of the house, and two children, pale as death, with their heads hanging down upon their breasts sitting by a small fire. The father had died on the road coming home from work. One of the children, a lad seventeen years of age, had been found, in the absence of his mother, who was looking for food, lying dead, with his legs held out of the fire by the little child which I then saw lying dead. Two other children had also died. The mother and the two children still alive had lived on one dish of barley for the last four days. On entering another house the doctor said, "Look there, Sir, you can't tell whether they are boys or girls." Taking up a skeleton child, he said, "Here is the way it is with them all; their legs swing and rock like the legs of a doll, they have the smell of mice."

Source: W. Stewart Trench, *Realities of Irish Life* (London: Longmans, Green, 1847).

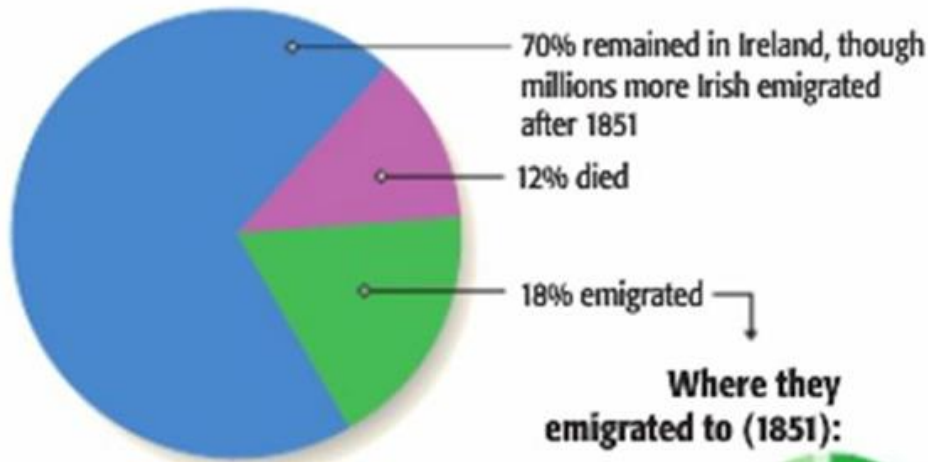
. . . “I started from Cork, by the mail [coach] (says our informant), for Skibbereen and saw little until we came to Clonakilty, where the coach stopped for breakfast; and here, for the first time, the horrors of the poverty became visible, in the vast number of famished poor, who flocked around the coach to beg alms: amongst them was a woman carrying in her arms the corpse of a fine child, and making the most distressing appeal to the passengers for aid to enable her to purchase a coffin and bury her dear little baby. This horrible spectacle induced me to make some inquiry about her, when I learned from the people of the hotel that each day brings dozens of such applicants into the town. . . .”

Source: James Mahony, “Sketches in the West of Ireland,” *The Illustrated London News*, February 13, 1847



The Great Famine, 1845–1851

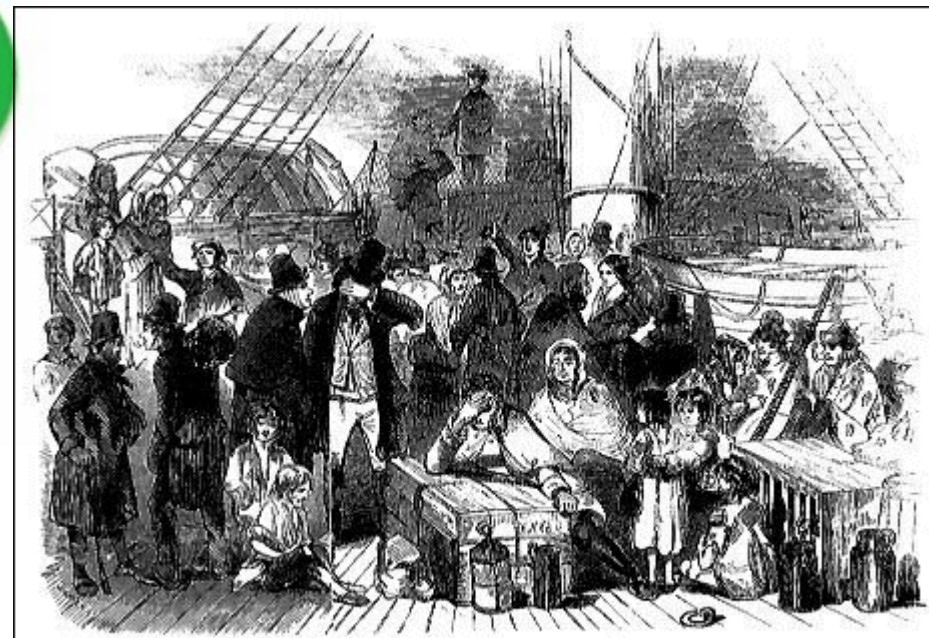
Fate of the Irish during the famine:



Where they emigrated to (1851):



Sources: R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972*;
D. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration, 1804–1921*



Irish emigrants depart Liverpool for North America.

Past as Prologue: Blair Faults Britain in Irish Potato Blight

By SARAH LYALL

LONDON, June 2 — In Ireland, even distant history is never very far away. So when Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, expressed regret over the weekend about Britain's role in the potato famine that devastated Ireland in the mid-19th century, he inserted himself into a debate that seems almost as fresh as if the famine took place in the 1940's instead of the 1840's.

Though his statement was the strongest admission of culpability by a British Prime Minister yet, Mr. Blair stopped short of making a full apology on behalf of his country. Instead, in a letter to the organizers of an event commemorating the famine's 150th anniversary, he spoke regretfully of the "deep scars" caused by the famine, which left about 1.5 million people dead of starvation or famine-related disease and led to a mass emigration as people fled an increasingly dire situation at home.

"Those who governed in London at the time failed their people through standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy," the Prime Minister said in the letter, which was read aloud on Saturday in Millstreet, County Cork, by the Irish actor Gabriel Byrne at a concert marking the end of three years of events commemorating the famine.

"That one million people died in what was then part of the richest and most powerful nation in the world is something that still causes pain as we reflect on it today," the letter said.



cattle from Ireland even as the poor starved.

Bertie Ahern, leader of Fianna Fail, Ireland's largest political party, said two years ago that the famine, which renewed anti-British violence in Ireland and paved the way for the country's eventual partition and for the start of the "troubles" in Northern Ireland, marked the low point in Britain's relationship with Ireland. It would help, he said then, if Britain would apologize.



Britain's new Prime Minister yesterday addressed the still painful subject of the Irish potato blight of the 1840's. Woodcuts depict people digging potatoes and immigrants leaving Galway during the famine.

hands took part, as an inappropriately festive way to commemorate a tragic era.

"It has been described as one great big party, but I can't think of a worse description for an event to recall the proportions of a famine which killed a million of our people in the most appalling circumstances," Joe Murray, a spokesman for Action from Ireland, a relief organization, told the Daily Telegraph. "It smacks of dancing on the graves of the dead."

effect it would have on the latest round of talks on the province's political future, which are due to start in Belfast on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Irish unionists, who support keeping Northern Ireland under British control, dismissed Mr. Blair's remarks as ill-conceived and said they would make little difference to his standing in Ireland.

"I don't think anyone should apologize for matters which did not happen in their lifetimes and for which

"The famine was a defining event in the history of Ireland and Britain. It has left deep scars. Those who governed in London at the time failed their people through standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy. That one million people died in what was then part of the richest and most powerful nation in the world is something that still causes pain as we reflect on it today. We must not forget such a dreadful event"

— Prime Minister Tony Blair, 1997

CAUSES

- Availability of raw materials and markets in colonies
- Great Britain's seapower and political stability
- Parliament's support of free enterprise
- Agricultural improvements in Great Britain
- Enclosure movement in Great Britain
- Great Britain's factors of production
- Invention of new machines in the textile industry
- Development of the steam engine
- Increased individual freedom in the West
- Western attitudes toward competition



Industrial Revolution



EFFECTS

- Development of labor-saving, time-saving machines
- The factory system
- Poor working conditions in factories
- Overcrowding, pollution, disease in cities
- Competing ideas about economics
- Rise in standard of living, growth of middle class
- Rise of new industries and powerful industrialists
- New emphasis on middle-class home life
- Increased power of industrialized countries