

Wearing of the Green, Rothbard on Ireland, Historical Confirmation Bias



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“Finding the Challenges” is an original column appearing every other week, usually on Wednesday, at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Verbal Vol. Verbal is a software engineer, college professor, corporate information officer, life long student, farmer, libertarian, literarian, student of computer science and self-ordering phenomena, pre-TSA world traveler, domestic traveler. Archived columns can be found here. FTC-only RSS feed available here.

It is so gratifying that Rothbard has something to say about Ireland, because as I write, it is St. Patrick’s Day. I am 3/4ths Irish on my Father’s side, and 3/4ths Irish on my Mother’s side. That makes me 6 parts Irish out of 8 parts. The other 2 parts are Acadian and Welsh. And neither of those had much love lost for the English either.

In observance of my ancestral day, I am featuring the lyrics of “Wearing of the Green,” a poetic description of the lengths to which tyranny may go, and Rothbard’s comments on where the Irish had been before the oppression of the English. Then, I will wrap up with a logical review of how history may be abused.

The Wearing of the Green

A link to John McCormack Singing “The Wearing of the Green”.

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 summer-time 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.

Rothbard Quote #16

For the libertarian, the most interesting and certainly the most poignant example of the creation of a State through conquest was the destruction of the libertarian society of ancient Ireland by England in the seventeenth century, a conquest which established an imperial State and ejected numerous Irish from their cherished land. The libertarian society of Ireland, which lasted for a thousand years—and which will be described further below—was able to resist English conquest for hundreds of years because of the absence of a State which could be conquered easily and then used by the conquerors to rule over the native population. ... The most remarkable historical example of a society of libertarian law and courts, however, has been neglected by historians until very recently. And this was also a society where not only the courts and the law were largely libertarian, but where they operated within a purely state-less and libertarian society. This was ancient Ireland—an Ireland which persisted in this libertarian path for roughly a thousand years until its brutal conquest by England in the seventeenth century. And, in contrast to many similarly functioning primitive tribes (such as the Ibos in West Africa, and many European tribes), preconquest Ireland was not in any sense a "primitive" society: it was a highly complex society that was, for

centuries, the most advanced, most scholarly, and most civilized in all of Western Europe.

First of all, I encourage you to read the above sections, and their surrounding matter, in Rothbard's *For A New Liberty*. We have been accustomed to the slavery of imperialism because European "civilization" spread through royal conquest, through a wrongful conviction that might made right. The British Empire has often rationalized its usurpations by claiming to have brought civilization to the world. But that was not the case with Ireland (Eire, before the Empire commanded abandonment of its traditional languages). The English appeared bound to destroy an arguably finer civilization until they were finally repulsed in the early Twentieth Century.

Logic Fallacy #46 — The Apocryphal

So here is a disclaimer: the story told in the lyrics of *Wearing of the Green* is told by way of literary imagery. It is difficult to find a specific case of hanging or persecution in that era, ca. 1798. The references are apocryphal. The Oxford Online Dictionaries give the word this treatment: 1(Of a story or statement) of doubtful authenticity, although widely circulated as being true: *an apocryphal story about a former president*. More example sentences:

- Urban legends are apocryphal or wildly inaccurate stories that are passed on from person to person until they reach a point where they are accepted as truth.
- Other stories that sound apocryphal are unfortunately true.
- I have no idea whether or not the above story is true or apocryphal, but I'd like to believe it anyway.

Unfortunately, most dictionaries cast the word as both of an uncertain origin **and** of doubtful truth. This would be a special case of the Fallacy Fallacy — because a construction has the shape of a logic fallacy, it is not necessarily false. I sense a bit of revisionism here. The trouble, however, is that the undisciplined mind will often take the apocryphal as true enough.

I was not in Ireland during the English domination, therefore I have no way of knowing what is concrete fact versus poetic license. I do know where there is smoke there is often fire.

Many of our American recountings of the colonial period cover similar purported episodes. Since I am a lighthouse *aficianado*, I am reminded of the Long Island Sound beacon known as Execution Rocks. Its location is referred to as, according to local lore, where the British executed colonial prisoners by chaining them to the rocks at low tide so that they would be executed come high tide. Specifically documented incidents, however, seem to be lost to

antiquity.

In modern times, though, we can see this type of fallacy being born. For instance, by the nature of the events, eyewitnesses are scarce at happenings like the death of Lavoy Finicum, notwithstanding that everyone seems to have a firm grasp of the details via video (shades of Doctor/Senator Bill Frist diagnosing from afar the condition of Terri Schiavo). And eyewitnesses are notoriously unreliable. Or, all of the witnesses have perished as was the case with the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald four decades ago.

I admit that I am less than objective when it comes to my Irishness. I am hoping for a world where ethnicity is very much like eye color in the scheme of things. I find that I like nearly everyone, taken as an individual, but I have my frictions with those in collectives, particularly involuntary, authoritarian ones. I try to respect individuals regardless of affiliation

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