

# Marcus - The Potato Famine on Irish Immigration

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**The Irish: How it all Began**



A picture of a scared young boy.

AP Images. **Young Boy.**

Ireland had been a beautiful and prosperous land up until about 1840. The land was lush with crops and vegetation, the landlords were generous and caring, and the economy was thriving. You might then ask yourself, why would four million Irish try to flee their country to come to America?

In 1841, Irish had become Europe's most densely populated area, and the total population was reaching over eight million people! This proved to be very unfortunate for all the new people who settled in to Ireland. In 1845, the blight had been carried by the wind from America and the surrounding areas in to Ireland. Also at this time, British had been planning a way to make Ireland fall to her knees. The Act of the Union was passed in the 1800's which then shut down the government in Dublin. Now the British were in control. Queen Elizabeth I had the mindset to make the Irish starve, or in her own words, "tame the barbarian Irish" (**Elliot 4**). The British also wanted Ireland to be strong, so they didn't give them any charity or aid because "that would make them weak".

## **The Division of Ireland**

King Henry split up Ireland in 10 regions. He then put his officials in charge of them. This caused conflict because now the regions had two rulers. The original, native ones, and the British ones. King Henry continued to take rule of the regions, but it wasn't till the reign of William III that declared Ireland conquered by the British (Price 41).

## **Taking Action**



Soldiers cutting potatoes during the war.

AP Images. **Cutting Potatoes.**

Now that the British had total control over the Irish, the landlords started charging rent. This went from taxing Irish settlers for having a home close to the field, to as far as charging them rent on the fields themselves. Not only did they have to pay money for the land, they didn't even see the crops on their own table. The British demanded that the crops be exported out of Ireland and on to Britain. Since the Irish settlers were very poor, they resulted in planting potatoes. Potatoes were a good choice because they grew well in poor soil, and they can yield a large crop in a small area. So by 1844, nearly all of the farmers were planting with potatoes to support their families. Now that the blight had set in, the British stepped up their game even more. They demanded an even higher percentage of yield be exported, and they raised the price of each piece of land (Price 37-52).

#### **Making a Choice**

In the summer of 1845, you could see the blight in the potatoes. In the autumn, nearly the entire crop failed. When people started to see this, they panicked and pleaded with the British to help them out. The British answered by evicting them from their settlements. About five months after the crop failed, people began to starve. The British only looked on and "saw it as a sign to better themselves" (**Elliot 9**). In a couple of months, Typhus and Cholera were starting to spread. Dead bodies started to rot in fields and ditches (Hossell 38). The Irish could either stay, or try their luck at immigration.

**All Aboard!**



An old Irish coffin ship used in the Potato Famine.

AP Images. [Coffin Ships](#).

Those who chose to go aboard ship, did not always have a better chance to survive than the people that stayed. Of the half million Irish that fled from Ireland, many pursued ships to Britain and the Americas. These ships were known as the coffin ships. Coffin ships were exactly what they sounded like. Ships that were poorly designed, and a lot of open space. This was Britain's way of "helping the Irish" ([Coffin Ships 1](#)).

Today, Irish Americans are very prosperous in this country, and many still trying to come here. All in all, the Irish had many struggles to get to America, but everything happens for a reason, and without that, I would not be here today.

[Video of Irish struggle](#).

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