

THE IRISH

My dad would light his pipe and say, "I smoke my dudeen and curse the Irish," and my mother would respond, "That's 'cause the Johnny Bull's already cursed." The Johnny Bull's the nickname for the British.

Until the 19th century, the Irish emigrants to America were those who could afford the passage, which meant they were mostly Protestants from Northern Ireland. Irish Catholics, who were considered to be of a different race and were referred to in Ireland as Native Irish or Celts, had just recently been freed from a century under Ireland's Penal Laws, and were collectively poor as church mice.

WHAT WERE IRELAND'S PENAL LAWS?

A decade-long insurrection in the 17th century led to the deaths of thousands of Protestants and was followed by a retaliation in which thousands of Catholics were massacred. This British victory led to the Penal Laws, which forbade Irish Catholics from:

- living in a town or a city
- voting
- practicing their religion
- teaching
- attending school
- sending their children away to be educated
- selling newspapers or books
- owning land
- renting any parcel of land for more than one generation
- renting land worth more than 30 shillings a year
- owning a horse worth more than 5 pounds
- practicing law
- owning a gun
- serving in the military

Does this sound reminiscent of the oppression of Blacks in America? Consider the fact that peasants were often whipped by their landlords, and peasant wives and daughters were summoned to warm their landlord's bed. American slaves, who lived under heinous conditions, ate better and lived in larger, better-ventilated