

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.** Still crisis and blight.
 - 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)