

Wade in the Water Lyrics and Meaning

Wade in the Water: Full Lyrics and Historical Context

“Wade in the Water” is a powerful African American spiritual with deep roots in the history of slavery in the United States. More than just a song of faith, it served as a coded message for escaping slaves navigating the Underground Railroad, offering both practical advice and spiritual encouragement. The lyrics of “Wade in the Water” are a testament to resilience, hope, and the quest for freedom.

Full Lyrics of “Wade in the Water”

(Chorus)

Wade in the water
Wade in the water, children
Wade in the water
God's gonna trouble the water

Who's that young girl dressed in red?
Wade in the water
Must be the children that Moses led
God's gonna trouble the water

(Chorus)

Wade in the water
Wade in the water, children
Wade in the water
God's gonna trouble the water

Who's that young girl dressed in white?
Wade in the water
Must be the children of the Israelite
God's gonna trouble the water

(Chorus)
Wade in the water
Wade in the water, children
Wade in the water
God's gonna trouble the water

Who's that young girl dressed in blue?
Wade in the water
Must be the children coming through
God's gonna trouble the water

(Chorus)
Wade in the water
Wade in the water, children
Wade in the water
God's gonna trouble the water

See that band all dressed in red?
God's a-gonna trouble the water
Looks like the band that Moses led
God's a-gonna trouble the water

(Chorus)
Wade in the water
Wade in the water, children
Wade in the water
God's gonna trouble the water

See that host all dressed in white?
God's a-gonna trouble the water
The leader looks like the Israelite
God's a-gonna trouble the water

(Chorus)
Wade in the water
Wade in the water, children
Wade in the water
God's gonna trouble the water

Historical Significance

The historical significance of “Wade in the Water” is immense, particularly concerning the Underground Railroad. The central instruction, “Wade in the

water,” was literal advice for escaping slaves: walking or wading in rivers and streams helped throw pursuing bloodhounds off their scent, increasing the chances of reaching freedom. The line “God’s gonna trouble the water” carried a dual meaning: referencing the biblical story of the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:4), where an angel troubled the waters, bringing healing, and also symbolizing the divine intervention believed to protect those seeking freedom by disrupting their pursuers. The lyrics served as a vital communication tool, embedding escape strategies within the familiar and relatively safe context of religious music.

Why “Wade in the Water” Matters

“Wade in the Water” remains culturally relevant as a powerful symbol of African American history, struggle, resilience, and faith. It transcends its origins as a coded message to embody the enduring human spirit in the face of oppression. The song was frequently sung during the Civil Rights Movement, connecting the historical fight against slavery with the modern struggle for equality. Its evocative melody and profound message continue to resonate with audiences worldwide, reminding listeners of the ingenuity required to survive and the deep wellspring of hope found in faith and community during times of trial. The enduring appeal of “Wade in the Water” lies in its universal themes of seeking liberation and finding strength in adversity.

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