was that New York workers believed they would receive area wage differentials, prepaid health insurance, and a longer period of retroactivity. The second was that neither the National Postal Union nor the National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees were allowed to participate in the negotiations. The amendments that were added protected minority unions and prevented a union shop. The Postal Reorganization Act passed Congress on 6 August, and Nixon signed the act into law on 12 August 1970.

Key Players

Blount, Winton M. (1921–): Blount, a native of Alabama, graduated from the University of Alabama and during World War II flew B-29 bombers. After the war he and his brother created a successful general contracting business. Active in civil affairs, Blount eventually rose through the ranks and served as postmaster general from 1969 to 1971.


Shultz, George Pratt (1920–): Shultz served in a number of political positions including secretary of labor (1968), head of the Office of Management and Budget (1970), secretary of the treasury (1973), and as President Ronald Reagan’s secretary of state (1982–1989).

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

Potato Famine

Ireland 1845–1851

Synopsis

The Irish potato famine killed one million people and led 2.5 million people to emigrate, making it one of the worst famines in modern European history. The Irish potato famine dealt a devastating blow to landless labor in Ireland but contributed an important element to the wage-labor force in the rest of the English-speaking world. In Australia, the United States, and England, famine refugees assumed a large role in the casual and domestic labor force. With their arrival, nationality and religion—most of the new migrants were Catholics—began to play a much more important role in working-class politics in the English-speaking world.

“Famine” refers to mass starvation stemming from a failure of food entitlements. In Ireland in 1846 and early 1847, there was a genuine food shortage, but hundreds of thousands of lives could have been saved if Irish resources had been used more efficiently. Most importantly, the food resources of the United Kingdom, of which Ireland was a component part, were more than adequate for famine relief. The fact that hundreds of thousands starved in a United Kingdom successfully emerging from the era of the Industrial Revolution must be seen as a triumph of the principles of political economy over the idea that governments are responsible for preserving the lives of those whom they rule.

Timeline

1825: British Parliament enacts a law permitting workers to join together in order to secure regulation of wages and hours; however, other provisions in the law effectively deny the right to strike.

1833: British Parliament passes the Slavery Abolition Act, giving freedom to all slaves throughout the British Empire.

1842: British forces in the Afghan capital of Kabul are routed, experiencing one of the first major defeats of a European force by a non-European one in modern times.

1844: Samuel Laing, in a prize-winning essay on Britain’s “National Distress,” describes conditions in a nation convulsed by the early Industrial Revolution. A third of the population, according to Laing, “hover[s] on the verge of actual starvation”; another third is forced to labor in “crowded factories”; and only the top third “earn[s] high wages, amply sufficient to support them in respectability and comfort.”

1845: The United States formally annexes Texas.

1846: The United States declares war on Mexico, and adds California and New Mexico to the Union.

1847: Liberia, colonized since 1821 by freed American slaves, declares itself a republic and becomes the first independent nation in Africa.

1848: Scottish mathematician and physicist William Thomson, Lord Kelvin, introduces the concept of absolute

zero, or the temperature at which molecular motion ceases. This value, -273°C, becomes 0K on his Kelvin scale of absolute temperature.

1851: With a population of 2.37 million, London is the world’s most populous city.

1852: Publication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Though far from a literary masterpiece, it is a great commercial success, with over half a million sales on both sides of the Atlantic. More important, it has an enormous influence on British sentiments with regard to slavery and the brewing American conflict between North and South.

1861: Emancipation of the serfs in Russia.

Event and Its Context

The Famine and Its Causes

In 1845 some areas of continental Europe and Ireland felt the potato blight, Phytophthora infestans, but the first sign of unusual hardship did not appear until 1846, when the blight hit again on a larger scale. As is often the case in large-scale famines, epidemic disease in Ireland accompanied famine and intensified its effects. Hungry people took to the road hoping to find relief in less affected areas, and epidemic diseases, particularly typhus, spread quickly among the malnourished bands swelling the highways. In turn, typhus not only increased the mortality toll on its own but further weakened rural society’s famine defenses. In times of hardship, Irish peasants had long depended upon reciprocity and mutual aid. Fear of disease undermined their participation in the ordinary social relationships that promoted solidarity among the poor.

The famine was long and its magnitude was great. In comparison with the other major nineteenth- and twentieth-century famines, it lasted a very long time. Hitting some areas in full strength year after year, striking some regions episodically, ignoring other areas entirely, the famine dominated the Irish countryside between the autumn of 1846 to the autumn of 1851. In Irish folk memory, “Black ’47” dated the worst of the famine. The winter of 1846 to 1847 was unusually cold, and bad weather exacerbated the famine’s effects by making it difficult or impossible to work outdoors, the major form of government relief. The maize imports that would save many lives did not begin to arrive until the spring and summer of 1847. Still, many communities reached rock bottom in the winter of 1848 or the summer of 1849.
The famine also would not have taken so great a toll if Irish agriculture had not been so terribly dependent on the potato. Since the eighteenth century, potatoes had spread rapidly throughout the island. They thrived in the damp Irish climate, required minimum investment, and provided a nutritious diet. Ironically, although Irish cultivators had long lamented that the potato did not bear long storage, they generally regarded it as an unusually reliable crop. The spread of the “conacre system” had both ratified and reinforced the potato’s hold on Irish agriculture. In the golden era of Irish agriculture during the Napoleonic wars, landlords were desperate for laborers; for a landlord class chronically short of capital, conacre provided an easy way of paying workers. Under the conacre system, in place of money wages, the poorest sections of the Irish laboring classes were given access to fertilized fields for growing potatoes.

Despite the length of the famine and the exceptional dependence on a single crop, reinforced by the conacre system, mass starvation would not have occurred if political authorities had acted aggressively. Effective suggestions for dealing with the famine were not wanting. In the last months of 1845, the great Irish political leader Daniel O’Connell called for a series of emergency measures. These included the ending of distilling and brewing in Ireland (which consumed vast quantities of grain), prohibition of the export of food products, opening of Irish ports to receive food directly from foreign countries, and imposition of a tax on landlords to subsidize the distribution of food to the needy. But by this time O’Connell was already a spent force in British politics and his old opponent Robert Peel was the prime minister. Peel insisted that welfare was a local responsibility and successfully sought the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 to lower the cost of grain; cheap grain would enable Irish landlords to afford the relief of the starving population.

The Irish authorities and the voluntary committees that administered relief certainly bear a heavy share of responsibility for the famine disaster. Although the potato crop had failed disastrously, other crops had not, and the continued export of food from a starving island made a lasting impression on the Irish memory. If the income from wheat and livestock exports had been used to finance famine relief, it might have been looked upon differently, but the landlord class did not respond to the famine in a unified way. Some landlords drew heavily on their resources to help their starving laborers and tenants. Many were already deeply in debt and the cost of famine relief was the final blow to long-weakened fortunes. Landlords who bought up these bankrupted estates as well as many established landlords responded to the famine by clearing the land of the unemployed and evicting tenants in arrears. Mass evictions, which often meant starvation for those who were turned out, were part of the famine legend. Some landlords offered tenants tickets to North America in exchange for a clear title to the land and so helped to swell the migratory wave departing Ireland. Remittances from kin and state assistance allowed some famine migrants to reach Australia.

While the failure of Irish administrative efforts contributed to the severity of the famine, the failure of England to act to save its subjects was pivotal. A famine extending so long and affecting so many required strong action from the national government. The famine must be seen in a British context, for the 1800 Act of Union had incorporated Ireland into the United Kingdom. While the revolution of 1798 had shown the dangers of maintaining Ireland with its own governing institutions, British preoccupation with Ireland had largely stemmed from political struggles over Catholic emancipation and compulsory tithes. British governments had made relatively little effort to integrate Ireland economically or socially into the realm. In re-
response to 1837 legislation. Poor Law unions were only beginning to be constructed in Ireland, while many areas of the west and south were still isolated and unreachable by dependable roads.

England’s initial response to the Irish famine was a generous outpouring of private contributions; even Peel, in the end, provided government aid. But the English contributions were seen as aid to a distressed neighbor rather than as entitlements of citizenship. As the famine wore on, English impatience increased and the modern phenomenon known as donor fatigue appeared. Stories of Irish laziness and fraud were widely publicized, and Irish political protest was seen as base ingratitude. The government’s decision to play a passive role was reinforced by a monetary crisis in the English financial markets and rising food prices throughout Europe, which made providing relief more costly.

Just at the moment when the famine began to worsen, in the summer of 1846, Lord John Russell’s ministry came to power. Even more than Peel, Russell was an advocate of laissez-faire policies who was determined to make Irish landlords pay for the crisis. Whig suspicions of the landlords were not unmerited; many Irish relief committees ceased to function, not because the famine had subsided but because ratepayers could no longer stand the burden. Yet the Russell government’s insistence on local responsibility ignored the urgency of the case and the magnitude of the need. However culpable they may have been for the plight of Irish agriculture, local landlords simply did not have the money to relieve the famine and were often resistant to paying any money at all. The conflict between the central government and local relief officials chiefly had the consequences of relieving the national government of any responsibility and of slowing famine relief. Assistant secretary of the treasury Charles Trevelyan refused to open the national government’s purse strings, consoling a local relief inspector, “We must do all we can and leave the rest to God.”

The dilemma facing treasury officials like Trevelyan was not new. Nineteenth-century British social policy was torn between the demands of political economy and the claims of citizenship. Political economists were determined to prevent dependency and feared that aid, even for the needy and deserving, would undermine work incentive. In England, the indignities and cruelties of the Poor Law were designed so that only men and women actually on the edge of starvation would avail themselves of poor relief. But when very survival was at stake, claims of English citizenship, claims that no member of the English polity could be allowed to starve, outweighed those of political economy. In his 1798 essay on human population, Thomas Malthus suggested starvation as a natural check on improvidence, but his contemporaries refused to allow even improvident Englishmen to perish. To prevent Irish famine, the British government would have had to violate the principle that local government was responsible for poverty relief and contributed a very large sum of money—a fraction of what Britain spent on any major nineteenth-century war, but still a large sum. When the English government regarded Ireland, political economy trumped citizenship.

Some historians have used the racism and anti-Catholicism of many English politicians to paint the famine as an attempt at genocide—an effort to remove the thorny Irish problem from the British agenda by removing the Irish from the face of the earth. Such an interpretation wrongly imposes twentieth-century policies on nineteenth-century politicians. While English racism and anti-Catholicism were real and contributed importantly to the famine tragedy, charges of genocide are wide of the mark. Even the most pernicious measures were taken in the belief that they were for the ultimate good of the Irish population. It is worth pondering the point that laissez-faire policies ruthlessly carried out and unmitigated by any sense of the responsibilities of citizenship could have the same practical effects as conscious programs of racial genocide.
Results of the Famine

In the end, the Irish potato famine was the greatest human disaster in nineteenth-century Europe. Deaths occurred in every region and among a wide variety of occupational groups, but fatalities were worst among the Gaelic-speaking day laborers in the west and south whose participation in the conacre system had made them fatally dependent on potatoes. The famine was the beginning of the end for the day-laboring class and the death knell for a Gaelic-speaking Ireland already in long retreat. The famine finally forced a massive reconversion of Irish agriculture. In succeeding decades, day laborers were replaced by tenants who came to dominate an Irish agriculture increasingly based on raising livestock.

The famine accelerated the migration of Irish villagers in areas of the country outside the north and in sections of the population, particularly the Catholic population, that were only beginning to migrate in the 1830s. Famine refugees arriving in foreign ports sometimes discovered that their ordeal was not over. In England, Irish migrants were sometimes deported by communities that refused to bear the burden of their relief. In Canada, England, and the United States, famine refugees might be greeted by riotous crowds fearful that Irish migrants were carrying epidemic diseases. The willingness of famine refugees to work for low wages also excited concern among many workers. Many large cities like Liverpool and Philadelphia opened their welfare institutions to Irish immigrants and played an essential role in helping peasants become urbanites.

The largest number of famine migrants ended up in the United States, although the real extent of the migration is unknown. Many took advantage of the cheaper tickets to Canada; an unknown but quite large number of these emigrants may have subsequently moved to the United States. Although the famine Irish followed some of the same paths as those of preceding waves of Irish immigrants, there were some important differences. Having few resources but manual labor, Irish migrants avoided destinations where they might be forced to compete directly with unfree labor. Only a small number of Irish famine migrants went to the U.S. South, a favorite destination of previous Irish migrants. The Cape Colony in South Africa also attracted few new Irish migrants. Those who brought a little money or acquired some rapidly in North America established farms along the Ohio River or in the Great Plains of the U.S. Midwest. Following the Ohio River westward, they joined an older generation of Irish migrants in establishing farms. But the great mass of famine migrants settled in rapidly growing U.S. cities such as Boston, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. The Irish migration was unusual in the large proportion of women, many of them single women, who crossed the ocean, many to enter domestic service in North America.

In Scotland, the United States, and the United Kingdom, many Irish migrants became wage laborers and contributed significantly to the lowering of wages for the least skilled portions of the labor force. In the United States, the Irish sometimes competed with African Americans for less skilled jobs. The Irish often won such struggles, because although theories of a separate and inferior Celtic race were common, the Irish migrants were seldom the victims of the virulent racism visited on African Americans. While many Irish Protestants styled themselves as “Scots Irish” to distinguish themselves from the famine migrants, the size and importance of this migration made the Celtic race card difficult to play. Those threatened by the new wave of Irish migrants were more likely to seize upon their Catholicism.

The presence of Catholic Irish migrants in labor markets made anti-Catholicism a major issue in the English-speaking world during the mid-nineteenth century. Despite the campaigns of American Know-Nothings and the grumbling of Canadian Orange Lodges, Catholic Irish migrants acquired citizenship in the United States and British colonies on the same terms as earlier Irish migrants. Many Irish migrants already spoke English, and this enabled them to accept jobs in government and to participate in politics almost as soon as they got off the boat.

In the 1850s and 1860s, Catholic workers began to play an important role in many trade unions within the English-speaking world. Famine migrants contributed substantially to the trade union movement. Toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Irish migrants and their children provided some of the foremost working-class leaders, including James Connolly, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, William Z. Foster, Mother Jones, Terence Powderly, James Sexton, and John Wheatley. Famine migrants and their children also involved themselves in Irish questions and trade unions, with large numbers of Catholics often endorsing Irish Home Rule. In the United States, Irish migrants, many of them Civil War veterans, played an important role in the Fenian movement of the 1860s, which endorsed using force to gain Irish independence from England. In both the United States and the United Kingdom, Irish migrants provided critical support for the Home Rule campaigns of Charles Stewart Parnell in the 1870s and 1880s.

The tide of Irish migration that grew up during the 1840s continued its flow for decades. The potato crop failed in later decades of the nineteenth century without producing mass starvation. While Irish dependence on the potato never again became as total as it had in the 1840s, emigration became the Irish solution to crop failure. Famine emigration established networks of kin and family in foreign countries who relieved Irish hardship by sending tickets to the United States or Australia.

Perhaps the most tragic aspect of the Irish potato famine is that British policymakers learned so little from it. In India between 1897 and 1899, millions died as a result of a great drought caused by a change in world weather patterns. Making no effort to maintain traditional state-sponsored grain stores, British governors struggled to unchain market forces while millions starved. The reasons for British inaction were the same as in Ireland: a commitment to laissez-faire principles combined with a colonial relationship that made the governed less than full citizens. In India as in Ireland, British administrators were unwilling to spend large sums of money to save the lives of their colonial subjects.

Key Players

O’Connell, Daniel (1775–1847): Founder and leader of the Catholic Association—the driving force in the struggle for Catholic emancipation, which finally was achieved in 1829.
Unable to win concessions for Ireland by his coalition with the Whigs between 1835 and 1839, O’Connell embarked on a campaign for Irish Home Rule that rallied Ireland but failed to make any headway in British politics. By 1844 O’Connell was a defeated figure, unable to use his many political connections to affect famine policy.

Russell, John, First Earl (1792–1878): Scion of one of the great Whig aristocratic families, Russell championed both electoral reform and Catholic emancipation. He was committed to liberal reform and was an ardent advocate of laissez-faire principles.

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Power Loom Invented

United States 1814

Synopsis
The textile industry in the United States entered a new era in 1814 when Francis Cabot Lowell created the first successful American power loom in Waltham, Massachusetts. Lowell copied successful designs of power looms that had been in use in England and invented an improved version of the power loom and other related devices for use in the United States. These inventions revolutionized the organization of all the technical processes by which cloth was made. For the first time mass production of finished textile products became possible.

Lowell and his brother-in-law, Patrick Tracy Jackson, incorporated their business in 1814 with one brick structure, six stories tall. They added a second mill in 1818 and a third one in 1820. First using water to power his machines, Lowell located his factory on the Charles River at Waltham. It was the first successful power-driven textile mill in the world. It was here that the entire process of transforming raw cotton into cloth was gathered within the same building for the first time. Lowell used the new power loom, along with effective mill organization and mass production, to make textile manufacturing a successful operation in the United States.

Timeline
1789: George Washington sworn in as first U.S. president in New York City.
1793: Eli Whitney patents his cotton gin—a machine that, by making cotton profitable, spurs the expansion of slave labor in the southern United States.
1796: British engineer and inventor Joseph Bramah develops the first practical hydraulic press, a machine that will have numerous industrial applications.
1800: Italian physicist Alessandro Volta develops the voltaic cell, an early form of battery.
1810: German art publisher Rudolph Ackerman invents the differential gear, which enables wheeled vehicles to make sharp turns.
1812: The War of 1812, sparked by U.S. reactions to oppressive British maritime practices undertaken in the wake of the wars against Napoleon, begins in June.
1814: British engineer George Stephenson builds the first practical steam locomotive.
1818: War of 1812 ends with the Treaty of Ghent in December—before General Andrew Jackson, unaware of the treaty, leads American troops to victory in the Battle of New Orleans.
1820: In the Missouri Compromise, Missouri is admitted to the Union as a slave state, but slavery is prohibited in all portions of the Louisiana Purchase north of 36°30’ N.
1825: Opening of the New York Stock Exchange.