

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

The Rebels

This drinking song of unknown origin proclaims the opposition of Tory loyalists to their fellow colonials who were in rebellion against the crown. Of what do the singers accuse “the Rebels”? In what tone and mood should one read the song’s recurring refrain, “with their hunting-shirts, and rifle-guns”? In general, what is the attitude of the song toward the colonials? How effective is the appeal to loyalty and law-abidingness, and the attack on rebellion? Could a similar song, in a similar spirit, have been written years later to mock and condemn the rebels in the Civil War?

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Ye brave, honest subjects, who dare to be loyal
And have stood the brunt of every trial
Of hunting-shirts and rifle-guns:
Come listen awhile, and I’ll sing you a song;
I’ll show you, those Yankees are all in the wrong,
Who, with blustering look and most awkward gait,
’Gainst their lawful sovereign dare for to prate,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.

The arch-rebels, barefooted tatterdemalions,¹
In baseness exceed all other rebellions,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.
To rend the empire, the most infamous lies,
Their mock-patriot Congress do always devise;
Independence, like the first of rebels, they claim,
But their plots will be damned in the annals of fame,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.

Forgetting the mercies of Great Britain’s king,
Who saved their forefathers’ necks from the string;
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.
They renounce allegiance and take up their arms,
Assemble together like hornets in swarms,
So dirty their backs and so wretched their show

¹ A person wearing ragged or tattered clothing; a ragamuffin.

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That carrion-crow follows wherever they go,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.

With loud peals of laughter, your sides, sirs, would crack,
To see General Convict and Colonel Shoe-black,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.
See cobblers and quacks, rebel priests and the like,
Pettifoggers and barbers, with sword and with pike,
All strutting, the standard of Satan beside,
And honest names using, their black deeds to hide.
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.

This perjured banditti now ruin this land,
And o'er its poor people claim lawless command,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.
Their pasteboard dollars prove a common curse;
They don't chink like silver and gold in our purse.
With nothing their leaders have paid their debts off,
Their honor's dishonor, and justice they scoff,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.

For one lawful ruler, many tyrants we've got,
Who force young and old to their wars, to be shot,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.
Our good king, God speed him! never used men so,
We then could speak, act, and like freemen could go;
But committees enslave us, our Liberty's gone,
Our trade and church murdered; our country's undone,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.

Come take up your glasses, each true loyal heart,
And may every rebel meet his due desert,
With their hunting-shirts and rifle-guns.
May Congress, Conventions, those damn'd inquisitions,
Be fed with hot sulphur, from Lucifer's kitchens,
May commerce and peace again be restored,

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And Americans own their true sovereign lord!
Then oblivion to shirts and rifle-guns.
God save the King!

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