

# Ghosts of the Civil War

## LYRICS

### Nat Turner:

They call me Mr. Nat Turner, I'm reppin' the South.

It's nothing to set a four-alarm blaze to your house.

I'm being honest, my owner, Travis, he treated us fair,

but I ain't nobody's slave. I'm getting out of this here.

*As God says, so soon the first should be last, the last should be first.*

I put my soul in the verse.

I saw blood upon cornstalks, the sun eclipsed,

and it was time to get it cracking like a thousand whips.

All out terror! Forty slaves on horses, killing every pale face and carrying torches.

My rebellion got squashed in a few short days.

They executed me easy, the South in a rage.

Nat Turner's gonna get you, so please behave,

I'm a whisper in the wind, I'm gonna rise from the grave.

In the South they went crazy by **lynching** blacks.

I'm telling you the real, 'cause truth should be a part of the facts.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### They call me Mr. Nat Turner . . .

In 1800 an African-born slave working in Virginia gave birth to Nat Turner. Turner was both keenly intelligent and deeply religious from a very young age, often spending his time praying and fasting.

### My owner, Travis, he treated us fair, but I ain't nobody's slave . . .

Turner was bought and sold twice. After his capture, he said his third owner, Joseph Travis, "was to me a kind master; and placed the greatest confidence in me; in fact, I had no cause to complain of his treatment to me."

### As God says . . .

But by Turner's own account, God had bigger things in store for him: "I heard a loud noise in the heavens, and the Spirit instantly appeared to me and said . . . the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first . . . and I should arise and prepare myself and slay my enemies with their own weapons."

### I saw blood upon cornstalks, the sun eclipsed . . .

Furthermore, Turner began seeing signs that he believed were from God: "While laboring in the field, I discovered drops of blood on the corn, as though it were dew from heaven." The same year, Turner witnessed an eclipse of the sun. He then began planning his uprising.

### All out terror! Forty slaves on horses, killing every pale face . . .

At 2:00 in the morning on August 21, 1831, Turner led a small group of slaves into his

## ★★★ CHAPTER 9: ★★★

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## INTRO

Slavery and the economic and political differences between the North and the South were beginning to tear the country apart. The political

compromises for determining if new states would be slave states or free states (**the Missouri Compromise**, and the **Compromise of 1850**) were beginning to fall apart as well. The South was thrown into fear and outrage after **Nat Turner's slave uprising** (1831) and **John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry** (1859).

In the North, meanwhile, abolitionists kicked up their rhetoric. In 1851 **Harriet Beecher Stowe** wrote a novel called **Uncle Tom's Cabin**. It was a long, melodramatic story about a slave family—basically a soap opera about escaping slaves. The amazing power of the book, though, was that it personalized the issue of slavery. The book was hugely popular, and it helped hundreds of thousands of Americans realize (for the first time) that African slaves were people too



Harriet Tubman

master's house and murdered the entire family as they lay sleeping. Turner and his men then began marching house to house, murdering the white families and recruiting slaves. Turner's force eventually consisted of forty slaves, mostly on horseback. The group killed every white person they came across, fifty-five people in all.

### **My rebellion got squashed in a few short days . . .**

Southern whites reacted quickly to the news, and local militias soon captured Turner and scattered his army.



### **They executed me easy . . .**

Nat Turner told his story to a local physician, who wrote it all down. The quotes above come from this document, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. Turner was tried, hanged, and then skinned.

### **The South in a rage . . .**

Nothing was scarier to white society in the South than a slave uprising. Turner's rebellion was a nightmare that had come true. The fact that Turner's revolt had been so bloody, so deadly (he had killed not only men, but women and children, too) seemed to justify slavery for many whites. More than ever, they clung to the belief that "if we let them free, they'll kill us all."

### **In the South they went crazy by lynching blacks . . .**

The State of Virginia itself executed as many as fifty-five slaves suspected of being involved in the massacre, but the real violence took place outside the courtrooms and prisons. Angry lynch mobs became a regular sight in parts of the South. These mobs killed an estimated 200 African-American slaves.

Strict new slaves' laws passed in many states, including censorship of abolitionist materials, all with President Andrew Jackson's blessing.

### **I'm John C. Calhoun, and I love the South, the Senator from South Cakalak . . .**

Though he died before the Civil War even began, John C. Calhoun was partly responsible for it. The Senator from South Carolina was the most powerful Southern voice in the government.

## **Ghosts of the Civil War**

LYRICS. continued

### **John C. Calhoun:**

I'm John C. Calhoun, and I love the South,  
the Senator from South Cakalak, reppin'  
the South.

They don't know me in the North, but  
they try to play me,  
states' rights best thing since grits 'n' gravy.  
I believe firmly in the goodness of  
slavery.

Northerners who hate it, I think they  
have rabies.

Never before have Africans been so  
civilized,

never before have they found the Lord,  
Jesus Christ.

Northerners don't pay workers enough  
to eat,

we don't pay slaves, at least they have a  
place to sleep.

We must maintain the status quo for  
whites and blacks

'cause if we ever let them free, they're  
going to attack!

**Dred Scott** decision was right, what  
belongs to me,

whether slave or mule, is my property.

We're chivalrous but don't mess with  
us, **abolitionists,**

we'll cane you on the Senate floor.

*We won't take no or maybe,  
We're gonna end this slavery . . .*

### **States' rights best thing since grits 'n' gravy . . .**

Calhoun was Andrew Jackson's vice president, but he resigned after one term. Calhoun (ever the states' rights advocate) and Jackson (who was so pro-federal government that they called him "King Andrew") clashed over the **Nullification Crisis**.

In 1828 Congress had raised protective tariffs that helped the North but hurt farmers in the South. Calling it the **Tariff of Abominations**, Calhoun argued that his state, South Carolina, could nullify the tariff. Like Jefferson, he believed that states were sovereign. In response, Jackson got a less-strict tariff passed (the **Compromise of 1833**) as well as a **Force Bill** that allowed the army to march into South Carolina to enforce collection of the tariff. South Carolina backed down, but Calhoun's argument continued to inspire Southern thinkers.

### **I believe firmly in the goodness of slavery . . .**

Calhoun was the leading proponent of slavery in the Senate. Previously, Southerners had argued that slavery was a "necessary evil." In a famous speech to the Senate, Calhoun took this much further, arguing that slavery was a "positive good."

### **Never before have Africans been so civilized . . .**

Every pro-slavery argument is based in ignorance and racism, but none more than the argument that Africans were savages and that by living in America they were at least living in a civilized society. As Calhoun said, "Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually."



### Never before have they found the Lord, Jesus Christ . . .

Many pro-slavery arguments were based in Christianity. Why God or the Bible wanted Africans in particular to be slaves is unclear, but many Christians believed that they had the duty to spread the word of Christ to all of the world's people. Many whites also noted that the Bible supports slavery. In numerous biblical passages, slaves are urged to obey their masters. For a full list of Bible quotations supporting slavery, see Appendix III: Biblical References to Slavery.

### Northerners don't pay workers enough to eat . . .

Calhoun and others noted with anger that while Northerners were yelling about the treatment of slaves, they were treating their workers worse than some slave owners treated their slaves. Indeed, young girls in textile mills in New England, for example, worked twelve-hour days under terrible conditions.

### Dred Scott decision was right . . .

With the tension over slavery rising in America, President James Buchanan tried to avoid the issue by passing the buck. He said that the Supreme Court should settle the question of slavery in the territories. The case in question was **Dred Scott v. Sandford**, and it involved a man who had traveled the United States with his slave, Dred Scott. When the man died, Scott argued that because he had lived in territories where slavery was illegal, he should be legally free. The case went to the Supreme Court, where Chief Justice **Roger B. Taney** delivered the ruling that would shape the country.

Taney argued that Scott was a slave and slaves had no right to sue in federal courts. He wrote that blacks "are so inferior that they had no rights which a white man was bound to respect." He went even further, noting that Scott was property, like a horse or a mule, and that slavery was fully supported by the Constitution.

This landmark decision was celebrated in the South, but it had another effect: many in the North who hadn't cared one way or another about slavery suddenly grew angry. The Republican Party was rejuvenated.

### We'll cane you on the Senate floor . . .

Calhoun died in 1850 but his feisty spirit lived on in South Carolina. In 1856 Massachusetts

## Ghosts of the Civil War

LYRICS. continued

### Harriet Tubman:

Children: I'm Harriet Tubman, born into slavery.

In history I'm noted for my bravery.

I'm a runaway slave, followed the

### North Star,

to take me from the South parts, and I was never scared of the dark.

Like Dead Prez, boy, I'm an African, more slaves down south, boy, I'm going back for them.

**Nineteen trips** and not one a disaster, like I told **Frederick**, I never lost a passenger.

Reward for my capture: forty Gs.

Wanted posters all around saying I can't read.

Still I slipped through the cracks of that

### Fugitive Slave Act,

with so many freed, I never lost my way back.

Jack-of-all-trades and you'd be surprised, I was a cook, a nurse, and even a spy for the North,

and this was during the Civil War:

Follow me while I'm following the **drinking gourd**.

I did it all, and it really wasn't a choice for me,

I only had two options, die or be free.

### Abraham Lincoln:

I'm Abraham Lincoln, what y'all thinking?

senator Charles Sumner delivered a raucous antislavery speech in the Senate in which he attacked South Carolina senator Andrew Butler. He accused Butler of taking "a mistress . . . who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight—I mean, the harlot, Slavery!"

Representative Preston Brooks, also from South Carolina, decided to defend Butler's honor and entered the Senate that evening. He found Sumner doing some paperwork, snuck up behind him, and cracked him over the top of the head as hard as he could with the metal top of his cane. He continued to beat the senator, who was now bleeding profusely, for a minute or more.

In the ensuing days, both men became heroes in their respective regions.

### Children: I'm Harriet Tubman . . .

Harriet Tubman was born a slave in Maryland around 1820. Like Frederick Douglass, she escaped to the North in 1849, but immediately returned to the South to help other slaves escape.

### I'm a runaway slave . . .

Sneaking up through the South toward freedom was no easy task. Tubman used the

**Underground Railroad**, which was neither a railroad nor actually underground. It was a loose network of individuals and houses sympathetic to the abolitionist cause. These families (many of them Quakers) would house the escaped slaves and send them on to the next "station," so that the slaves could gradually make their way north.

### Nineteen trips and not one a disaster . . .

Amazingly, Tubman risked her life nineteen times by returning to the South to help more slaves escape. She ultimately helped 300 slaves find their freedom, and she didn't lose a single person.

### Reward for my capture: forty Gs ...

The South knew about Harriet Tubman and also knew that she was more dangerous as a symbol than as a slave-runner. At one point the reward for her capture was \$40,000.

### I slipped through the cracks of that Fugitive Slave Act ...

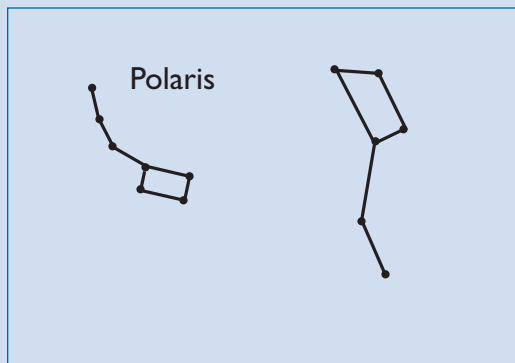
The Fugitive Slave Act, which passed through Congress as part of the **Compromise of 1850**, required citizens of any state, slave or free, to assist in the capture and return of runaway slaves.

### I was a cook, a nurse, and even a spy for the North...

Tubman served for the Union during the Civil War, working as a spy behind Confederate lines, a nurse, and a cook. At one point during the war, she and a group of Union troops reportedly led 750 slaves to freedom.

### Follow me while I'm following the drinking gourd ...

Tubman and other escaped slaves moved at night, using the stars as their guides, especially Polaris, the North Star. Many slaves taught each other to locate Polaris by using the stars of the Big Dipper (aka the drinking gourd).



### I'm Abraham Lincoln ...

Abraham Lincoln was born in 1809 in Kentucky, the son of an illiterate pioneer farmer. He later moved to Illinois, where he became a lawyer.

### I'm from Illinois ...

Lincoln had been a mostly unsuccessful politician until 1860, when he ran for president. The newly powerful Northern Republicans, however, organized behind the tall, impressive man from Illinois and he won the presidency without carrying a single Southern state (in ten slave states he didn't even receive a single popular vote).

### North rich like cha-ching ...

As potential war approached, it seemed it would be an easy victory for the North, which had more than twice the population, twice the miles of railroad, five times the factories, ten times the workers, and nearly five times the money (\$189 million dollars in bank deposits). All the South had going for it were better generals, knowledge of the land, and that famous rebel yell.

### Slave states think that they're going to secede ...

A month after Lincoln's victory, South Carolina voted to secede from the United States of America. Two months later, six more states did the same. These governments joined together to form the **Confederate States of America**. They elected Jefferson Davis as the Confederacy's first president. After Lincoln gathered an army, three more states joined the Confederacy. Three slave states remained loyal to the Union.

### I said I wasn't gonna mess with your slavery, but the South didn't buy it ...

Southern states left the Union in spite of the

## Ghosts of the Civil War

LYRICS. continued

I'm from **Illinois**, you illin' boy, North rich like cha-ching.

All slave states think that they're going to **secede**?

Like the **Fugitive Slave Act**, running away ain't easy.

*A house divided against itself cannot stand,*

like **Betsy Ross** trying to climb on **Uncle Sam's** hands.

I said I wasn't gonna mess with your slavery,

but the South didn't buy it, they were hating me.

I switched reasons to fight from **Union** to slavery

like Bush, Iraq's empty of WMDs.

**Emancipation Proclamation** made France like me.

Who needs friends, Jefferson Davis? You have me as an enemy.

Who do you have? **Stonewall**

**Jackson** and **Robert E. Lee**?

I've got **U.S. Grant** and **Sherman's March to the Sea**.

I wanted to be soft on the

**Confederacy** like Huggies,

but after **Booth** shot me, nobody wanted to hug me ...

*We won't take no or maybe,*

*We're gonna end this slavery ...*

fact that Lincoln had promised that he would not interfere with slavery in the South. He said, however, that he would forbid slavery in new territories.

### I switched reasons to fight from Union to slavery ...

The Civil War was fought to keep the Union together. Only later did Lincoln (and public perception) make it a war about ending slavery. Lincoln was a politician, and he was very aware that most Northerners wouldn't fight to emancipate slaves. However, they would fight to keep America united.

With the **Emancipation Proclamation** (1863), Lincoln added a new objective of the war: abolishing slavery.

### Bush, Iraq's empty of WMDs ...

Lincoln never dropped saving the Union as the Civil War's primary objective, so the comparison falls short, but it is worthwhile to note that when George W. Bush switched the reason for the war in Iraq from finding and destroying weapons of mass destruction (there were none) to regime change, he was not the first president to alter or add to the reasons for a war while already halfway through it.

### Emancipation Proclamation made France like me ...

Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation not to free all slaves (it didn't, just those in the Confederacy), but to drum up European support for the Union and to help destroy the Southern economy. It proved a brilliant political move as Britain and France soon pledged their support.

### Who needs friends, Jefferson Davis? ...

Jefferson Davis was actually an opponent of



Robert E. Lee

secession before the Confederacy nominated him president. As the leader of the Confederacy, he failed to appoint a general-in-chief to coordinate strategy until late in the war. Instead, Jefferson chose to defend each part of the South equally, a strategy that some argue cost the Confederacy the war.

**Who do you have? Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee?**

The most important man of the Confederacy was Robert E. Lee, the brilliant general who won a series of battles in which his troops were vastly outnumbered.

Stonewall Jackson was a leader of Confederate troops under Lee, who was best known for leading a brilliant flanking move against the Union in the **Battle of Chancellerville**. The battle ended poorly for Jackson himself, though. Returning to camp, he was accidentally shot by a Confederate soldier and died soon after.

**I've got U.S. Grant and Sherman's March to the Sea ...**

The Union had a series of inept generals who failed to win battles and failed to follow Lincoln's orders. Exceptions were General **Ulysees S.**

**Grant**, who led successful offensives at **Vicksburg** and along the Mississippi River; and General **William Tecumseh Sherman** (named at birth after the notorious Indian chief), whose famous March to the Sea across Georgia and through Atlanta ravaged and destroyed the land. As Sherman himself noted, "we devoured the land."

**I wanted to be soft on the Confederacy like Huggies ...**

After the war, Lincoln outlined a policy for letting Southern states back into the Union that was generous and compassionate. Many members of his Republican Party thought these

policies were too generous and didn't punish the South enough for the enormously costly Civil War. Lincoln, however, never got a chance to put these plans in place.

**But after Booth shot me, nobody wanted to hug me ...**

Lincoln was shot and killed by an actor, John Wilkes Booth, a Confederate sympathizer, while watching a comedy at Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865. American reconstruction was left to Lincoln's successor, **Andrew Johnson**. Johnson's moderate approach to reconciliation clashed with radical Republicans from the North, leading to his impeachment.



## AMERICA SPEAKS

"I am quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood."

—John Brown, speaking at his execution. Brown had led a group of abolitionist followers in an attack on a federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859. Harriet Tubman had planned to join Brown's uprising, but she fell ill a few days before.

"My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it."

—Abraham Lincoln, in his Letter to Horace Greeley (August 22, 1862)