

CONFERENCE OPENING REMARKS

Presented below, is a summary of remarks made by Stephen T Smith, Consul General, United States of America, who performed the official opening of our 2006 Conference. Those attending the Conference were most appreciative of the time Mr Smith took from his busy schedule to address the Conference and spend time with us.

Thank you for the kind invitation to open this Conference and share with you my personal experiences as an American citizen who grew up in a country with the legacy of this seminal 19th Century conflict as a central part of its history. From the outset of these remarks, however, I must advise you that I am a Civil War enthusiast **not** an expert. What is the Civil War to Americans? Like Gallipoli it is a huge, painful, emotional experience resonance that in a significant way defines us as a country and a culture.

As an enthusiast, I have used your invitation to speak to research something that interested me about the Civil War and that is the words and music of the time and, in particular, the songs, “Dixie” and “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”.

THE WORDS AND MUSIC OF ‘DIXIE’

First, let us consider where did term “Dixie” originate? There are three leading theories regarding its origin:

1. Before Civil War, the Citizens Bank of Louisiana, in NOLA, issued ten dollar notes that bore the Creole/French word for ten – dix and these notes were popularly known as ‘dixies’;
2. The term may have come from a corruption in the pronunciation of the name Dixon in “Mason-Dixon line”, the famous pre-Revolutionary War surveyor’s line that separated the U.S. States of Maryland and Pennsylvania; and
3. Finally, the term may come from a fellow named “Dixy” an allegedly kindly slave owner (or underground railroad operator) on Manhattan Island in New York State. It has been suggested that his reputation was such that his farm came to symbolize an earthly paradise. While this makes a bit of sense when you read the lyrics of the song “Dixie” itself – a longing for a golden time now ended, it is not as persuasive as the first two theories, although this was apparently widely circulated after the Civil War.

The origin of the music of “I Wish I Was In the Land of Cotton” or “Dixie” as we know it was in a minstrel show in the late 1850s. It was written by Daniel Emmett of Mt. Vernon Ohio, and premiered in September 1859 in New York as part of a minstrel show. Emmett had been a superstar of the Minstrel shows during the 1840s to 1850s. Before this time Minstrel shows had only been a part of an evening’s vaudeville style entertainment. Emmet’s innovation in American popular theatre was to make the show a minstrel show a complete evenings’ entertainment.

Minstrel Shows themselves were a reflection of wider views in American society of the time about slaves and the institution of slavery. The rise of the minstrel show coincided with the growing abolitionist movement. Many Northerners were concerned for the oppressed blacks of the South, but most had no idea how these slaves lived day-to-day. Blackface performance had been inconsistent on this subject; some slaves were happy, other victims of a cruel and inhuman institution. In the 1850s, however, minstrelsy became decidedly mean-spirited and pro-slavery as race replaced class as its main focus. Most minstrels projected a greatly romanticized and exaggerated image of black life with cheerful, simple

slaves always ready to sing and dance and to please their masters. The lyrics and dialogue were generally racist, satiric, and of largely white origin. Songs about slaves yearning to return to their masters were plentiful, and some of them are still popular today, such as *Dixie*, *Carry Me Back To Old Virginia* and *My Old Kentucky Home*. The message was clear: do not worry about the slaves; they are happy with their lot in life.

Best known as the adopted anthem of the Confederate States, it was immensely popular, it was a favorite of Lincoln's and was played at his inauguration. Emmett was ostracized during and after the Civil War for being its composer. Some questions about its full origin. Emmett said the tune was inspired by a song his mother had sung him as a child, and other who wrote about it said that there was a similar tune sung along the Mississippi plantations and river towns for several generations.

THE WORDS AND MUSIC OF 'BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC'

The music came from the song "*John Brown's Body*" Originally, the tune was a Protestant Evangelical Christian camp-meeting hymn, probably written by William Steff of South Carolina, with the title "*Oh brother, will you meet us on Canaan's happy shore?*" Over time it evolved into the familiar tune we know for both songs.

The words came from Julia Ward Howe, visiting Washington, D.C. in autumn 1861 attended a public parade and review of Union troops. On her way back to Willard's Hotel, her carriage was caught in a traffic jam. To pass the time, she and her cohorts sang a few of the war songs that were popular at the time, chief among them the song "John Brown's Body".

Howe would have assumed that the John Brown of the song was the famous abolitionist, but the song actually belonged to a young Scotsman in the Second Battalion of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry of the Fort Warren Militia, who shared Brown's name. The Scotsman John Brown was well aware of John Brown the abolitionist and having the same name made him a prime target for many good-natured jokes, and his fellow soldiers used the catchy tune not only to memorialize the abolitionist John Brown, but also invented verses to pass a jest to the John Brown in their Battalion. Their song traveled rapidly to other units, even though others who sang the song knew it only as the song about John Brown who was captured at Harper's Ferry.

The morning after, Julia Ward Howe wrote her lyrics, which she sent to the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine, which published it as "*The Battle Hymn of the Republic*". The *Atlantic Monthly* paid Julia Ward Howe \$5.00 for her song. Emotionally, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" is full of Old Testament fierceness and moral righteousness, representative of the moral strength behind the anti-slavery cause of the North:

*"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the lord
He hath trampled 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."*

Emotionally, "*Dixie*" reflects the nostalgia for a rural, agrarian, slave-owning paradise that probably never existed and that the white, slave-owning Southerners was fated to disappear forever:

*"O I wish I was in the land of cotton, old times there was not forgotten
Look away, look away, look away Dixie land."*

Both songs strike my ears as full of the contradictions of melancholy, moral righteousness that fueled a war that turned brothers against brothers but, in the end, ended the disgrace of slavery in the United States.