



# TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

## *The Irish Potato Famine*

AN EXPERT GUIDE BY CLARE KILBANE





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# The Irish Potato Famine

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The Irish Potato Famine (as it is known outside of Ireland) or “Great Famine” (as it is referred to within Ireland) was an incidence of mass starvation that was stimulated by a natural cause (i.e., the widespread fungal infection of potato crops) but made significantly worse by the social, economic, and political conditions of the world at that time. It is considered to have lasted from 1845-1852. The famine resulted in the estimated death of one million people in Ireland and the forced immigration of one million more. The famine and its effects permanently changed the country’s demographic, political, and cultural landscape. It also spurred a 100-year

population decline. The current population of Ireland is 25-30% smaller than it would have been if the famine had never occurred. The famine not only affected Ireland; it affected the rest of the world. Those who left Ireland fleeing the famine formed a diaspora around the globe. The United States of America was particularly influenced by the massive waves of Irish immigrants who contributed, in significant ways, to the development of civil infrastructure (i.e., roads, canals, levys), political movements, religious organizations, and schools.. The famine is also the primary reason why some 33,000,000 or 33% of US citizens claim Irish ancestry.

## The Potato, Blight, and Famine

The first report that a contagious fungal infection called a “blight” was affecting potato crops was published in the Dublin Evening Post on September 9, 1845. Overnight, fields of green potatoes soon to be harvested turned black and began rotting in the ground. The fungus, *phytophthora infestans*, was probably brought in to Ireland unknowingly on infected potato plants from the US (an area in Maine had been affected by blight in 1842), but the exact origins of the fungus are disputed. Although the fungus spread through Holland and Belgium, as well as Ireland, it struck Ireland most severely

because there was little genetic diversity in the types of potatoes being grown there (i.e., all Irish crops were equally susceptible to the disease) and because so many people were almost entirely dependant on this one crop for food.

Ireland, with its typically damp climate, had been even wetter in 1845, and it is thought that the spread of the fungus was accelerated as a result. The blight destroyed both the root (i.e., the edible portion) and leaves of the potato plant, yet the plant’s destruction was not the full extent of the

disease's impact. The blight could also infect healthy potatoes if they came into contact with those which were infected. As a result, a farmer could lose both new potatoes as well as those which might be stored already. The scientific community at the time did not yet possess a thorough understanding of microbes and how diseases caused by them spread. Even if this knowledge had been available during the famine, it is unlikely the uneducated and impoverished Irish who were most severely affected would have had access to information about how to prevent the spread of the blight nor how to limit the threats to their staple food source.

Although Ireland had been influenced by crop failures in the past, this one was different. It began gradually, affecting only a small percentage of the crops. Given that the Irish lacked knowledge and resources to stop the blight, it expanded for many consecutive years. In 1845, only 30% of the crop was lost. Many people were able to survive on the crop yields that remained. As conditions worsened however, people's

financial conditions continued to deteriorate. They began to pawn their possessions, sell their livestock, and borrow money for food with the expectation they would recover their financial standing following the harvest of next year's crop. When crops continued to fail again in 1846, many people were left hungry and destitute (without money to buy food or pay rent and with no possessions to sell and generate money for the things they needed). There were few social institutions or programs available to help them at the time, and whole communities were affected. This left few sources of aid. Regardless of one's financial stability before the famine, one was reduced by its effects. People of the lowest social standing became increasingly impoverished, malnourished, and vulnerable to starvation. By the time an unusually harsh winter happened in 1846-47, the poorest communities of Ireland, particularly those in the west and south, experienced massive numbers of deaths from starvation and related diseases. This humanitarian disaster continued until 1849.

## Life of the Irish Before 1845

Understanding the social conditions for most Irish living in Ireland makes it easier to grasp how a natural disaster like a famine could be made worse by human influence. Ireland's agricultural economy was an important component of the country's social structure and exacerbated the famine's effects. Most individuals, whether they were a wealthy landowner, a family farmer, a tenant

farmer, or a laborer, were influenced by the prices that could be gained from the sale of agricultural crops. This type of economy contributed to the economic and social conditions that, combined with political conditions mentioned later in this guide, determined the extent of the famine's impact.

A boom in the Irish economy, stimulated by the need for grain in the Napoleonic War (1803-1815), established relative prosperity for a span of time. As the demand for grain increased, its price did, too. This in turn raised the value of farmland as well as both the demand for and wages of agricultural workers. Steady income and jobs for laborers encouraged earlier marriage and resulted in larger families for Ireland's common people. The population grew. This success beyond a certain critical point had a negative effect on the availability of land for ownership or farming of the Irish working class. It led to land scarcity because a sizeable family farm had to be gradually divided by a father for his sons. As more and more family members took over a portion of the family's land individual parcels became smaller and smaller. Over time, it was more difficult for a family to make a living from the land in their control.

Furthermore, tenant farmers and laborers functioned in a system that limited their upward social mobility and left them particularly vulnerable to the effects of the famine. Due to the restrictions of the "Penal Laws," a majority of people in these low social positions were Irish Catholics. Tenant farmers did not own their own land but rather paid rent to a landlord for the right to farm a portion of his land. These landlords often lived elsewhere (e.g., England or Scotland) but employed a manager who ran the enterprise in their absence. Landlords and their managers typically named their own terms for leasing property and dealing with their tenants. There was little if any governmental oversight of the landlord's practices and few rights for tenants at this time. Tenant farmers were treated unfairly by their landlords almost as a matter of course. For example, if a tenant farmer made improvements to the farmed land and generated a higher crop yield and profit, the

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landlords would respond by increasing the price of the farmer's lease. This effectively locked a farmer into his social position and discouraged farmers from making any improvements that could increase land productivity and generate greater amounts of food for sale.

The tenant farmer adhered to the same practices almost universally across Ireland. These practices also influenced the laborers who worked for him. This farmer used the poorest soil in his parcel to grow food to support his family (e.g., potatoes and seasonal vegetables). He used the most fertile land in his parcel to grow the crops that commanded higher prices (e.g., "cash crops"-- oats and other grains). These crops were sold for cash to pay rent to the landlord. If these crops failed, a tenant farmer would not have rent and might be forced to become a laborer on another tenant's farm. One small setback (i.e., a failing harvest) could easily result in a permanent decline in a tenant's social status. The tenant farmer generally hired laborers to work for him, and this laborer relied on the tenant farmer for his livelihood. The fortune a tenant farmer experienced was directly felt by the laborer and usually with a more exaggerated effect. If the tenant farmer experienced hard times, the laborer experienced worse.



Local laws commonly prohibited tenant farmers from selling their crop yields (in some cases because they were Catholic). As a result, tenant farmers became reliant on a class of merchants and small shopkeepers to sell their cash crops for them. Over time, these “middle men” gained control over the tenant farmer. The tenant farmer’s reliance on middle men meant they could raise the fees charged for selling the tenant farmer’s crops. When these middle men grew wealthy on this practice, it enabled them to use their wealth to further control members of the lower classes. They engaged in usury—offering loans to vulnerable tenant farmers, laborers, and others for exorbitant interest rates.

Due to the population growth and the absence of employment alternatives, by 1841, 45% of Irish tenants, subtenants, and undocumented homesteaders had fewer than 5 acres of land to sustain them and many were desperate for limited but regular (rather than just seasonal) employment. Approximately 10,000 landlords, exclusively Protestant and both English and Irish, owned all the land and rented it to tenants.

Because the Irish from lower socio-economic classes experienced more difficulty paying high prices for grain to plant and land to farm, they began relying more and more on other sources of food, especially those which took less space and less fertile soil to grow than grain. The potato, which was not indigenous to Ireland (originating in Central America), thrived in the wet but temperate Irish climate. Its tightly wound

vines could produce more food in less space than could grain. Furthermore its edible roots were able to be stored through the winter months when other food sources were not available. Because potatoes were nutrient rich they could be depended upon almost exclusively as a dietary staple—supporting even large families. The potato crop gradually became the primary source of food in the Irish diet, particularly for those from the lowest socio-economic levels, who were disproportionately Catholic.

Although many struggled to make ends meet on the farm, the Irish persevered through these difficulties to avoid entering the workhouses—the only form of government aid for the impoverished. The 1838 Poor Law Relief Act divided Ireland into districts and developed workhouses to provide aid to desperate people in each district. To receive this aid, people had to give up their land and move into institutional housing. Families were separated according to age and sex. In exchange for this free housing and a strict, limited diet, needy people did different kinds of rigorous work including breaking stones for roads or grinding corn. The focus of the workhouses was to keep beggars off the street, but life in the workhouse did not respect families or human dignity. Leading up to the famine, workhouses were only half full because the Irish wanted to avoid the prison-like conditions at all costs. The Irish avoided them as much as possible during the famine, too, because the squalid conditions worsened. Workhouses were seen as “death houses,” where dysentery and infectious diseases spread uncontrolled.

# The Social, Economic, and Political Conditions Leading to the Famine

Although the Irish Potato Famine was ultimately caused by a natural disaster (i.e., the complete and continued failure of the potato crop which was relied upon as daily nourishment by the lowest socio-economic class) the social, political, and economic conditions of the time period contributed to the perpetuation of this atrocity and the extent and variety of its devastation. The development of these conditions was a product of the long-standing, complex relationships among groups of people living in the affected areas over time. These relationships were influenced most significantly by the territory in which they lived (whether they were English or Irish) and their religion (whether they were Protestant or Catholic).

**SOCIAL CONDITIONS:** The relationships between different groups of people in England and Ireland were affected not only by citizenship, religion, and social class, but also by popular social ideas of the time. In the decades before the famine, a well-known cleric and scholar named Thomas Robert Malthus proposed that suffering of mass proportions would ensue if the world's increasing population outpaced the ability to grow and distribute sufficient food. Influenced by this social philosophy, the British ruling class began to implement programs designed to decrease population growth among the poor Irish. Public works programs, educational opportunities, and immigration incentives were implemented in response to the prevailing English view that the ignorance of the Irish would lead them to overpopulate. Furthermore, many believed that the ease with which potatoes could be grown had made the Irish lazy and therefore responsible for their own poverty. By and large, the Irish Catholics in the lower socio-economic classes were considered unclean, uncultured, uneducated, and unworthy of aid. Some English believed the famine would ultimately help Ireland by culling the population of its weakest members. It was also commonly thought that the famine was some sort of "Divine punishment" of the Irish for their vices. Such views explain why there was little government support for relief measures during the famine.

**ECONOMIC CONDITIONS:** Irish political leader Daniel O'Connell was able to regain some civil rights for Irish Catholics in the early 1800s—including the right to serve in Parliament. Yet this gain was not enough to affect change in the development of political, economic, and social conditions that contributed to the devastation wrought by the famine. Even with Irish Catholic representation in Parliament, these politicians were not powerful or numerous enough to make a significant difference. Parliament disproportionately passed legislation that privileged wealthy Protestant merchants and land-owners. The Corn Laws were passed in 1815 with the goal of growing the agricultural sector and protecting farmers against cheap grain from abroad. It did so by heavily taxing imports of maize,

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wheat, barley, and rye from other countries. These laws facilitated easy grain sales and an increase in the land's value, ultimately enabling Protestant merchants and landowners to grow in wealth.

The “laissez faire” or “hands-off” economic approach popular throughout Europe at this time made the famine's impact much worse. This approach limited governmental involvement in business and prevented politicians from interfering with the autonomy of business owners. It is largely to blame for the fact that the many agricultural products produced across Ireland throughout the famine continued to be exported to other countries rather than used to feed the starving people of Ireland. The economic advantages of exporting grain, beef, dairy, and other products to Great Britain were significant. In fact, when the government stepped in with famine relief measures, Irish grain was not used, and many people died waiting for grain to be imported from the Americas.

**POLITICAL CONDITIONS:** Leading up to the potato famine, which lasted from 1845-1852, Ireland had been under some form or another of English political rule for centuries. Although the nature and variety of England's impact in Ireland changed over time, it was characterized by a continual increase in the control England had over Ireland's social, political, and economic conditions. Ireland's close geographic proximity to Great Britain, separated only by the Irish Sea, meant that Ireland was a persistent potential threat to England's continuing dominance. An attack on Great Britain would be easy to launch if those living in Ireland had the resources and will to do so. Therefore, it was in England's best interest to oppress and disempower the Irish. Thus, Ireland experienced harsher treatment from the ruling English than any other English territory.

The relationship between the Irish and the English was also influenced by religion and the economic and social opportunities that were associated with religious identity. The English, since the reformation incited by King Henry VIII in the 1530s, were predominantly Protestant. People living in Ireland, except in centers of trade (e.g., Dublin and Wexford) were predominantly Catholic. As the English gained control over Ireland, Protestants (both those who were Irish but loyal to the crown, as well as English who settled in Ireland) became increasingly powerful while Catholics became less so. This dynamic influenced the disproportionate impact of the famine on Catholics, who were largely impoverished as the result of long-term, systematic oppression.

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In the mid-1600s, the English Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Oliver Cromwell, confiscated much of the valuable land in Ireland (i.e., farms and forests) from Irish Catholics and transferred its ownership to Protestants. This not only displaced the Irish, it also impoverished them. The establishment of the “Penal Laws” between the 1690s-1720s institutionalized the oppression of Catholics by prohibiting them from buying land, serving in public office, and educating their children in the Catholic faith. The continued enforcement of these laws over many decades established a significant economic divide and solidified the animosity between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. At the time of the famine, the social conditions in Ireland were similar to that of the Feudal system in the middle ages. Protestant landlords controlled a majority of the land in Ireland, and their affluence was largely subsidized by Catholics who paid rent to farm on the landlord’s estate and labor in his fields.

After witnessing the successful revolution of the American colonies, Ireland aspired its own autonomy and staged a rebellion in 1798. This rebellion was ultimately put down by the English, but only after the loss of 30,000 Irish lives. To firmly establish English authority and control, the British Parliament passed the Act of Union in 1801, which orchestrated greater Irish dependence on the Crown and bound it more tightly to England. The Act abolished the Irish Parliament and brought Ireland under the direct rule of the English government. It further strengthened the power of Protestants in Ireland by forbidding Catholics from serving in Parliament.

## The Coffin Ships/Emigration

During and after the famine, many Irish tenant farmers were forced to emigrate to try to find work. Although emigration had been shunned before the famine, many began to see it as the only way to survive. The frantic rush to leave the country left transportation routes, which for an island are only accessible by boat, congested. Port cities were overcrowded and became breeding grounds for communicable diseases among the hungry and malnourished Irish. Although most Irish leaving the country were left to their own devices when determining how to pay the high transportation costs out of Ireland, some Protestant landlords incentivized emigration by paying for the passage of their tenants. Some landlords saw better opportunities for their tenants in other countries and wanted to help the Irish be successful, but other

landlords had an interest in getting tenants off their land for economic reasons. When given the option, most landlords paid for tenants’ transportation to Canada because it was cheaper than the passage to the United States.

Given the unexpected high demand for passage out of Ireland, there were insufficient passenger ships available. Cargo ships were put into service for transporting these immigrants. Because they were designed to transport goods rather than men, women and children, most cargo ships did not have means for sanitation. This reality, combined with the traumatized state of most passengers, contributed to the creation of unhealthy conditions that promoted disease. Additionally, some cargo vessels used for long voyages did not have sufficient food stores

and only provided passengers with putrid water. In these cases, a passenger was left entirely dependent on their own meager preserves for nourishment on the transatlantic voyage to North American ports (approximately 40 days). These conditions and the weakened state of most passengers meant only the strongest survived. In a surge of emigration in 1847, approximately 40,000 or 20% died at sea or upon arrival in other countries.

Immigrants to Canada were first taken to Grosse Isle, which served as a quarantine island. Due to the high number of Irish immigrants arriving all at once, the personnel and lodgings on Grosse Isle quickly became overwhelmed. Lines of ships with desperate passengers were forced to wait on the St. Lawrence River until they could be served on Grosse Isle. As the build up of boats increased, passengers had to wait through a mandated 15 day quarantine before they could disembark. While waiting, many healthy Irish who were lucky enough to survive the trans-Atlantic crossing got sick and succumbed to disease. Given the conditions, hundreds of dead were dumped into the river. Those who were ill were left on the beach of Grosse Isle to walk or even crawl to the hospital, many dying along the roadside on their way.

Often, Irish immigrants to Canada continued journeying across the border to the United States. They saw this land as one of greater opportunity. It was difficult for the Irish to sail directly to the United

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States. The United States had stricter laws about the minimum conditions required for passage and had placed the fare higher to deter excess immigration. In addition US ports required the captain to pay a bond for each passenger as a means to ensure he or she would not become a ward of the state.

Not all of the Irish emigrated to Canada or the United States. Many took refuge closer to Ireland—with concentrations of Irish heading to Liverpool, Glasgow, and Wales. These destinations provided food handouts for the poor and better rations than were available in the soup kitchens of Ireland. Unfortunately, the cities could not handle the influx of Irish; they became overcrowded, financially strained, and disease-ridden. In an effort to aid these cities, the English government passed a bill limiting the number of immigrant Irish and deported the homeless back to Cork and Dublin.

No matter where they fled, Irish immigrants faced prejudice and hatred. People feared typhus and other diseases that the poor Irish frequently brought with them. In addition, the Irish were viewed as competition for unskilled jobs.

## Relief Measures for the Irish

The relief measures implemented by the British government were slow and inadequate compared to the speed and severity of the famine. In the beginning of the famine's first year, British Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel authorized the purchase of American Indian corn to supplement the minimal aid provided by the 1838 Poor Relief Act. The government considered these measures sufficient to help the Irish live through what many thought might be a single year of crop failure. In January 1846, parliament passed the Public Works Bill, which began small scale, county-based relief projects. When these measures proved insufficient, parliament passed a new bill to build piers and harbors to promote fishing as an alternative food source. These measures provided work to able-bodied Irishmen but did nothing for the elderly, infirm, or children.

In April 1846, Britain repealed the Corn Laws. This made the export of Irish grain to Great Britain less economically advantageous but did little to channel Irish grain to those who needed it. The grain produced in Ireland was used in distilleries and exported to England because the starving Irish could not afford the English market grain prices. Furthermore, the repeal of the Corn Laws was unpopular with the English because it hurt their economy. As a result the established Peel government collapsed and was replaced with the *laissez faire* policies of the Russell government. It was at this time that food depots, the equivalent of "soup kitchens," were established in the poorest areas of the country.

To cope with the increasing effects of famine, a new Poor Relief Act was passed in 1846, but only the poorest were eligible to receive wages for relief work. Wages for these needy workers were intentionally set below the market level. This was done to ease the financial impact on the wealthy who employed laborers who were not receiving relief. It reflected a persistent practice of prioritizing the concerns of wealthy employers over those of the most vulnerable. The wages received through the Poor Relief Act were too low for people to afford the rising price of food. They also diverted laborers away from work that would provide food (e.g. farming and fishing).

Means of financing relief for the poor resulted in greater oppression for the Irish. Because England wanted to hold the Irish responsible to care for themselves, relief projects were financed by treasury loans. Landowners in Ireland were expected to repay these treasury loans through taxes. Some landowners were too poor to pay. Their own fortunes had declined because they had difficulty collecting rent from their tenants who no longer had the funds to pay. Other landlords did not want to pay and were unsupportive of financing public works projects. Rather than doing so, many landlords evicted tenants who could not pay rent and destroyed their tenants' homes to keep them from "squatting" or staying on the land. This left the already poor, destitute. The sympathy of ruling classes was usually for the wealthy Protestant landowners rather than the impoverished Irish. As a case in point, when tenants killed a landlord out of desperation in 1847, the British public responded by calling for the protection of the landlords against the lawless tenants.

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The evictions of Irish tenants began picking up in 1847, when approximately 974,930 people lost their homes and were left with nowhere to live. In 1849, there were 13,384 families evicted, double the number evicted in 1848. Although there were some areas where local communities resisted these detrimental policies, the Irish people could not sustain the effort to make wide-spread, systematic changes. The government did not intervene or set standards for the landlords' treatment of their tenants, considering the decision about whether to evict tenants for non-payment of rent “the landlords' right.”

Other private groups from Britain and beyond tried to supplement the meagre English support for the Irish. On January 1, 1847, the private organization British Associates for Relief of Extreme Distress in Remote Parishes of Ireland and Scotland was founded and made it their mission to raise funds to give children 10 oz. of bread and a pint of hearty soup a day. In November 1846, Quaker leaders founded

the Central Relief Committee (CRC) of the Society of Friends. They created a system of providing quarts of soup for a penny; those who wanted to help could buy soup tickets for the poor. These soup kitchens were considered practical and generous and devoid of demeaning government bureaucracy. Although the Quakers did not act in a way that made more significant systemic changes, their assistance helped people survive the crisis.

Though many Irish were grateful for the help of these individual groups, sometimes food was used as a means of incentivizing the disaffiliation of the poor (often Catholic) from their religion. Protestant clergy and their families were frequently responsible for distributing food and, while in many cases they worked together with the Catholics, in others they used food to force conversion. This effect was not usually significant because many of the “converts” reverted to Catholicism later.

The Catholic Church also assisted the Irish people. Local priests worked with the poor while bishops reached out to Irish immigrants living abroad and other Catholics in Europe. Pope Pius IX promulgated the encyclical *Prædessorum Nostros*, raising awareness of Ireland's situation and calling for prayers and funds. The Church criticized the practice of evicting tenants and the government's policies that valued property over human life.

# The Impact of the Irish Potato Famine

Ireland lost a quarter of its population during the famine. The officially recorded Irish population in 1841 was 8,175,124 but decreased to 6,552,385 in 1851. These numbers are not completely accurate, however, as the populations of Irish in the poorest areas of the country were not always recorded. Ireland became a country with a large, strong, and conservative middle class although much of the rural areas remained poor and continued to experience famine conditions in years with poor crops. Irish nationalism, along with anti-British sentiment, grew after the famine. Many Irish saw Russell's policies focused on Irish responsibility for relief as abandonment by the British government. Despite growing nationalism, the number of people able to speak "Gaelic," the Irish language, continued to decline or "die out" because it had been mainly used by members of the poorer classes, many of whom did not survive the famine.

In addition to the shift in the socio-economic effects of the famine on the Irish population, it caused the Irish people to make some changes in agricultural and inheritance practices. These were designed to prevent

## Timeline

- **Mid-1600s:** English Lord Lieutenant of Ireland Oliver Cromwell confiscates much of the valuable land in Ireland
- **1690s-1720s:** Establishment of the Penal Laws prohibiting Catholics from buying land, serving in public office, and raising children in the Catholic faith
- **1798:** Irish rebellion against the English
- **1801:** Act of Union
- **1803-1815:** Napoleonic War stimulates boom in the Irish economy
- **1815:** Corn Laws passed heavily taxing imports of maize, wheat, barley, and rye from other countries
- **1838:** Poor Law Relief Act divides Ireland into districts and provides working houses in each district
- **1841:** 45% of Irish tenants, subtenants, and undocumented homesteaders have less than 5% of land to sustain them
- **1842:** Area in Maine affected by blight, a probable source of the Irish blight
- **1845:** First report of blight published in the Dublin Evening Post (September)
- **1846:** Public Works Bill passed (January), Corn Laws repealed (April), and Quakers found Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends (November), unusually harsh winter
- **1847:** British Associates for Relief of Extreme Distress in Remote Parishes of Ireland and Scotland founded (January), Pope Pius IX promulgates encyclical *Praedessores Nostros* (March), evictions pick up and in a surge of emigration approximately 40,000 or 20% die at sea or upon arrival in other countries
- **1849:** 13,384 families evicted
- **1852:** End of the Irish Potato Famine
- **1903:** Irish Land Act helps families work toward purchasing land



compounding factors that might be problematic in the event of a future famine. The potato remained a staple food, but the rural population increased the growth of other crops and became dependent on a larger variety of foods. Tenants ended the practice of splitting land among all of their sons. Instead, the eldest son inherited or the eldest daughter was heavily dowered. The 1903 Irish Land Act helped tenants work towards purchasing the land. This kept a property from becoming too small to support a family. However, it also forced younger children to emigrate for economic opportunities. Marriage and birth rates, which some argue were already declining before the famine, continued to decrease as well.

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## How the Famine Intersects with Human Dignity

At first glance, the Irish potato famine might seem to be a simply an unfortunate natural disaster that stripped many people of their basic human needs. When the famine started, however, some people in Ireland were already struggling to survive because of discriminatory and oppressive legal and social structures. As the famine continued over the years, the English government made a series of decisions that served the needs of the wealthier English rather than the starving Irish. Policies and practices prioritized trade and commerce rather than aid for the poor. The government chose to import grain from America to feed the Irish while still exporting

grain from Ireland for the English markets, deport Irish immigrants from cities in England and Scotland where they died from overcrowding and disease, and implement policies that taxed the already poor landlords to pay for relief programs that were in many cases ineffective. The English had a negative and prejudiced view of the Irish and believed the famine would result in “weeding out” the poor and lazy. Many viewed the Irish as “others” who were different and lesser than themselves, even less than human in some cases. These attitudes allowed people to justify the lack of support and direct care provided for the starving and destitute Irish. ❖

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