

Document 23.5

George F. Root, "The Battle Cry of Freedom" (1863)

George F. Root of Chicago was a fervent supporter of the Union cause and the Civil War's most famous and successful songwriter. "The Battle Cry of Freedom" was his most famous song and the war's first truly monumental piece of original music. "Battle Cry" weds an exuberant and instantly unforgettable melody to a stirring lyrical text, eschewing the religious pomp of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" for a straightforward, rollicking populism. Its structure and content are simple enough to learn, and remain exciting after countless repetitions.

*Yes we'll rally round the flag, boys, we'll rally once again,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom,
We will rally from the hillside, we'll gather from the plain,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom!*

[Chorus:]

*The Union forever! Hurrah, boys, hurrah!
Down with the traitor, up with the star;
While we rally round the flag, boys, rally once again,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom!*

*We are springing to the call of our brothers gone before,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom!
And we'll fill our vacant ranks with a million free men more,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom!*

[Chorus]

*We will welcome to our numbers the loyal, true and brave,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom!
And although he may be poor, not a man shall be a slave,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom!*

[Chorus]

*So we're springing to the call from the East and from the West,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom!
And we'll hurl the rebel crew from the land we love best,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom!*

[Chorus]

Source: George F. Root, "The Battle Cry of Freedom" (Chicago: Root & Cady, 1863).

William H. Barnes and Herman L. Schreiner, "Battle-Cry of Freedom" (1864)

Root's "Battle Cry" proved so popular that it was soon pirated by Confederate songwriters William H. Barnes and Herman L. Schreiner, who of course altered the lyrics. Root, staunchly pro-Union, would have surely been incensed by this development, as by the fact that the Confederate version's "composers" had altered the melody just slightly enough to claim credit for it as an original composition.

*Our flag is proudly floating on the land and on the main,
Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom!
Beneath it oft we've conquered, and we'll conquer oft again!
Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom!*

[Chorus:]

*Our Dixie forever! She's never at a loss!
Down with the eagle and up with the cross!
We'll rally 'round the bonny flag, we'll rally once again,
Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom!*

*Our gallant boys have marched to the rolling of the drums.
Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom!
And the leaders in charge cry out, "Come, boys, come!"
Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom! –*

[Chorus]

*They have laid down their lives on the bloody battle field.
Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom!
Their motto is resistance – "To tyrants we'll not yield!"
Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom! –*

[Chorus]

*While our boys have responded and to the fields have gone.
Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom!
Our noble women also have aided them at home.
Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom! –*

[Chorus]

Source: William H. Barnes and Herman L. Schreiner, "The Battle-Cry of Freedom" (Savannah: J.C. Schreiner & Son, 1864).