

# **Special Section: Great Irish Famine Curriculum**

In 1997, the people of Ireland and of Irish descent around the world observed the 150th anniversary of the worst year (1847) of the Great Irish Famine, a catastrophe precipitated by a fungus that destroyed the potato harvests of 1845, 1846, 1848 and 1849. The consequences of the Great Irish Famine altered more than the course of Irish history; the Irish Diaspora changed the shape of world history, especially that of the United States, Canada, Australia and England. In the 1990 federal census, 44 million Americans voluntarily reported their ethnicity as Irish. Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans have made significant contributions to every phase of American life, including politics, labor, sports, religion, arts, entertainment, and business.

The Great Irish Famine occurred in a period where England, countries in continental Europe, and the United States were developing politically and industrially into modern states. The famine challenged the British government, international humanitarian organizations and philanthropic private individuals to provide aid to massive numbers of poor Irish, many living in remote areas, who were suffering from starvation and famine-related disease.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to study the Great Irish Famine is that hunger and homelessness are still with us; that there is want in a world of wealth. The famine's legacy has affected the psyches of the Irish and the Irish of the Diaspora teaching us that distress and dislocation have long-term consequences on its victims and its descendants. The lessons of the Great Irish Famine have a claim on our fundamental humanity; they remind us that we have an opportunity to help our neighbors who face similar suffering. Students studying the Great Irish Famine in the context of other famines will develop a better understanding of the factors which contribute to famine in today's world and will, as a result, become actively concerned about the human right to adequate nourishment.

This special section of Social Science Record follows up on articles previously published by the New York State Council of Social Studies in the February 2000 issue of Time and Place, 30 (3). The New York State Great Irish Famine curriculum was also featured in Social Education's Middle Level Learning supplement in September/October, 2000. Material based on the New York State Great Irish Famine Curriculum is available at [www.geocities.com/hsse.geo](http://www.geocities.com/hsse.geo).

The principal authors and editors are Maureen Murphy and Alan Singer of Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York. Contributing authors and editors include Maureen McCann Miletta of Hofstra University and Judith Y. Singer, Long Island University - Brooklyn Campus, Brooklyn, New York. Teachers who edited and field tested social studies material include Jennie Chacko (Amityville MS, Amityville, NY); Lynda Costello (Lawrence Rd JHS, Uniondale, NY); Jennifer Debler (Baldwin MS, Baldwin, NY); Rachel Gaglione (IS 119Q) Queens NY); Cecelia Goodman (PS 197K, Brooklyn NY); Stephanie Hunte (Turtlehook JHS, Uniondale, NY); Jewella Lynch (Roosevelt HS, Roosevelt, NY); Michael Maiglow (IS 292K, Brooklyn, NY); Siobhan Miller (Herricks HS, New Hyde Park, NY); Jennifer Palacio (Long Beach HS, Long Beach, NY); Michael Pezone (Law, Government and Community Service Magnet HS, Queens, NY); Cheryl Smith (Hicksville MS, Hicksville, NY); Adeola Tella (IS 292K, Brooklyn, NY); Nicole Williams (Westbury HS, Westbury, NY).