Historical Background

Version 1:
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 to be 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:
The Confederacy used “Dixie” 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.