

## American Songs

“Yankee Doodle” and “Dixie” are two songs that became famous during different periods of American history. The melody and lyrics of “Yankee Doodle” are believed to have been written by the British as an insult to the American colonists. The song “Dixie” often is considered the national anthem of the Confederacy, otherwise known as the southern states. It was composed by a Northerner, Daniel Decatur Emmett, who was known for composing songs for minstrel shows.

According to the song “Yankee Doodle,” “Yankee Doodle came to town, riding on a pony. He stuck a feather in his cap and called it macaroni.” These words refer to the way that colonial soldiers dressed. In eighteenth-century England, a *macaroni* referred to someone who tried to dress and act like a foreigner, particularly someone who was French or Italian. Macaronis thought they were being fashionable. But most people thought they looked ridiculous and were just country bumpkins. That's what the British thought of the American colonists.

Americans liked the tune “Yankee Doodle.” They embraced it as a patriotic song, and ignored the supposed insults in the lyrics. After the American colonists defeated the British at the Battle of Yorktown, George Washington had the American band play the song to celebrate the victory.

The song “Dixie” is officially called “Dixie's Land.” It was first played in New York in April 1859. The following year, “Dixie's Land” was introduced in the South by a group of traveling musicians who had made the song part of their musical version of the story of Pocahontas. The song was an immediate success.

Eventually, the term *Dixie* became linked with the states south of the Mason-Dixon Line. The Mason-Dixon Line was the boundary between free states and slave states before the Civil War. Emmett, the writer of the song, was a staunch

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Union supporter. When he learned that the song was played when Jefferson Davis was sworn in as president of the Confederacy, he said he wouldn't have written it if he'd known how it was going to be used for this Confederate purpose.

- Why might it be deceptive to call “Dixie” a patriotic song?
  
- Can songs be used as propaganda? Think of some examples.
  
- Songs are often a part of traditions. Choose one of the following categories: sports, religion, or education. Describe how songs play a role.