



# Foundations of U.S. History

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## Primary Source Activity : "Dixie Song"

- [Play Song Version 1](#)  
(<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/audio/DixieVersion1.mp3>)
- [Play Song Version 2](#)  
(<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/audio/DixieVersion2.mp3>)
- [Download Song Lyrics Version 1](#)  
(<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/DixieSongLyrics1.pdf>)
- [Download Song Lyrics Version 2](#)  
(<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/DixieSongLyrics2.pdf>)

[\*print this activity \(.pdf\)\*](#)

(<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/DixieSong.pdf>)

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### 1. Overview

In this exercise, teachers examine two different versions of the song known as "Dixie," one written in 1859, just before the Civil War, and one written in 1861, just after the start of the Civil War. Teachers read the lyrics for each version, listen to the songs, and then answer the following questions:

- What do you notice about the lyrics and the musical qualities of the songs?
- What questions do you want to ask about the lyrics and the musical qualities of the songs?

After discussing these questions, teachers learn more about the historical context of sectionalism and the Civil War and draw conclusions about how people at the time thought about the South. After completing the activity, teachers discuss classroom applications.

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### 2. Source Analysis, Version 1

- Distribute individual copies of the [Version 1 song lyrics](http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/DixieSongLyrics1.pdf) (<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/DixieSongLyrics1.pdf>)
- Play [Version 1 \(3:09 mins\)](http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/audio/DixieVersion1.mp3) (<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/audio/DixieVersion1.mp3>)
- Ask teachers to work in pairs and compare things that they noticed and want to ask.

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### 3. Source Analysis, Version 2

- Distribute individual copies of the Version 2 song lyrics [Version 2 song lyrics](http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/DixieSongLyrics2.pdf) (<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/DixieSongLyrics2.pdf>)
- Play [Version 2 \(2:42 mins\)](http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/audio/DixieVersion2.mp3) (<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/audio/DixieVersion2.mp3>)
- Ask teachers to work in pairs and compare things that they noticed and want to ask.

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### 4. Group Discussion

Write three columns onto the whiteboard: Notice, Questions, and Historical Background.

Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- What did you notice about Version 1 and Version 2 lyrics?
- What is the musical quality of each song? Is it fast or slow? Is it cheerful or somber?
- What feelings do the song lyrics evoke?
- What is missing from this song? What can the song tell us and what can it not tell us about this time period?
- What do you already know about these songs?
- What questions do you want to ask about the songs or the historical context?

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### 5. Historical Background

Present this historical background to enhance the group's knowledge of the time period, and as a basis for drawing conclusions about how people at the time thought about the South in Step 5. Write the words in bold on the whiteboard, and use the rest of the text for guidance.

- **Version 1 was a minstrel song:** Daniel Emmett, a white man born in Ohio, composed and performed "Dixie," when he was a member of the Bryant's Minstrels troupe in New York City. It was created as a new closing, or "walk-around," number for the group's show. The style in which Bryant's Minstrels and similar minstrel troupes performed "Dixie" owed a great deal to African-American traditions of singing, dancing, and banjo playing. In its catchy polka rhythm, it resembles earlier minstrel songs like "Turkey in the Straw" (1824) or "Oh Susanna" (1848).
- **Version 2 was used by the Confederacy as its anthem and marching song:** Many Southerners wrote lyrics, a common practice in the 19th century, to suit its role as a war song. "Dixie" was taken up as one of the Confederacy's two most popular songs. It was so popular that it was played at Jefferson Davis's inauguration as President of the Confederacy.

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## 6. Conclusions

Discuss the following questions:

- How do the lyrics depict the South in each version?
- What can we learn from these lyrics about how people at the time thought about the South?
- Did people in the United States see the Civil War as inevitable?

Possible Answers:

### Version 1

- The chorus to this version of “Dixie” (“I wish I was in Dixie, Hooray, Hooray!” etc.), tells us that sectionalism and slavery were important issues in American politics in 1859, particularly in defining the differences between the South and the North. The lyrics, similar to those in closing “walk-arounds” from other minstrel shows, depicted the South as a happy land bathed in warmth and rural nostalgia, an appealing contrast to the urban squalor of New York and its cold winter weather.
- Some lines of the chorus (“In Dixie land I’ll take my stand, live and die in Dixie”) hint at the belligerence of southern sentiment in the 1850s, but do not specifically refer to outright war or even impending war.
- Written on the eve of the Civil War, this original version fit within the context of the growing conflict. Sectionalism and slavery were important issues in American politics, but at the same time, many Americans did not see the Civil War as inevitable. The jaunty rhythm implies that sectionalism and factionalism are a kind of sport and many of the lyrics to “Dixie” have little to do with slavery or other moral and political differences (“Old Missus marry Will de Weaber [weaver], Will-yum was a gay deceaber [deceiver]”). This was created for an all-white audience at a minstrel show in New York and performed by white men who rubbed burnt-cork on their skin to portray “darkies” and sing about the joys of the rural South. The song may indeed have served to help deny the cruelty of slavery or the importance of sectional differences.

### Version 2

- This version speaks more directly to the climate in the U.S. in the early days of the Civil War. Written two years after Emmett’s version, these lyrics demonstrate growing Southern defiance and determination. Here, the tune is revised to recast the song as a military marching tune. The relatively benign refrain (“look away”) is replaced with a call to arms.
- The abundant exclamation marks and sprightly marching beat suggest that at the beginning of the Civil War, most white Americans (both Northern and Southern) expected the war to be a short, glorious adventure.

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## 7. Classroom Applications

- Do you think this activity would work with your students?
- Could you use this strategy with other resources?

- Would you do anything differently in your classroom?

\*This activity is based on **Model Interpretation of Dixie** (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Songs/model.html>) by John Spitzer and Ronald Walters on **History Matters** (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>).

*“(I Wish I Was In) Dixie’s Land” (1859)*

*Lyrics by: Daniel Decatur Emmett*

I wish I was in the land of cotton,  
Old times dar am not forgotten,  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.  
In Dixie Land whar’ I was born in,  
Early on one frosty mornin’,  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

CHORUS:

Den I wish I was in Dixie, Hoo-ray! Hoo-ray!  
In Dixie land, I’ll take my stand to live and die in Dixie;  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie,  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie.

Old Missus marry Will-de-weaber,  
Willium was a gay deceaber; Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.  
But when he put his arm around ‘er  
Smiled as fierce as a forty-pounder,  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

CHORUS:

Den I wish I was in Dixie, Hoo-ray! Hoo-ray!  
In Dixie land, I’ll take my stand to live and die in Dixie;  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie,  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie.

His face was sharp as a butcher’s cleaver,  
But dat did not seem to greab ‘er;  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.  
Old Missus acted the foolish part,  
And died for a man dat broke her heart,  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

CHORUS:

Den I wish I was in Dixie, Hoo-ray! Hoo-ray!  
In Dixie land, I’ll take my stand to live and die in Dixie;  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie,  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie.

Now here’s a health to the next old Missus,  
And all the gals dat want to kiss us;  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.  
But if you want to drive ‘way sorrow,  
Come and hear dis song to-morrow,

Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

CHORUS:

Den I wish I was in Dixie, Hoo-ray! Hoo-ray!  
In Dixie land, I'll take my stand to live and die in Dixie;  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie,  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie.

Dar's buckwheat cakes an' Injun batter,  
Makes you fat or a little fatter;  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.  
Den hoe it down and scratch your grabble,  
To Dixie's land I'm bound to trabble,  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

CHORUS:

Den I wish I was in Dixie, Hoo-ray! Hoo-ray!  
In Dixie land, I'll take my stand to live and die in Dixie;  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie,  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie.

*Dixie to Arms! (1861)*  
*Lyrics by: Albert Pike*

Southrons, hear ye Country call ye!  
Up! Lest worse than death befall you!  
    To arms! To arms! To arms! In Dixie!  
Lo! All the beacon fires are lighted,  
Let all hearts be now united!  
    To arms! To arms! To arms! In Dixie!

CHORUS:  
Advance the flag of Dixie!  
    Hurrah! Hurrah!  
For Dixie's land we take our stand,  
To live or die for Dixie!  
    To arms! To arms!  
And conquer peace for Dixie!  
    To arms! To arms!  
And conquer peace for Dixie!

Oh, hear the Northern thunders mutter!  
Northern flags and South winds fluter,  
    To arms! To arms! To arms! In Dixie!  
Send them back your fierce defiance!  
Stamp upon the cursed alliance!  
    To arms! To arms! To arms! In Dixie!

CHORUS  
Advance the flag of Dixie!  
    Hurrah! Hurrah!  
For Dixie's land we take our stand,  
To live or die for Dixie!  
    To arms! To arms!  
And conquer peace for Dixie!  
    To arms! To arms!  
And conquer peace for Dixie!

Fear no danger! Shun no labor!  
Lift up rifle, pike, and saber!  
    To arms! To arms! To arms! In Dixie!  
Shoulder press and post to shoulder,  
Let the odds make each heart bolder!  
    To arms! To arms! To arms! In Dixie!

CHORUS

Advance the flag of Dixie!

Hurrah! Hurrah!

For Dixie's land we take our stand,

To live or die for Dixie!

To arms! To arms!

And conquer peace for Dixie!

To arms! To arms!

And conquer peace for Dixie!

Then I wish I was in Dixie,

Hurrah! Hurrah!

For Dixie's land we take our stand,

To live or die in Dixie!

Away, away, away down south in Dixie!

Away, away, away down south in Dixie!