

Dixie

Also known as ***I Wish I Was in Dixie, I Wish I Was in Dixie's Land,***
and ***Dixieland***

1859

Daniel Decatur Emmett is credited with writing *Dixie*, but many other people have claimed to have composed "Dixie", even during Emmett's lifetime. Emmett was a white minstrel show writer and blackface player from Mount Vernon, Ohio. Many Mount Vernon residents claim that Emmett collaborated informally with a pair of black musicians named Ben and Lew Snowden, black musicians from Mount Vernon, who also claim to have written the song. However, it is doubtful that the Snowden brothers wrote the song as they would have been only small children at the time Emmett composed *Dixie*.

Dixie is the best-known song to have come out of blackface minstrelsy. Although not a folk song at its creation, *Dixie* has since entered the American folk vernacular. The song likely cemented the word "Dixie" in the American vocabulary as a synonym for the Southern United States. It became a favorite of Abraham Lincoln's and was played during his campaign in 1860 and at his inauguration in 1861.

Emmett published "Dixie" (under the title "I Wish I Was in Dixie's Land") in 1860. His tardiness in copyrighting the song allowed it to proliferate among other minstrel groups and variety show performers. By 1908, four years after Emmett's death, no fewer than 37 people had claimed the song as theirs.

Its lyrics tell the story of a freed black slave longing for the plantation of his birth. During the American Civil War, *Dixie* was adopted as the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy. New versions appeared during wartime that more explicitly tied the song to the events of the Civil War. The song presented the point of view, common to minstrelsy at the time, that slavery was overall a positive institution.

The song even added a new term to the American lexicon: "Whistling *Dixie*" is a slang expression meaning "unrealistic fantasizing". For example, "Don't just sit there whistling *Dixie!*" is a scolding used against inaction, and "You aren't just whistling *Dixie!*" indicates that the person is serious about something.

Today, *Dixie* is sometimes considered offensive, and its critics link the act of singing it to sympathy for the concept of slavery in the American South. The song's supporters, however, view it as a legitimate aspect of Southern culture and heritage.

"Dixie" is structured into 32 measure groups of alternating verses and refrains, following an AABC pattern.

LYRICS

I wish I was in the land of cotton,
Old times there are not forgotten;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

In Dixie Land where I was born in,
Early on one frosty mornin',
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

Old Missus marry "Will-de-weaber,"
William was a gay deceiver;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

But when he put his arm around her,
He smiled as fierce as a forty-pound'er,
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land

There's buck-wheat cakes an Indian batter,
Makes you fat or a little fatter;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

Then hoe it down an scratch your grabble,
To Dixie land I'm bound to travel.
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.

Related Research Topics:

Abraham Lincoln
Civil War
Confederacy
Daniel Emmett
Minstrel Shows
Slavery

Listen:

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/music/titles_noncopyright.cfm