

# The Great Irish Famine Was Genocide

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Some controversy has surrounded the use of the word “genocide” with regard to the Great Irish Famine of 160 years ago. But this controversy has its source in an apparent misunderstanding of the meaning of genocide. No, the British government did not inflict on the Irish the abject horrors of the Nazi Holocaust. But the definition of “genocide” reaches beyond such ghastly behavior to encompass other reprehensible acts designed to destroy a people.

As demonstrated by the following *legal* analysis, the Famine was genocide within the meaning of *both* United States and *International law*.

The United States Government is party to the 1948 Convention On The Prevention And Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (“Genocide Convention”). As a Treaty of the United States , the Genocide Convention is therefore “the Supreme Law of the land” under Article VI of the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. Government has also passed implementing legislation which substantially adopts the Genocide Convention and makes any violation of the Convention punishable under federal law. 18 U.S.C. § 1901.

Article II of the Genocide Convention provides:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within a group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

(emphasis supplied)

From 1845-50, The British government pursued a policy of mass starvation in Ireland with the intent to destroy in substantial part the national, ethnical and racial group known as the Irish People. This British policy caused serious bodily and mental harm to the Irish People within the meaning of Genocide Convention Article II(b). This British policy also deliberately inflicted on the Irish People conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction within the meaning of Article II(c) of the Convention. Therefore, from 1845-50

the British government knowingly pursued a policy of mass starvation in Ireland which constituted acts of Genocide against the Irish People within the meaning of Article II(b) and (c) of the 1948 Genocide Convention.

While there are many legitimate subjects of debate surrounding the Famine, there is no doubt that the British Government committed genocide against the Irish People. This particular “debate” should therefore come to an end.

(See Irish Echo, Feb.26-March 4, 1997 at page 7 for the list of 125 distinguished signatories)

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