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# BATTLE CRY OF FREEDOM

## THE CIVIL WAR ERA

BY JAMES M. McPHERSON



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The Civil War Era

JAMES M. McPHERSON



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## *Battle Cry of Freedom*

# **The Oxford History of the United States**

C. Vann Woodward, *General Editor*

## **Volume III**

ROBERT MIDDLEKAUFF

### **THE GLORIOUS CAUSE**

*The American Revolution, 1763–1789*

## **Volume VI**

JAMES MCPHERSON

### **BATTLE CRY OF FREEDOM**

*The Civil War Era*

*To Vann and Willie*

*and to the  
memory of*


*Glenn and Bill*

*Who introduced me to the world  
of history and academia in the  
good old days at Hopkins*


## BATTLE CRY OF FREEDOM

The original words and music of this sprightly song were written in the summer of 1862 by George F. Root, one of the North's leading Civil War composers. So catchy was the tune that southern composer H. L. Schreiner and lyricist W. H. Barnes adapted it for the Confederacy. The different versions became popular on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. Reproduced here are Verse 3 and the Chorus of each version.

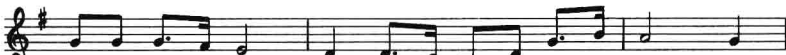
### VERSE 3



*Union:* We will wel-come to our num - bers the loy - al, true and brave,  
*Confederate:* They have laid down their\_ lives on the blood-y bat - tle field,



Shout - ing the bat - tle cry of Free - dom, And al - though he may be poor Not a  
 Shout, shout the bat - tle cry of Free - dom; Their\_ mot - to is re - sis - tance, To




man shall be a slave, Shout - ing the bat - tle cry of Free - dom.  
 ty - rants we'll not yield! Shout, shout the bat - tle cry of Free - dom.


### CHORUS



The Un - ion for - ev - er, Hur - rah, boys, Hur - rah!  
 Our Dix - ie for - ev - er, she's never at a loss



Down with the trai - tor, up with the star; While we ral - ly 'round the flag, boys,  
 Down with the ea - gle, up with the cross. We'll\_ ral - ly 'round the bonnie flag,



ral - ly once a - gain, Shout - ing the bat - tle cry of Free - dom.  
 we'll rally once a - gain. Shout, shout the bat - tle cry of Free - dom.

## Preface

Both sides in the American Civil War professed to be fighting for freedom. The South, said Jefferson Davis in 1863, was “forced to take up arms to vindicate the political rights, the freedom, equality, and State sovereignty which were the heritage purchased by the blood of our revolutionary sires.” But if the Confederacy succeeded in this endeavor, insisted Abraham Lincoln, it would destroy the Union “conceived in Liberty” by those revolutionary sires as “the last, best hope” for the preservation of republican freedoms in the world. “We must settle this question now,” said Lincoln in 1861, “whether in a free government the minority have the right to break up the government whenever they choose.”

Northern publicists ridiculed the Confederacy’s claim to fight for freedom. “Their motto,” declared poet and editor William Cullen Bryant, “is not liberty, but slavery.” But the North did not at first fight to free the slaves. “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with slavery in the States where it exists,” said Lincoln early in the conflict. The Union Congress overwhelmingly endorsed this position in July 1861. Within a year, however, both Lincoln and Congress decided to make emancipation of slaves in Confederate states a Union war policy. By the time of the Gettysburg Address, in November 1863, the North was fighting for a “new birth of freedom” to transform the Constitution written by the founding fathers, under which the United States had become the



world's largest slaveholding country, into a charter of emancipation for a republic where, as the northern version of "The Battle Cry of Freedom" put it, "Not a man shall be a slave."

The multiple meanings of slavery and freedom, and how they dissolved and re-formed into new patterns in the crucible of war, constitute a central theme of this book. That same crucible fused the several states bound loosely in a federal *Union* under a weak central government into a new *Nation* forged by the fires of a war in which more Americans lost their lives than in all of the country's other wars combined.

Americans of the Civil War generation lived through an experience in which time and consciousness took on new dimensions. "These are fearfully critical, anxious days, in which the destinies of the continent for centuries will be decided," wrote one contemporary in a sentence typical of countless others that occur in Civil War diaries and letters. "The excitement of the war, & interest in its incidents, have absorbed everything else. We think and talk of nothing else," wrote Virginia's fire-eater Edmund Ruffin in August 1861, a remark echoed three days later by the Yankee sage Ralph Waldo Emerson: "The war . . . has assumed such huge proportions that it threatens to engulf us all—no preoccupation can exclude it, & no hermitage hide us." The conflict "crowded into a few years the emotions of a lifetime," wrote a northern civilian in 1865. After Gettysburg, General George Meade told his wife that during the past ten days "I have lived as much as in the last thirty years." From faraway London, where he served his father as a private secretary at the American legation, young Henry Adams wondered "whether any of us will ever be able to live contented in times of peace and laziness. Our generation has been stirred up from its lowest layers and there is that in its history which will stamp every member of it until we are all in our graves. We cannot be commonplace. . . . One does every day and without a second thought, what at another time would be the event of a year, perhaps of a life." In 1882 Samuel Clemens found that the Civil War remained at the center of southern consciousness: it was "what A.D. is elsewhere; they date from it." This was scarcely surprising, wrote Twain, for the war had "uprooted institutions that were centuries old . . . transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations."

Five generations have passed, and that war is still with us. Hundreds of Civil War Round Tables and Lincoln Associations flourish today. Every year thousands of Americans dress up in blue or gray uniforms

and take up their replica Springfield muskets to re-enact Civil War battles. A half-dozen popular and professional history magazines continue to chronicle every conceivable aspect of the war. Hundreds of books about the conflict pour off the presses every year, adding to the more than 50,000 titles on the subject that make the Civil War by a large margin the most written-about event in American history. Some of these books—especially multi-volume series on the Civil War era—have achieved the status of classics: James Ford Rhodes's seven-volume *History of the United States* from the Compromise of 1850 to the Compromise of 1877; Allan Nevins's four-volume *Ordeal of the Union* from 1847 to 1861, and four more on *The War for the Union*; David M. Potter's 600-page study *The Impending Crisis 1848–1861*; Bruce Catton's three volumes on the Army of the Potomac (*Mr. Lincoln's Army*; *Glory Road*; and *A Stillness at Appomattox*), his three additional volumes, *The Centennial History of the Civil War*, plus two volumes on Ulysses S. Grant's Civil War career; Douglas Southall Freeman's magnificent four-volume biography *R.E. Lee* and his additional three-volume *Lee's Lieutenants*; and Shelby Foote's *The Civil War*, three encompassing volumes totaling nearly three thousand pages.

Alongside these monumental studies the present effort to compress the war and its causes into a single volume seems modest indeed. Nevertheless, I have tried to integrate the political and military events of this era with important social and economic developments to form a seamless web synthesizing up-to-date scholarship with my own research and interpretations. Except for Chapter 1, which traces the contours of American society and economy in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, I have chosen a narrative framework to tell my story and point its moral. This choice proceeds not only from the overall design of the *Oxford History* but also from my own convictions about how best to write the history of these years of successive crises, rapid changes, dramatic events, and dynamic transformations. A topical or thematic approach could not do justice to this dynamism, this complex relationship of cause and effect, this intensity of experience, especially during the four years of war when developments in several spheres occurred almost simultaneously and impinged on each other so powerfully and immediately as to give participants the sense of living a lifetime in a year.

As an example: the simultaneous Confederate invasions of Maryland and Kentucky in the late summer of 1862 occurred in the context of intense diplomatic activity leading toward possible European intervention in the war, of Lincoln's decision to issue an emancipation procla-

mation, of anti-black and anti-draft riots and martial law in the North, and of hopes by Peace Democrats to capture control of the Union Congress in the fall elections. Each of these events directly affected the others; none can be understood apart from the whole. A topical or thematic approach that treated military events, diplomacy, slavery and emancipation, anti-war dissent and civil liberties, and northern politics in separate chapters, instead of weaving them together as I have attempted to do here, would leave the reader uninformed about how and why the battle of Antietam was so crucial to the outcome of all these other developments.

The importance of Antietam and of several other battles in deciding “the destinies of the continent for centuries” also justifies the space given to military campaigns in this book. Most of the things that we consider important in this era of American history—the fate of slavery, the structure of society in both North and South, the direction of the American economy, the destiny of competing nationalisms in North and South, the definition of freedom, the very survival of the United States—rested on the shoulders of those weary men in blue and gray who fought it out during four years of ferocity unmatched in the Western world between the Napoleonic Wars and World War I.

The most pleasant task in writing a book is the expression of gratitude to people and institutions that have helped the author. The resources of the Firestone Library at Princeton University and of the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California, provided most of the research material on which this book is based. A year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, where part of this book was written, supplemented an earlier sabbatical year at the Huntington to give me the time and opportunity for reading, research, and writing about the Civil War era. These two rich and rewarding years in California were financed in part by Princeton University, in part by fellowships funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and in part by the Huntington Library and the Behavioral Sciences Center. To all of them I am especially indebted for the support that made the writing of *Battle Cry of Freedom* possible. To Gardner Lindzey, Margaret Amara, and the staff of the Behavioral Sciences Center who helped me gain access to the riches of the Stanford and Berkeley libraries I also express my appreciation. The staff of the Manuscripts Collection of the Library of Congress, and Richard Sommers as Archivist-Historian at the U.S. Army Military History Institute at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, extended me every courtesy and assistance dur-

ing research visits to these superb repositories. I also thank the staffs of the photographs and prints divisions at the libraries where I obtained photographs for the illustrations in this book.

George Fredrickson read an early draft of this book and offered valuable suggestions for improvement, as did my colleague Allan Kulikoff who kindly read Chapters 1 and 20. Sheldon Meyer, Senior Vice President of Oxford University Press, has been in on the project from the beginning and has shepherded it through to conclusion with an expert helping hand. Managing Editor Leona Capeless at Oxford refined the manuscript with her careful editing and cheerful encouragement. To Vann Woodward I owe more than I can express. Teacher, friend, scholar, editor, he has guided my growth as an historian for nearly thirty years, offered the highest example of craftsmanship, and done more than anyone else to bring this book to fruition. To Willie Lee Rose also I owe much as a friend and fellow graduate student at Johns Hopkins who did more than anyone else except Vann to introduce me to the mysteries of the guild.

Without the love and companionship of my wife Patricia this volume could never have come into existence. Not only did she help with some of the research and read early drafts with a sharp eye for confused or overblown rhetoric; she also joined me in the tiresome but essential task of correcting proofs, and suggested the title. Finally to Jenny, and to Dahlia and her friends, I express warm appreciation for helping me understand the potential as well as problems of Civil War cavalry.

*Princeton*  
*June 1987*

J. M. M.

## Editor's Introduction

No period of American history makes greater demands on the historian than that of the Civil War. To meet this extraordinary challenge all the classic accounts have resorted to multivolume solutions. The one by Allan Nevins, for example, required eight large volumes, and another has used that many without attempting to be comprehensive. One of the remarkable aspects of the present achievement is that the author has been able to cover the period so completely and admirably within the covers of one volume. It is a large volume, to be sure, and will probably be the longest of the ten in *The Oxford History of the United States*. That it should, despite its size, cover the shortest period assigned calls for some comment on the part of the editor.

First, a look at the disparity between the length of the book and the brevity of the period. Precious little correlation exists between the importance, complexity, and abundance of historical events and the length of the time it takes for them to occur. Some history of momentous consequence requires centuries to unfold, while history of comparable importance can take place with staggering speed. Here we are clearly dealing with history of the latter type. In his Preface to this volume, James McPherson has spoken of the Civil War generation as having "lived through an experience in which time and consciousness took on new dimensions." These new dimensions have to be reckoned with by the historians recording the experience. If participants in that era had the experience of "living a lifetime in a year," historians can reasonably

demand more pages and chapters to do justice to such years. That also helps to explain why far more has been written about these particular years than any others in American history. The more written, the more disclosed, and the more questions and controversies to be coped with by latter-day historians.

Given the latitude granted in the matter of pages, is it not reasonable to expect a more complete treatment of all aspects and themes of the period? Normally so, yes. But again, this is hardly a normal period. What normality can be claimed for it consists largely of the continuation of familiar themes of American history: westward expansion and settlement, Indian removal and resistance, economic growth and development, the tides of European immigration, the back-and-forth of diplomatic exchange. None of these classic themes are missing from the Civil War period, and all get some attention in these pages, but they are necessarily subordinated to the dominant theme or integrated with it. It is hard to imagine a historian in his right mind pausing between the roar of Gettysburg and the fall of Vicksburg for a topical chapter on internal improvements or the westward movement. Like other historians engaged in writing the *Oxford History*, McPherson has made agreements with the authors of the previous and following volumes regarding responsibility for full treatment of overlapping themes.

Of the ten periods covered in this series there is not one when Americans were not involved in some war or other. Two of them are called world wars—three counting one in the eighteenth century. What then is to be said to justify the exceptional attention and space allotted to this particular war? There are numerous criteria at hand for rating the comparative magnitude of wars. Among them are the numbers of troops or ships committed, the years the conflict lasted, the amount of treasure spent, the numbers of objectives gained or lost, and so on. One simple and eloquent measurement is the numbers of casualties sustained. After describing the scene at nightfall on September 17, 1862, following the battle called Antietam in the North and Sharpsburg in the South, McPherson writes:

The casualties at Antietam numbered four times the total suffered by American soldiers at the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944. More than twice as many Americans lost their lives in one day at Sharpsburg as fell in combat in the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Spanish-American War *combined*.

And in the final reckoning, American lives lost in the Civil War exceed the total of those lost in all the other wars the country has fought added together, world wars included. Questions raised about the proportion of space devoted to military events of this period might be considered in the light of these facts.

C. Vann Woodward

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