

Green Root: Celebrates the renewal of spring, the environment, and the Tree of Life ceremony.

Red Root: Celebrates workers' rights and social justice movements.

These two colors represent the two distinct historical lineages that converged into the modern holiday:

The Green Tradition (Ancient Roots): This is the original, pre-Christian celebration of spring's arrival, nature's renewal, and fertility. Traditions like dancing around maypoles, gathering greenery (hence "green"), and festivals such as the Celtic Beltane or Roman Floralia date back thousands of years.

The Red Tradition (Modern Labor Roots): This tradition emerged in the late 19th century as a day for workers' rights and social justice. The color "red" is synonymous with the labor movement and commemorates the 1886

Haymarket Affair in Chicago, which eventually led to the establishment of International Workers' Day on May 1st.

While these two histories existed independently for nearly a century, the Minneapolis MayDay event, founded by Sandy Spieler and In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre (HOBT) in 1975, is widely recognized for explicitly “twining” these two roots together into a single community-focused celebration. This formal language of “twining” the red and green roots became a core pedagogical tool for the event's expansion. For Spieler, the “twining” metaphor describes the two roots as inseparable. The green root represents the “always fomenting power” of the changing seasons and nature's sustenance, while the red root honors the “change-bringing of people's hands” in the struggle for workers' rights.

Spieler developed the “roots” concept to give the Minneapolis festival and parade a philosophical foundation

that bridged environmentalism and social activism.

In terms of social activism, the first May Day parade occurred just two weeks after the end of the Vietnam War. Spieler viewed the event as a “radical” form of anti-war protest intended to pull people out of their homes and foster common humanity after years of social division. (This move to link the May Day event with an anti-war platform was not new. It goes back to the Industrial Worker’s of the World union (IWW), who protested against World War I, refusing to participate in killing their brother workers for the capitalist cause. The IWW, also known as the Wobblies, was a radical, international labor union founded in Chicago in 1905. Unlike traditional craft unions, the IWW organized workers across all industries into “one big union” with the goal of abolishing the capitalist system and establishing workplace democracy.)

