

... A hateful state song

WALKING past the open window of an elementary school classroom, I heard the children singing the familiar words of "Maryland, My Maryland" — familiar because I had sung them as a pupil some 70 years ago.

In this time of change, in Washington and throughout the world, it seems to me that the time has come to consider

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changing the Maryland anthem. The words are meaningless to most children (as they were to me three-score-and-10 years ago) and insulting to the Maryland Free State.

Those being urged not to "cower in the dust" were the owners and exploiters of some 84,000 slaves still in bondage in Maryland when the song was written by a passionate Yankee-hater, James Ryder Randall.

He was a Maryland professor who was teaching at a Louisiana college in 1861, when he learned of the bloody battle at Baltimore's Camden Station, where the Massachusetts 6th Regiment, on its way to join Union forces in Virginia, was attacked by a mob of Baltimore Confederate sympathizers. Four of the soldiers and 11 of the mob were killed and scores wounded on both sides. Randall's pen caught fire.

The defiant lyrics stirred the blood of those Marylanders who supported the Confederacy and wanted the state to secede. But the song's rhetoric was not appreciated by over half the citizenry, including especially about 89,000 freed slaves.

Since it is the state song, generations of Maryland school children have been required to mouth the hateful lyrics. Very few of the kids, of course, have any notion what they're singing — any more than

Maryland school children are still singing it

they understand "Our father, Art, in heaven; Harold be thy name," or the pledge to "one nation invisible."

But some of the more observant children, who have been led to believe that the North won the Civil War and that emancipation of the slaves and saving of the Union were not evil events, may be a bit confused. Some are still — even today — required to sing this song glorifying those who fought valiantly for justice.

Why must innocent children be imploring their state to "gird thy beauteous limbs with steel" (against those fighting to save the

Union)?

Why must the kids be taught that "the despot's heel is on our shore" (the despot being Abraham Lincoln, who they had been led to believe was the Great Emancipator)?

Are they pledging allegiance to the Stars and Stripes or to the flag of the Confederacy?

How many more generations of peaceful youngsters must be incited to "avenge the patriotic gore that flecked the streets of Baltimore"?

Isn't it time for them to learn that the "beaming sword" of the slave owners has rusted, and that thousands of black professionals, business people, scientists, technicians, sheriffs, mayors and government officials in the South signify that the War Between the States is over?

Maryland school children would be better served if they learned to sing — and more important, to understand — the "South Pacific" song, "Carefully Taught":

"You've got to be taught to hate and fear,

You've got to be taught from year to year,

It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear —

You've got to be carefully taught ..."

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