



Battle Hymn of the Republic

The story behind the song

Patriotic songs have the power to bring people together in a musical celebration of unity and love of country. But what do people sing when their country tears itself apart? That was the unhappy circumstance during the American Civil War, which lasted from 1861–1865. For four years, the fate of the country hung in the balance as two parts of America took aim at each other.

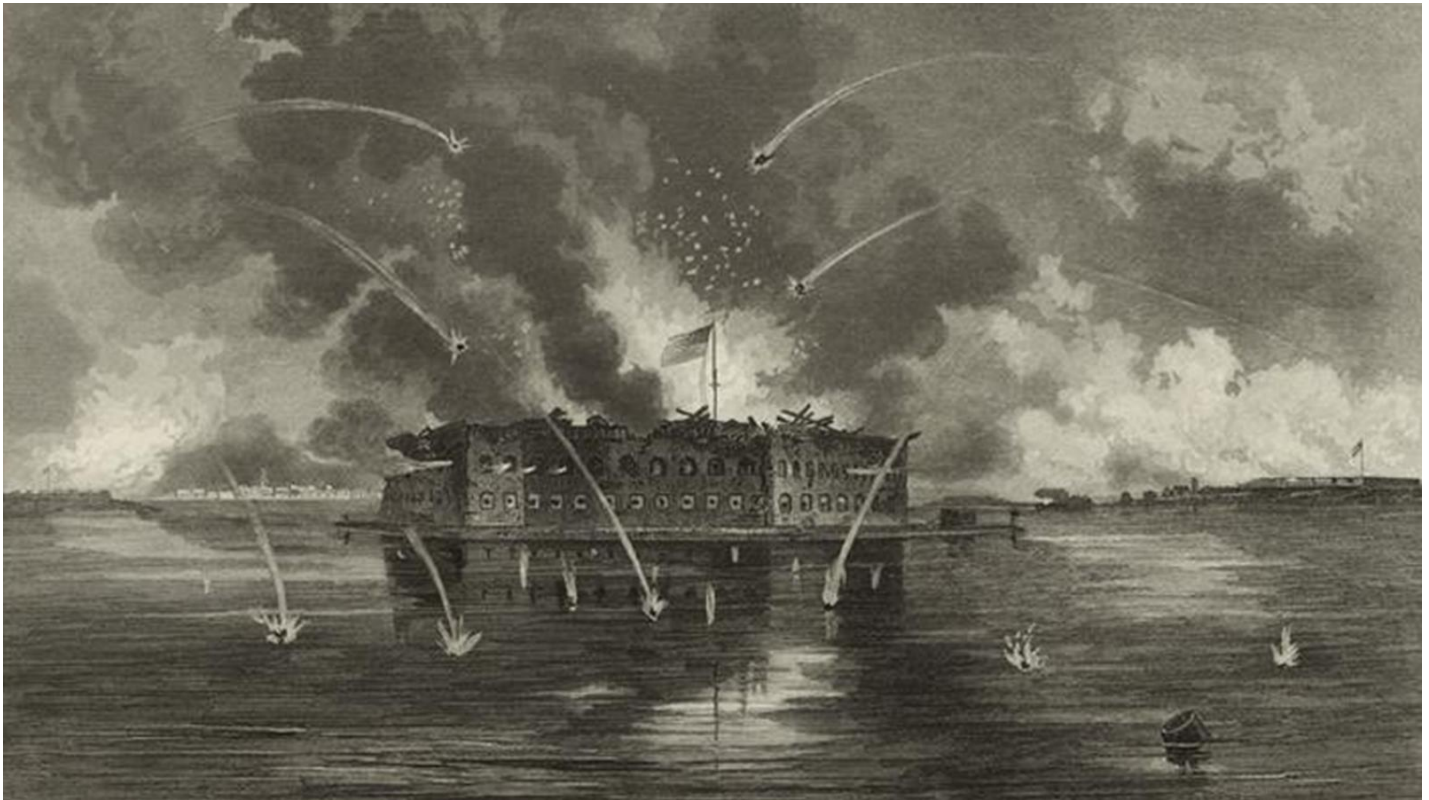
For the victors, one song came to represent all they were fighting for. To the conquered, it was a musical slap at their honor and pride. Here is the story behind “Battle Hymn of the

Republic.”

Battle Lines Being Drawn

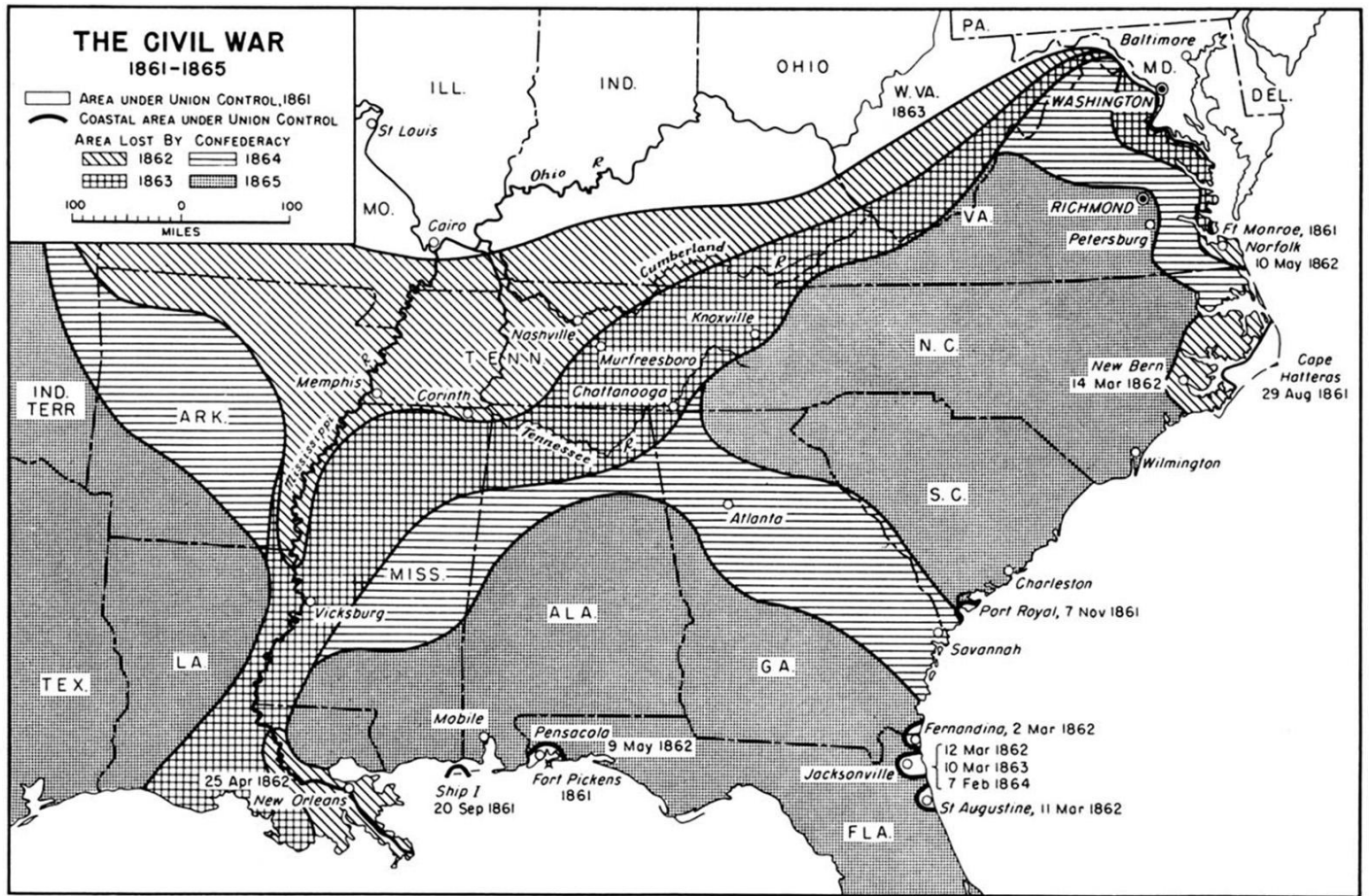
In 1860, American voters elected Abraham Lincoln as president. Although he personally hated slavery, Lincoln promised not to interfere with the slave system in southern states.

Most Southerners, however, were fighting mad about Lincoln’s election. They were convinced his true goal was to end slavery and control the South. One by one these states seceded, or broke away, from the United States to form the Confederate States of America. As president, Lincoln felt duty-bound to fight to keep “the Union” together; the South vowed to fight for its independence.



On April 12, 1861, a Confederate cannon fired on Union forces at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, igniting what northerners referred to as the Civil War, and most southerners called the War Between the States.

The Civil War



Started: April 1861

Ended: April 1865

Who: The United States of America against the Confederate States of America

Why: Eleven southern states seceded from the U.S. for fear the national government would interfere with their rights—especially the right to own slaves. The states that remained in the Union went to war to end the rebellion.

Writing Fighting Words

In November 1861, a woman named Julia Ward Howe and her husband visited Washington, D.C. While there, Howe, a published poet, heard Union troops belting out a well-known marching song called “John Brown’s Body,” after the famous abolitionist, John Brown. A preacher standing with Howe encouraged her to write new lyrics to the tune.

“I replied that I had often wished to do so,” Howe later wrote.

I... awoke the next morning in the gray of the early dawn, and to my astonishment found that the wished-for lines were arranging themselves in my brain. I lay quite still until the last verse had completed itself in my thoughts, then hastily arose, saying to myself, I shall lose this if I don't write it down immediately. I... began to scrawl the lines almost without looking... Having completed this, I lay down again and fell asleep, but not before feeling that something of importance had happened to me."

That "something of importance" proved to be the words to the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." In February 1862, she sold her poem to the *Atlantic Monthly*, a well-known magazine, for five dollars.



The new song spread quickly through the Union armies and was adopted by Union supporters who wanted to teach the southern rebels a lesson. (Oddly, it had been a

southerner named William Steffe who had written the original music.) Howe's version was packed with Biblical imagery and phrasing.

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.

(Chorus)

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

Howe took dead aim at slavery in her lyrics. She and her husband were strong anti-slavery activists, called abolitionists. Included in one verse of the hymn were the words “let us die to make men free”—to fight to end slavery, in other words. Howe's new words also angered southerners. Not only did the song sing for an end to slavery, this “hymn”—a holy, church song—claimed that God was on the North's side.

The Poet: Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910)



Despite pressures of the time to provide for her husband and home in very traditional ways, Julia Ward Howe was quite socially active in circles that included other authors such as Charles Margaret Fuller, Charles Sumner, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Charles Dickens. A lyrical poet and prolific author in her own right, Howe is best remembered for her new words to the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” She was active in prison reform, the fight to end slavery, and the fight to win equal rights for women.

Julia Ward Howe's efforts for social justice continued after the war. In 1870, she campaigned for a Mother's Day for Peace, a precursor of Mother's Day. She also pushed for women's suffrage—the right for women to vote.

“Battle Hymn of the Republic”

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BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC.

BY MRS. 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 lightnings of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

CHORUS—Glory, glory, hallelujah !
Glory, glory, hallelujah !
Glory, glory, hallelujah !
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.

CHORUS—Glory, glory, hallelujah, &c.
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."

CHORUS—Glory, glory, hallelujah &c.
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!
CHORUS—Glory, glory, hallelujah, &c.
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, &c.
While God is marching on.

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"Dixie" — The Unofficial Anthem of the South



This lively song of the South was actually written in New York City by a northern composer named Dan Emmett. Even stranger, "Dixie" was often featured in minstrel shows—white performers who painted their hands and faces black and acted out shameful stereotypes of former slaves. But the song became the unofficial anthem of the South during the war, and its lyrics were changed to make it a battle song. The lyrics below are attributed to Confederate General Albert

Pike.

Southrons, hear your country call you,
Up, lest worse than death befall you!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!
Lo! all the beacon-fires are lighted,

Let all hearts be now united!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!

Advance the flag of Dixie! Hurrah! Hurrah!
In Dixie's land we take our stand, and live or die for Dixie!
To arms! To arms! And conquer peace for Dixie!
To arms! To arms! And conquer peace for Dixie!

Hear the Northern thunders mutter!
Northern flags in South winds flutter!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!
Send them back your fierce defiance!
Stamp upon the cursed alliance!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!

(Chorus)

Fear no danger! Shun no labor!
Lift up rifle, pike, and saber!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!
Shoulder pressing close to shoulder,
Let the odds make each heart bolder!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!

(Chorus)

How the South's great heart rejoices
At your cannon's ringing voices!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!
For faith betrayed and pledges broken,
Wrongs inflicted, insults spoken,
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!

(Chorus)

Strong as lions, swift as eagles,
Back to their kennels hunt these beagles!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!
Cut the unequal bonds asunder!

Let them hence each other plunder!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!

(Chorus)

Swear upon your country's altar
Never to submit or falter
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!
Till the spoilers are defeated,
Till the Lord's work is completed!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!

(Chorus)

Halt not till our Federation
Secures among earth's powers its station!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!
Then at peace and crowned with glory,
Hear your children tell the story!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!

(Chorus)

If the loved ones weep in sadness,
Victory soon shall bring them gladness
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!
Exultant pride soon vanish sorrow;
Smiles chase tears away to-morrow!
To arms! To arms! To arms, in Dixie!

(Chorus)

The War Ends



The fighting raged for four brutal years. More Americans died during the Civil War than in any war before or since: 620,000 dead and tens of thousands more wounded. Both sides fought fiercely for their beliefs.

In the end, the North's larger population and manufacturing power overwhelmed the resources of the South. Compared to Confederate forces, the Union Army seemed to have a bottomless supply of soldiers and guns. Southern slave owners even had to battle their former slaves, now fighting in the blue uniforms of Union soldiers.

The main Confederate army surrendered in April 1865, and the Union was restored. Much of the South, though, was left in smoking ruins. Defeat, destruction, and the end of their way of life—namely slavery—left southerners with a bitter taste in their mouths. And when they heard “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” it left a bitter sound in their ears.

But the song was beautiful music to former slaves—black children, women, and men who now tasted freedom.