The Land Question and the Great Irish Famine

1. The Land Question: what is it?
   a. Inequality
   b. Land division
   c. Land use
   d. Agriculture/Manufacturing division

2. Social History of the Potato
   a. Potato, nutritional value of grain at about 1/3 cost, main food of 50%+ Irish
   b. Population
      i. 1845, pop. density arable land in Ireland, 700 per square mile (highest in Europe)
      ii. fastest growing population in Europe, 1750-1845
      iii. Agriculture

3. The Great Hunger, 1845-50 (“a famine of the 13th century acting upon a population of the 19th”)
   a. 1845.
      i. fungus arrives Ireland Aug. 1845, first noted in press at beginning of Summer
      ii. Sir Robert Peel (British Tory PM) responds quickly
      iii. few died 1845-46 season; Whigs blamed Tories for over-reacting
   b. 1846
      i. crisis as potato planting at all-time high and looks vibrant well into season
      ii. average yield from 6-7 tons per acre down to .5 ton per acre.
      iii. food rioting, secret agrarian societies active, and petty crime surged (crimes against
           property not crimes against persons)—high crime rates until 1849
      iv. Peel sets up a Board of Works to fund public employment projects:
   c. 1847.
      i. soup kitchens established summer 1847, by July 3 million/day.
      ii. poor law thrown back on Irish taxpayers in Summer 1847.
   d. 1848-1849.
      i. Donor fatigue, ebbing private charity (Quakers had set up numerous relief stations; Lord
         Rothschild)
      ii. 1849, Queen Victoria makes trip to Dublin in support (first monarch’s visit to Ireland)
   e. Result.
      i. Many died. Estimates from as low as .5 million to 2-3 million. Probably 1 million died,
         1 million emigrated (pop. from 8 million 1841 to 6.5 million 1851).
      ii. Why?

4. Emigration
   a. cost for a laborer’s passage and food for few months = one year’s wages
   b. 1.5 million leave between 1845 and 1855 (double normal rate)