

ANTHEMS OF WAR



Singing played an important role in the Civil War in a way that is hard for people surrounded by radios, disks, and concerts to understand. Songs helped soldiers set a cadence for marching. Soldiers sang in camp to ward off homesickness and for something to do besides drink or fight. On the home front people gathered around parlor pianos to sing topical songs about the war from sheet music. They sang about the soldiering life in "Marching Through Georgia" and "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground," about the battlefield in "Comrades, I Am Dying!" and "The Dying Volunteer," and about domestic scenes in "When This Cruel War Is Over" and "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," one of the enduring favorites.

Everyone, in the field or at home, sang the great patriotic songs of the age, "Battle Cry of Freedom" and "Battle Hymn of the Republic" in the United States, for example, and "Maryland My Maryland," "The Bonnie Blue Flag," and "Dixie" in the Confederacy. Songs like these built fervor, defined the cause, created collective solidarity, and sustained morale. They may in fact have been indispensable to the conflict. Even in the Confederacy, with comparatively few publishers, instruments, or distribution outlets, sheet music outsold books, pamphlets, and magazines by five to one. The songs of the two sections were in many respects similar: simple, sentimental, belligerent. Set frequently to older tunes—folk ballads, hymns, popular songs, European melodies—the words frequently changed as the circumstances of the war changed or the popular mood changed. Songs written for one side sometimes ended up on the other side with new, sometimes sarcastic or comic, words.

Amidst the sameness and sentimentality, however, there were significant ideological differences, which may be seen in the following two popular examples, one Southern, the other Northern. The author of "Maryland My Maryland" was James Ryder Randall, a Maryland native who was teaching in Louisiana when word arrived that war had broken out and that Baltimore residents had attacked a Massachusetts regiment, with casualties on both sides. Randall, seeking to rally

Southern morale and spur Maryland to join the rebellion, wrote his poem for a New Orleans newspaper. A pro-Confederate printer set it to the music of "Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum" and published it in sheet music form with the Maryland coat of arms on the cover. As it turned out, Maryland remained in the Union despite the rebel sentiments of Baltimore. But the song was immensely popular anyway and became a favorite Confederate marching song.

"Battle Hymn of the Republic," one of the greatest war anthems ever written, came from the pen of the genteel Julia Ward Howe, the wife of a well-known asylum reformer and abolitionist, Samuel Gridley Howe of Boston. The daughter of a New York banker, Howe enjoyed an excellent education, wrote poetry, and helped her husband edit a reform newspaper. She later related how she came to write this remarkable verse:

I awoke in the gray of the morning twilight, and as I lay waiting for the dawn, the long lines of the desired poem began to twine themselves in my mind. Having thought out all the stanzas, I said to myself, "I must get up and write these verses down, lest I fall asleep again and forget them." So with a sudden effort I sprang out of bed . . . and scrawled the verses almost without looking at the paper. . . . Having completed my writing, I returned to bed and fell asleep, saying to myself, "I like this better than most things that I have written."

Her melody came from an 1861 camp song by William Steffe of South Carolina. Soldiers had begun to sing "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave" to this tune when Howe wrote her hymn. "Battle Hymn of the Republic" first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Howe was paid four dollars for her great work; her name did not appear on the poem.

Questions to Consider. What common features do you find in the language and imagery of these two songs? To what extent were the messages similar or different? Given what you know about the Civil War, do these two songs seem to be reasonable representations of the ideals of the two sides of the conflict? Did "liberty" and "freedom" mean the same thing for these authors?



Maryland My Maryland (1861)

JAMES RYDER RANDALL

The despot's heel is on thy shore,
Maryland!
His torch is at thy temple door,
Maryland!
Avenge the patriotic gore
That flecked the streets of Baltimore,
And be the battle queen of yore,
Maryland! My Maryland!

Hark to an exiled son's appeal,
Maryland!
My mother State! to thee I kneel,
Maryland!
For life and death, for woe and weal,
Thy peerless chivalry reveal,
And gird thy beauteous limbs with steel,
Maryland! My Maryland!

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Come! for thy shield is bright and strong,
Maryland!
Come! for thy dalliance does thee wrong,
Maryland!
Come to thine own heroic throng,
Stalking with Liberty along,
And chaunt thy dauntless slogan song,
Maryland! My Maryland!

Dear Mother! burst the tyrant's chain,
Maryland!
Virginia should not call in vain,
Maryland!
She meets her sisters on the plain—
"Sic semper!" 'tis the proud refrain
That baffles minions back again,
Maryland! My Maryland!

I hear the distant thunder-hum,
Maryland!
The Old Line's bugle, fife, and drum,
Maryland!

She is not dead, nor deaf, nor dumb—
Huzza! she spurns the Northern scum!
She breathes! she burns! she'll come! she'll come!
Maryland! My Maryland!



Battle Hymn of the Republic (1862)

JULIA WARD HOWE

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps.
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat:
Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

[Chorus]
Glory, Glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.