

## Lessons from the Great Irish Famine [1845–1850]

### The Causes of Starvation

The Great Irish Famine, as it is often called, is so deeply imbedded in Irish history—and that of North America—that extensive research into it and the resulting debates and controversies continue today. Entire university departments, centers, and institutes are devoted to its study. The result is a variety of interpretations and analyses. There are the traditional Irish nationalist account; the Marxist, Sen, and Malthusian readings; the imperialist, feminist, anti-English, and even the anti-Catholic versions. Not surprisingly, debate about some important and unanswered questions persists: What were the principal predisposing causes of the Famine? Those who study the events in Ireland between 1845 and 1850 (and beyond) disagree about what triggered a nationwide starvation that by 1846 was killing widely across a weakened and impoverished Irish population. Was the Great Famine simply “a tragic ecological accident” or “Ireland’s destiny”? Or were the Irish “desperately unlucky”?<sup>1</sup>

Was this indeed a famine? Our definition appears to fit these circumstances: long-term suffering from chronic hunger collapsing into starvation (food shortages and intensity) in a specific geographic area (scale) and resulting in large numbers of dead (the endpoint). Moreover, the Great Irish Famine fits Scrimshaw’s additional definition, that famine is “also an economic and social phenomenon that can occur *when food supplies are adequate to prevent it.*”<sup>2</sup>

History provides many examples of famines that took more lives than the Great Irish Famine. In the twentieth century alone there was starvation in Ukraine (1932–1933; 9–13 million dead), Bengal, India (1943–1944; 3–10 million), China (1959–1960; perhaps as many as 25 million).<sup>3</sup> Estimates for Ireland from 1845 to 1850, by comparison, range between 500,000 and 2 million Irish dead from starvation-related causes. Yet, “the Great Hunger,” as it is also called, has gained a broader and more lasting fame than many other famines, perhaps because millions of Irish fled it to Europe and North America, creating a vibrant diaspora. By 1855, for example, more than one in every four people in New York City was Irish, and the Irish soon made up almost half (44.5 percent) of all immigrants living in that city.<sup>4</sup> “The disaster,” two historians write, “which saw the destruction of one Ireland helped to create another Ireland which was not confined within the shores of one small island, for the North American Irish in

particular were destined to make a remarkable contribution to the shaping of modern Irish history.”<sup>5</sup> The Great Irish Famine became a legendary backdrop for songs, plays, films, and books that even today re-awaken strong feelings among a vast scattering of Irish across Canada and the United States. More than a dozen U.S. states now include the Great Irish Famine in their high school curricula. Montreal’s flag still has a shamrock in one corner. On March 17 (St. Patrick’s Day) at least seven countries celebrate the Irish among them, including Montserrat, South Korea, and Japan. On this day, many of the people of North America identify themselves as Irish-American: at least twenty-three U.S. and Canadian cities hold St. Patrick’s Day parades, Celtic fests, and Irish fiddle contests; some even illuminate buildings with green lights and images of leprechauns.<sup>6</sup>

The Irish Famine also remains a popular case study of Malthusian theory. The Famine is cited as an example of the price paid by the Irish poor for their high rate of reproduction and large families, and, not incidentally, for their Catholicism. (Malthus, after all, was a parish priest in the Church of England.) More recently, however, Amartya Sen (and others) redirected our analysis of the underlying causes of this famine to the poverty of the Irish peasants and their inability to access food available in the markets around them.

The Great Irish Famine further serves as a central support beam in the construction of the nationalist version of Irish history. It is seen, and taught, as “the historical wrong that sealed the fate of the unhappy Union between Britain and Ireland: a partner so uncaring in time of need deserved no loyalty from Irishmen.”<sup>7</sup> The Famine continues to shore up the anti-English version of this history: “The Almighty sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine.”<sup>8</sup>

The Irish Famine is also presented as a symbol of the indifference of free-market or *laissez-faire* economics, as then practiced in Europe, to human suffering. It serves as a reminder of the miserly dispersion of benefits from the Industrial Revolution. Since 1801 and through the Famine years, Ireland was a full member of the United Kingdom, with London as its capital. Yet despite daily accounts of starvation under way in nearby Ireland, large sums of money continued being spent in London on the Great Exhibition of 1851, with its elaborate Crystal Palace and its abundance of celebrations.<sup>9</sup>

Analysis of the guiding economic theory of *laissez-faire* as it was applied to Ireland in 1845–1850 gives us a historical reference point in the tension that continues to this day between anti-interventionist and humanitarian responses toward those who starve. Although it is not the goal here to engage in popular debates about the Great Irish Famine, it is nonetheless insightful to hold it up as a distant mirror reflecting on more recent misfortune. The Famine

reminds us that even today economic theory drives relief policies with regard to hunger and starvation. Whereas the Irish peasant suffered from the *laissez-faire* economic policy of mid-nineteenth century England, free-market economic theory is thought to have caused hunger and food shortages more recently in sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly the starvation that rose inside Malawi in 2001–2002 and again in Niger and Mali in 2005 (discussed in detail in chapter 7).

### **Predisposing and Catalytic Causes**

Several authors refer to the Irish Famine as “the last famine in Europe.” Starvations and famines had essentially disappeared from England by 1600, although during the 1840s starvation visited Ireland and the Scottish Highlands, both as the result of the potato blight.<sup>10</sup> Why did this famine occur? What were the fundamental predisposing causes of the Irish starvation? What catalytic causes may have tipped the Irish poor into the Famine?

Like modern twentieth-century starvations in Africa, India, China, and elsewhere, the Great Irish Famine erupted out of a prolonged, intractable silent emergency. Smaller starvations among segments of the Irish population had been recorded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But chronic hunger, malnutrition, and disease were spreading across an expanding, impoverished Irish peasantry, making them increasingly vulnerable to a catalytic event. There is some agreement about what may have precipitated the Great Famine: the ownership and control of Ireland’s arable land, the failing structure of the Irish economy causing extensive poverty among the Irish peasantry, profound shifts in the Irish population from births and emigration, the increased dependency of the Irish peasant diet on the potato, and then its blight. Interpretation of these events, however, quickly divides into two broad and opposing camps: the nationalist, who say that the British government “deliberately used the pretext of the failure of the potato crop to reduce the Celtic population by famine and exile,” and those less willing to see conspiracy, but who blame the social and economic systems imposed on Ireland by the British government.<sup>11</sup>

A less nuanced, but equally vociferous, dichotomy occurs over the predisposing causes between those who argue that the Great Irish Famine was the result of a food availability decline (FAD) or a food entitlement decline (FED). The FAD (Malthus or supply-side) advocates point to the rising Irish population and their dependency on the potato for income and sustenance. They see the starvation as the inevitable outcome when the potato blight—the “positive check”—caused a shortfall in this food staple by some 12–15 million tons annually, which in turn triggered starvation. The FED (Sen or demand-side) advocates put forth

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the poverty of the Irish peasant as the underlying predisposing cause. The Irish economy was heavily dependent on agriculture, which after the Napoleonic Wars increased production of grains for export and grew potatoes for food. With commercialization of farming, the Irish peasantry became increasingly landless. When the economy faltered, farmers and peasant laborers lost work. Incomes fell, the blight destroyed the potato crop, food prices jumped beyond the reach of millions of peasants. Unable to grow other crops and without income, the Irish peasants starved. The FED side argues, therefore, that the dependency of the Irish peasantry on a single crop, “the primitive state of Irish agriculture and the bad relations between landlord and tenant were but different expressions of the same evil, poverty.”<sup>12</sup>

Both sides agree that as many as 3 million Irish emigrated out of the country between 1845 and 1860, many to North America, and that perhaps as many as 2 million of those who remained died from the effects of starvation. Ireland did not recover from these economic and social losses until well into the twentieth century.

We examine here three possible predisposing causes of the Great Irish Famine. We believe they are the fundamental and underlying reasons the starvation occurred. Two of them—population and poverty—meet our criteria as principal or predisposing causes. The third, *laissez-faire* economics, falls on the margins of our definition but was such a seminal force that it requires inclusion here. We also argue that all three are similar—and in some instances, identical—to the principal causes of modern starvation in developing states today. We frame the analysis around discussion of the Irish population, economy, and politics before and during the Great Famine.

### *Population*

Population numbers in Ireland (and elsewhere) during the mid-1800s must be considered more descriptive than definitive; nineteenth-century census-taking was a flawed process. Yet the Irish population figures form an important part of FAD analysis. Cormac Ó Gráda tells us that the Irish population quadrupled between 1780 and 1845, from 2 million to 8.2 million on the eve of the Famine. It appears that the pre-Famine population growth rate, in five important locations where starvation was severe, reached about 2.1 percent a year, with a doubling rate of thirty-three years. Just before the Famine struck there were some 700 people per square mile of arable land—the highest density in all of Europe. This rapid population growth and density were not slowed by earlier starvations that occurred in 1800–1801 and again in 1816–1819.<sup>13</sup>

It is thought that expansion of the Irish population came from increasing dependence on the potato, which was easy to grow, nutritious, with a high

yield per acre. As Mary Daly, the Irish scholar, writes, “By ensuring good health the potato may have increased the Irish birth rate and reduced mortality levels.”<sup>14</sup> In addition the dietary dependency on the potato *alone* may have triggered starvation. This dependence on a single crop, as we shall also see in our discussion of Africa’s starvations, made the impoverished Irish peasant vulnerable. When the blight struck, the peasants and laborers had neither the money (entitlements) nor the opportunity to purchase food elsewhere. Would the Irish have starved if the potato had not succumbed to blight? Probably not. But when the potato crop did fail—in three consecutive harvests—millions of Irish were too poor to purchase food, and they did indeed starve.

Population growth, however, is clouded somewhat by the argument that emigration “depressed the Irish population” between 1815 through 1845, when some 1.5 million Irish people left the island. This accelerated in 1845 and 1846 when the Poor Law Extension Act, which made landlords responsible for the maintenance of their own poor, pushed some to clear their estates by paying for the emigration of their tenants. A few landlords did so for humanitarian reasons, but others simply evicted the poor because they could then consolidate their holdings and shift cultivation to cash crops for export.

During the four years of the Famine (1845–1850), 571,704 Irish emigrated to the United States alone. Another 1,174,251 left Ireland and joined them during the next decade (1850–1860).<sup>15</sup> So profound was this flow of refugees that the Irish made up about one-third of all voluntary trans-Atlantic passengers.<sup>16</sup> The voyage was difficult: thousands died on the “coffin ships”—so named because of the way people were packed into them—crossing the Atlantic. In 1847 alone there were 17,465 documented deaths among the Irish at sea. Ranelagh writes “This chaotic, panic-stricken and unregulated exodus was the single largest population movement of the nineteenth century.”<sup>17</sup>

Who was left behind? Many of those who could not afford food during the Famine also lacked funds to emigrate. The fare to North America—plus food for three or more months at sea—equaled about a year’s wages for a laborer.<sup>18</sup> Those who could emigrate from Ireland, therefore, were the healthier and better off; those who remained were predominately the poor and unemployed, malnourished and weakened by illness and disease. This further deprived Ireland and its agriculture of reliable and healthy human capital and left behind a peasantry caught in a poverty trap inside the country.

### *Poverty*

Poverty made the Irish peasant vulnerable to price fluctuations. As prices for food rose rapidly in 1845 and 1846, and the potato crop again failed across the country, poverty’s effect was to separate the Irish peasants into two identifiable

groups: those who could purchase food and/or leave the island, and those who could not.

How did the Irish become that poor? First, there was the segregation of the Irish Catholics by English law: the Penal Laws, The Statutes of Kilkenny. These laws of separation were not unlike the twentieth century colonial-era laws in sub-Saharan Africa that separated blacks and whites, reserving the best land for white minority farmers. The Statutes of Kilkenny read like the *apartheid* regulations in pre-1994 South Africa or the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 in Southern Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe), both of which divided land unequally, with whites getting the more arable acreage and blacks the most marginal, thereby creating an impoverished majority. In pre-Famine Ireland, the result was similar: the entrapment of the Irish peasant worker and family and the restriction of the Irish peasants to less-arable farmland left them with few, if any, reliable economic opportunities. As a result of these and other laws, one-third of Ireland's landholders held two-thirds of all arable land.

On the eve of the Great Famine, therefore, wealth was concentrated among those who not only controlled the most fertile farming areas but also ruled with great power over their tenants. With the "evictions," a large and landless class of itinerant Irish peasants, perhaps two million, wandered about the country looking for work. These were the "essentially poor."<sup>19</sup> Their profile is not unlike today's bottom billion. They annually struggled through *summer hunger*—the potato gap between the old and new crops that lasted from mid-May through September, a time of hunger and even malnutrition. Anything that caused a poor harvest drew down their resources and created a shortage that carried over into the next year and pushed these Irish peasants into starvation. They formed "a hidden Ireland," not unlike today's global poor or "the other America" of rural and inner-city United States, who suffer from hunger and poverty. "[T]here is no denying the gradual decline in the living standards of the [Irish] poor, the bottom half or so of the population before 1845," writes Ó Gráda.<sup>20</sup> "The poor were wretchedly housed—two-thirds of the entire population huddled into sparsely furnished, tiny mud cottages or their urban equivalents—and [were] poorly clothed, and often hungry for two or three months of every year." Others lived in "fourth-class" dwellings, mud cabins having only one room.<sup>21</sup> When falling wages and rising prices occurred as a result of the potato blight, these Irish were unable to absorb the shock.<sup>22</sup> Those few Irish with income or skills—"entitlements"—could buy food and/or emigrate. Those who lacked money, skills, or other resources were locked into a poverty trap—unable to work, buy food, or leave. Thus, several million Irish fell to the bottom of the economy. They bore the full weight of the Famine.

Malthus's argument of 1798, when applied to the Irish Famine forty-seven

years later, played well in London, where anti-Irish sentiment was high. The Irish were often referred to as ignorant, primitive, and sketched in London newspaper cartoons with simian features. To the Malthusians in England, the Great Famine was part of God's plan for humankind, or at least that part of humanity who were Irish. The prevailing view was that there was little or nothing that could (or should) be done to prevent or avert starvation. It was viewed as a "positive check" to bring a sinful population, often depicted as subhuman, back into balance with its food supply. Their suffering, while regrettable, was considered inevitable and natural.

### *Laissez-faire Economics*

No famine stands in isolation: the starvation in Ireland rose out of decades of agrarian inequities between tenant and landlord. By 1847, calls for tenant rights were louder than demands for the repeal of the Act of Union with Great Britain. The Great Famine emerged also from the fact that about 66 percent of the Irish population depended entirely on agriculture. Moreover they struggled on small individual plots; almost half of all farms in Ireland at the time of the Famine were less than five acres.<sup>23</sup> "The buoyancy of the British economy" was nowhere to be found in the Irish countryside, and 5.5 million Irish peasants (in a population of 8.2 million) were smallholders, often seasonally unemployed or landless, and trapped by single-crop agriculture. They were "doomed to spend their lives in very great poverty."<sup>24</sup>

The dominant economic theory of mid-nineteenth century Britain was based on the concept of *laissez-faire*. This theory held that it was not the task of government to provide aid for its citizens or to intervene with the free market movement of goods and trade. One might argue that this economic philosophy was a predisposing cause of the Great Irish Famine, but we suggest that this popular economic theory of the time served more as a trigger to Ireland's famine. We test this simply by asking: Did landowners, government officials, or even landed peasants starve under this economic policy? If not, then the fundamental difference was the *poverty* of the Irish peasant, the principal cause of the Great Famine. The *laissez-faire* economic policy of the time was a catalyst that made poverty worse and prevented alleviation of the starvation.

Despite this policy, the initial response in 1845 of the British government under Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel was "prompt, efficient and interventionist."<sup>25</sup> The Prime Minister sent over a Scientific Commission to examine Ireland, which reported that half the Irish potato crop was destroyed, or unfit for use, and correctly identified the cause of the crop's failure as the blight. Against advice from his own treasury ministry, Prime Minister Peel engaged a merchant house in November 1845 to purchase £100,000 of Indian corn and meal from

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the United States—enough to feed 1 million people for more than a month. “A buffer stock was built without fuss or publicity.”<sup>26</sup> At the same time, Peel was convinced that only “the removal of all impediments to the import of all kinds of human food” would disperse the threat of famine in Ireland. One of those impediments was the Corn Laws, which erected a trade barrier around the United Kingdom—of which Ireland was a member—preventing importation of corn even for emergency purposes. Peel’s position was difficult: he was head of the Conservative Party, which supported the Protectionist position and “he was aware that for him to propose repeal [of the Corn Laws] would be considered gross and shameful treachery.”<sup>27</sup> Ó Gráda writes “this dramatic reversal of a key Tory policy—the Corn Laws—led to his political downfall eight months later.”<sup>28</sup>

Sir Robert Peel was forced to resign in June 1846, and Lord John Russell succeeded him as Prime Minister. Russell took office as more than 90 percent of the potato crop of Ireland failed for the second consecutive year. The winter of 1846–1847 became one of the worst in Irish history and marked “the true beginning of the Great Famine.”<sup>29</sup> The second season of failure was unanticipated, despite the previous year’s poor harvest, largely because potato acreage was at an all-time high in 1846. The average yield dropped to less than half a ton per acre, compared to 6–7 tons. Supply fell as demand rose, which ignited increases in prices. “Cups,” a common type of potato, which sold at less than 2 shillings per hundredweight (or 50 kilos) on the Dublin market in October 1845, more than tripled to 7 shillings within the year. The price of the “lowly Lumper”—the peasant’s potato—jumped from 16 pence to 6 shillings. The Irish laborer, already impoverished and hungry, slipped into starvation. “The average agricultural wage per day was now less than the cost of a poor man’s food, making no allowance for those dependent on him. Famine loomed.”<sup>30</sup>

As the new Prime Minister Lord Russell, like his predecessor, was also in a difficult role: he had pledged himself and his Whig Party to Corn Law repeal. He nevertheless made his approach to the Irish Famine very clear: “It must be thoroughly understood that we cannot feed the people . . . We can at best keep down prices where there is no regular market and prevent established dealers from raising prices much beyond the fair price with ordinary profits.”<sup>31</sup> Most members of Parliament put their faith “in the market.” Like some modern-day politicians, they also viewed public charity as a sign of weakness that ignored the “inevitability” of the outcome. Such aid would shift the distribution of food “from the more meritorious to the less,” as *The Economist* wrote at the time, because “if left to the natural law of distribution, those who deserved more would obtain it.”<sup>32</sup> By the winter of 1846–1847 the numbers of Irish dying from starvation “began to mount alarmingly.”<sup>33</sup> Press coverage in London was



extensive, but most favored the *laissez-faire* position. Matchstick figures of Irish scavengers and fully sketched reports of the dead and dying that appeared in the more liberal press such as the *Illustrated London News* did nothing to shift the British government's course. The Irish were abandoned to the vagaries of a free market and self-correcting pricing mechanism that, if left alone, its proponents promised, would match demand with supply. Ó Gráda writes that even today scholars see this as "Malthusian murder by the invisible hand."<sup>34</sup>

As mentioned earlier, perhaps as many as two-thirds of the Irish peasants<sup>35</sup> were wretchedly clothed and housed during the Great Famine, living in mud huts, malnourished, suffering "summer hunger" from May to September before the autumn potato harvest. There was sufficient food produced throughout the Famine to feed all of them, but it was exported in what Sen calls a "food 'counter-movement'" driven by prices and markets.

As prices for the peasant's staple potatoes started to rise—doubling in less than a year—the Irish grain crop was being exported to England. Cecil Woodham-Smith, the preeminent authority on the Irish Famine, wrote in *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845–1849* that "no issue has provoked so much anger or so embittered relations between the two countries . . . as the indisputable fact that huge quantities of food were exported from Ireland to England throughout the period when the people of Ireland were dying of starvation."<sup>36</sup> By several accounts, the amounts were staggering:

- In 1845, some 3,251,907 quarters (1 quarter = 8 bushels) of corn and 257,000 sheep were sold and shipped to Britain. In 1846–1850 another 3 million live animals left Ireland, and in 1847 (or "Black '47," as it was called) 822,609 gallons of butter went to England in the first nine months,<sup>37</sup> which totaled more than 1 million gallons of butter shipped from Ireland during the height of the Famine.

- Alcohol exported from Ireland to England amounted to 874,170 gallons of porter, 278,658 gallons of Guinness, and 183,392 gallons of whiskey. In Black '47, the total amount was 1,336,220 gallons—almost all derived from food grains.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, despite the collapse of the potato crop, Ireland still produced grain crops in abundance—enough, some experts believe, to feed the entire starving population throughout the entire Famine. But while the potato was considered a "food crop," the grain crops were a "money crop" and therefore part of commerce and the free-market economy. Although there were calls for the exports to be stopped and for grain to be sent back to Ireland, this would have meant repealing the Corn Laws, which protected British grain traders and generated large profits for them. There was strong and powerful political opposition in England to reversing the Corn Laws, as former Prime Minister Peel had

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experienced. The British government relied instead on a balance of supply and demand controlled by market forces. Thus, grain crops would not be diverted, and throughout the five-year period of the Great Famine, Ireland remained a net exporter of food.<sup>39</sup> Even during the terrible winter of 1846–1847, as hundreds of thousands of Irish poor starved to death in frozen huts and crawling along the roadsides, “Russell and his colleagues never conceived of interfering with the structure of the Irish economy in the ways that would have been necessary to prevent the worst effects of the famine.”<sup>40</sup> As Sen points out, the shifting of food from those who were starving and poor to those who were well-fed and had money—the counter-movement—was seen not only in the Great Famine, but also later in Ethiopia 1973–1974 and in the Bangladesh famine of 1974.<sup>41</sup>

Can the Great Irish Famine be blamed on an anti-interventionist economic policy of the day? Some historians propose that the Great Irish Famine was a problem of scale; for example, an embargo was placed on food exports during the smaller and shorter 1741 famine in Ireland, thus keeping grains inside the country, which alleviated the hunger. But 1845–1850 marked the first time that a British government had attempted to deal with such a huge and prolonged catastrophe as the Irish Famine. Thus encumbered by its own “hands-off” economic policy, it was ill-equipped to intervene had it wanted to do so.

Other historians propose that even had exports been halted, and food retained inside Ireland, perhaps as many as 3 million Irish poor would still not have been able to locate and purchase food. They were the poorest of the poor, at the bottom of Ireland’s economy. *Laissez-faire* had been in place for decades before the Great Famine, and “free-trade policies gradually eroded the profitability” of rural-based agriculture in Ireland. Poverty and shortages of food were therefore already in place; “the removal of protective tariffs doomed helping, fishing and textile production to failure” and thus denied the Irish laborer nonagricultural income. During the Famine, blind adherence to the *laissez-faire* economic policy merely continued an entrenched economic system that allowed exports of food, as well as “the failure of successful public intervention to relieve the starvation.”<sup>42</sup> That said, it is an inescapable fact that “Nevertheless, the lack of generosity displayed by the Irish landlords and farmers, together with the rest of the United Kingdom, guaranteed the disastrous outcome.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the economics of *laissez-faire* and the free market can be said to have assured Irish poverty and starvation, but perhaps not to have been its principal “cause.”

Finally, there was a *core-periphery disparity*. The Irish were poor, rural, far from London, and Catholic. They, like their counterparts today in developing countries, were also generally silent in their suffering. During earlier economic difficulties in the 1830s and 1840s, for example, “the poor in the industrial areas

of England impressed themselves more vividly in the political consciousness than the rural poor, just as they did in China in the 1950s . . . and in Ethiopia in the 1970s,” writes Liz Young, a geography professor at Staffordshire University, England.<sup>44</sup> It was easier to supply the urban centers of England, and they had a longer history of demand, which they “punctuated by riot” ignited by increasing bread prices, turnpike fees, “and a score of other grievances.” Rioting mobs from Lancashire to Glasgow and Dunfermline in Scotland quickly got London’s attention and aid. The silent starving in Sligo and Skibbereen did not. “Industrial unrest in England,” Young argues, “was potentially more revolutionary and more disturbing than dispersed unrest in Ireland.”

What have we learned to this point from the Great Irish Famine? We argue that poverty, the result of population growth, land and tenancy restrictions, and dependency on a single staple food, characterized a “silent emergency” that spread among the mid-nineteenth-century Irish peasantry. We suggest here, and will discuss more fully later, that the imposition of *laissez-faire* and free market economic policies prevented substantial relief food aid from entering Ireland and continued drawing out grains and other foods for export. With successive failures of the potato crop, evictions, and loss of employment, those Irish who could not buy food or emigrate, starved.

How many died? In 1841 the population of Ireland was thought to be 8,175,124. This rather precise figure may nonetheless have been smaller than the actual number, given the general suspicion of government census takers by those being counted and the remoteness of parts of the Irish countryside. By 1851, after the worst of the Famine, the population was said to have fallen to 6,552,385. The Irish census commissioners calculated that given normal growth rates there should have been 9,018,799 people had the Famine not occurred. What happened to them?

We know that during the Famine years, 1845–1850, some 571,704 Irish arrived in the United States and another 257,354 landed in Canada, for a total of 829,058.<sup>45</sup> The number of Irish making the 120-mile trip across the Irish Sea to Liverpool, England, with the cheaper fare, shorter voyage, and possibility of easier return, might have matched that sailing to North America. Thus, perhaps 1.5 to 1.7 million Irish emigrated during those five years. Putting the census and emigration together, we estimate that another 800,000 to 1.5 million Irish men, women, and children may have died from starvation-related causes in the Great Irish Famine. Thus, the total losses from death and emigration may be estimated at about 2.5 million (2,466,414) people—a staggering drain on Ireland. Emigration out of Ireland continued for more than a century and produced an unanticipated benefit: it planted and nurtured a vast international dispersion of Irish culture and nationalism.