

11.2 Wearing of the Green (c. 1798)

Source: <http://www.ireland-information.com/irishmusic/thewearingofthegreen.shtml>

Background: Songs are important parts of revolutionary social movements. They teach ideas, convey messages, and inspire solidarity. “The Wearing of the Green” was originally an Irish street ballad. Its author is unknown. It probably was composed in 1798 when the United Irishmen, whose official color was green, rebelled against English colonial rule. British authorities declared it illegal for anyone to wear a shamrock in their hat (in Irish it was known as a *caubeen*). The penalty for displaying a revolutionary insignia was death by hanging. Over the years there were many versions of this song. The best-known version is from a play performed in the United States in 1864.



O Paddy dear, and did ye hear the news that's goin' round?
The shamrock is by law forbid to grow on Irish ground!
No more Saint Patrick's Day we'll keep, his color can't be seen
For there's a cruel law ag'in the Wearin' o' the Green.”
I met with Napper Tandy, and he took me by the hand
And he said, “How's poor old Ireland, and how does she stand?”
“She's the most distressful country that ever yet was seen
For they're hanging men and women there for the Wearin' o' the Green.”
“So if the color we must wear be England's cruel red
Let it remind us of the blood that Irishmen have shed
And pull the shamrock from your hat, and throw it on the sod
But never fear, 'twill take root there, though underfoot 'tis trod.
When laws can stop the blades of grass from growin' as they grow
And when the leaves in summertime their color dare not show
Then I will change the color too I wear in my caubeen
But till that day, please God, I'll stick to the Wearin' o' the Green.

Questions

1. Why does the song's narrator call Ireland the “most distressful country”?
2. What is the song narrator's response to the British decree?
3. What are the “colors” of the United States?
4. How would you respond if someone tried to make wearing these colors illegal? Why?
5. In your opinion, why were songs important parts of revolutionary struggles?