

“The American Dream”: We Celebrate Patriotism and National Unity While Promoting Division Globally

The 150th Anniversary of the U.S. Civil War

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One of America’s greatest songs begins this way:

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.

Think of that image of “truth marching on” with “terrible swift swords’ at the ready to reunify a divided nation, end a bitter secession and restore a union that had been torn asunder,

The author, Julia Ward Howe, was not just a patriot, but an activist, and an abolitionist who supported the North against the South to eradicate slavery and restore the union.

When President Obama speaks today, he always makes a point of invoking and punching up the name, or perhaps the memory, of “The UNITED States of America.”

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.

For a nation that has fought a war every twenty years, the American Civil War was the bloodiest in our history. For both sides, it became a holy cause, a crusade of righteous service to conflicting ideals in the name of God in the heavens.

The song conjured up a “trumpet that shall never call retreat.”

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.

The chant in the north was “union, union” in the service of one nation. It later found expression as “indivisible, under God, and with liberty and justice for all.”

Those words, written by the Socialist minister Francis Bellamy, are in our pledge of

allegiance, the promise that we make with hands on hearts. It's that pledge that makes Americans Americans. Bellamy had wanted the pledge to be used by all nations. (Today's self-styled far-right patriots have no idea that the pledge they recite with so much fervor was originally the work of a man of the left.)

For Americans, in that era, the idea of being UNITED was not just the name of an airline.

Today, as that savage war marks its 150th anniversary, publishers and television networks are hyping their civil war histories, even as another kind of civil war is underway. It's a partisan war, not between the blue and the gray of the 1860's but between blue states and red state in the 2011s,

The South has risen again politically winning disproportionate influence in the Congress and the media.

The "rebels" who get media attention these days are in the Tea Party, even if many are well off opponents of deeper chahe

Overseas, the rebels we are being taught to like are in Libya where a shadowy opposition aided and abetted by NATO bombing are all we hear about.

Unity is a value we embrace but spreading disunity what we practice.

We fought two wars to keep countries from reuniting. We won on the Korean peninsular where North and South are kept divided partially by a phalanx of nuclear armed U.S. soldiers.

We lost the same battle in Vietnam to Ho Chi Minh's forces when the North and the South reunified by kicking US forces out. Millions of Asians died as well as over fifty thousand Americans.

In that war, our trumpet called retreat.

Today, some of our pundits and cheerleaders speak in hopeful turns about the collapse of the European Community. Some want to see debt-ridden Greece be divided into a "Good Greece" and a "Bad Greece."

Divide and rule is the oldest axiom for power elites.

In recent years, we divided Bosnia into two states that continue to battle and hate each other.

There were calls in US policy circles to divide Iraq into three, hoping the Kurds could keep the Arabs in line. That proposal failed.

We supported Kosovo independence from Serbia even as we learned that members of their government were running drug gangs

Africa has long been balkanized along with the Balkans.

A part of Sudan has become a separate country, Southern Sudan. There's even talk of splitting Libya into an Eastern Libya where the oil wells are and a Western Libya. That is, if

Gaddafi clings to power.

The idea of a long hoped for unity deal between the Palestinian movements, Fatah and Hamas is an anathema to policy makers in Israel and Washington.

They prefer them to fight amongst themselves and kill each other.

Keeping the Palestinians divided has been a US objective ever since the West colluded with Israel in creating the Islamacist Hamas to compete with Yasser Arafat's nationalist Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO.) Israel's supporters slam Hamas for not recognizing Israel which, of course, refuses to recognize Hamas despite its victory in a democratic election,

Leave it to a liberal hawk like Martin Peretz, publisher of the New Republic who put the disunity doctrine into words back in 1982. He advised Israel to deliver Palestine a "lasting military defeat" that would "clarify to the Palestinians in the West Bank that their struggle for an independent state has suffered a setback of many years." Then "the Palestinians will be turned into just another crushed nation, like the Kurds or the Afghans," and the Palestinian problem - which "is beginning to be boring" - will be resolved."

"Crushed nations" are what we seem to like, especially when they become dependant on us and march to our trumpets.

National unity is something our leaders support in the US, but only up to a point overseas.

The Battle Hymm has even become controversial.

The great American singer Judy Garland wanted to dedicate the song to President Kennedy after his assassination but CBS refused to allow her to do so on her own program.

Imagine, petty censorship by a major network on such an occasion!

Martin Luther King quoted the lyric in his last speech in Memphis before he would be assassinated, Kings last public words ended with the opening lyrics of the anthem, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." He didn't see the coming of James Earl Ray.

So it can be risky to preach the message of the unity today. In England, the Manchester United football club uses a version as its fight song.

In the the US, this battle hymn was downgraded into parody to celebrate the lives of garment workers as in the "Battle of Harry Lewis. "

"His name was Harry Lewis, and he worked for Irving Roth/He died while cutting velvet on a hot July the Fourth", and "Oh Harry Lewis perished / In the Service of his Lord / He was trampling through the warehouse / Where the Drapes of Roth are stored."

Oy!

And so goes that journey in which great ideas are turned on their heads before being turned into a joke.

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