

Race case study essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Race was the defining element in nineteenth century perceptions of the Irish
“ how far is this judgement borne out by the documents?”

These sources are exceptionally revealing about nineteenth century perceptions of the Irish. Many of the sources reveal the extent of colonial racism; some of the sources however are pro-Irish.

Source A is an extract written by the chairman of the Irish Famine Curriculum Committee, James Mullin, in 1998. From interpreting the author it is clear that the source will be anti- British. It clearly states that race was the defining element in nineteenth century perceptions of the Irish. Mullin says that the British looked on the Irish with “ a self conscious sense of Saxon superiority at what they considered to be the childlike and inferior, but dangerous Celtic race.”

Mullin touches on the area of colonialism, which many Irish Nationalist historians believe was the root of all the problems. The British wanted control of Ireland for many different reasons: to give land as rewards to nobility, to avoid becoming a launching point for a French invasion and to spread Protestantism. The British had no respect for the Irish and treated them as they treated their other colonies. This source explains the British false sense of racial superiority encouraged by the idea of social Darwinism. In relation to the Irish the British ruling class believed in social Darwinism and adhered to the view that only the fittest survive.

Source B is a good example of how the Saxon races defined other races. This view is supported by Mullin in source A. The source is taken from the American magazine ‘ Harpers Weekly’ in 1864. It pictures the Irish Iberian

race as inferior to the Anglo Teutonic and Negro races. The source also shows that it was not only the British who held racial prejudices against the Irish. At the time the source was written Irish immigration to the USA was rife. Now the previously enslaved Afro-American Negro race was free and slowly climbing the social ladder a new victim was needed to take their place. The blacks would no longer accept the lowest rate jobs. Irish immigrants were struggling for survival and were forced to accept these jobs. This is a good example of how race was such a defining element in the fight for survival.

Source C is an extract from a pamphlet written by an English economist in 1834. It is a stereotypical view of the Irish referring to their “insurrectionary spirit” and “rude efforts at obtaining a sort of savage self established justice”. Scrope is saying that their treatment gave the Irish no choice but to react with violence against the English landlords. The source shows the British mentality towards the Irish and the stereotype that they attached.

Source D is a pro-Irish document taken from a book written in 1853. It shows that race was the defining element in perceptions of the Irish but touches on a different angle to the other sources. It accepts that the Irish are a lower race than the British but they do have good aspects to their characters. John Garwood the author says that the English labourers are lacking in “intellectual acuteness and an imaginative glow but have manliness and honesty. Whereas the Irish have both”. The source is positive about the Irish but ultimately it is still defining them by race. It is unclear whether or not this source is racist.

Source E is a very racist document taken from the English satirical magazine 'Punch' in 1862. This was mainly read by the upper class English, and is an excellent example of how the British perceived the Irish and stereotyped them. It refers to the Irish as a "creature manifestly between the gorilla and the Negro". This source bears similarities to source A, in relation to social Darwinism.

Source F is a document written by the historian Lord Acton in 1862. It is an ultimately racist source with Acton discussing social Darwinism and racial progression. Depicting the Irish as the "materials of history not the impulse". He believed that more developed races should control the retrogressive races with the aim of advancing them. This source can be related to Mullin's views on colonial racism.

Whether or not race was perceived as good or bad it was the factor that people were influenced by. This is easily linked to the view of colonial racism and social Darwinism, especially borne out in source A. There is sufficient evidence from these sources that race was the defining element in nineteenth century perceptions of the Irish.