



THE CIVIL WAR

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

LESSON

Grade Level: 7-12

Subject: History and Music

Estimated Time of

Required:

1 (50-60 minute) class
period

THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

CIVIL WAR MUSIC

INTRODUCTION

Both North and south used music extensively during the Civil War to rally troops, as recreation, to march by, and many other reasons. Frequently both sides would borrow each other's tunes or lyrics. It was not uncommon for each side to serenade the other, or for battle to stop while an impromptu concert was held.

Probably the most famous Civil War era song was Julia Ward Howe's Battle Hymn of the Republic, which used the tune of the abolitionist song, John Brown's Body. However, there were many other songs that both sides knew well.

In this activity, students will examine lyrics of songs of both sides, and make conclusions about the lyrics.

RESOURCES FOR THIS LESSON

Two songs (and/or variations of these songs) will be used in this lesson. Lyrics for songs (as well as MIDI files of the tunes) are listed with each song.

Battle Cry of Freedom (<http://users.erols.com/kfraser/union/songs/battcry.html>)

Battle Cry of Freedom (Southern version) (http://users.erols.com/kfraser/confederate/songs/southern_battcry.html)

Dixie's Land ("Dixie")

(<http://users.erols.com/kfraser/confederate/songs/dixie.html>)

Union Dixie (<http://users.erols.com/kfraser/union/songs/union-dixie.html>)

The lyrics are part of a site entitled "Poetry and Music of the War Between the States" (<http://users.erols.com/kfraser/>)

(Note: at the top of each page of lyrics a link is available to hear the song in MIDI format. The teacher may need to download a MIDI player in order to hear the songs.)

RELEVANT STANDARDS

This lesson addresses national content standards established by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks>).

History

- *Understands the impact of the Civil War on social and gender issues (e.g., the roles of women on the home front and on the battlefield; the human and material costs of the war; the degree to which the war united the nation; how it changed the lives of women, men, and children)*
- *Understands how different groups of people shaped the Civil War (e.g., the motives and experiences of Confederate and white and African American Union soldiers, different perspectives on conscription, the effects of divided loyalties)*
- *Understands how the Civil War influenced Northern and Southern society on the home front (e.g., the New York City draft riots of July 1863, the Union's reasons for curbing civil liberties in wartime, Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus during the war)*

by Michael Hutchison

STRATEGY FOR THE LESSON

The teacher should open the lesson by a discussion of how historic events worked to influence popular music. (For example, soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Lee Greenwood's *God Bless The USA* became extremely popular, even though it had been written 20 years before. Sergeant Barry Sadler's *Ballad of the Green Beret* was a Top 40 hit during the early rock and roll era because of its relationship with the early days of the Vietnam War. *The Star Spangled Banner* became a number one hit for Whitney Houston after she sang it on Super Bowl Sunday during the Gulf War in 1991.)

The teacher should then discuss with the students that music seemed particularly important during the Civil War era, including its use to promote the abolitionist cause.

(Note: Many of the songs available on the Web site are also available on the companion CD soundtrack for The Civil War series, and are also played during the series. If the teacher has access to a copy of the soundtrack, they may wish to play selections from the CD or audio tape.)

Next, the teacher can either direct students to the web pages to look at the song lyrics (and may elect to play the MIDI files), or may distribute photocopies of the song lyrics. The teacher should also distribute question sheets to the students to complete. (Please note: two versions of the question sheet are posted. One with possible answers and one for student distribution.)

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- *Students may wish trying their own hand at creating lyrics (or perhaps songs) that highlight certain battles or events in the Civil War.*
- *Students may wish to investigate how music had an impact on national or world events in other instances.*
- *Students may wish to investigate the origin of the word "Dixie". Some related web sites that may be used in this investigation are:*
<http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~south/archives/threads/dixie.html>
<http://civilwarhome.com/dixieorigin.htm>

Have students research and debate on a resolution to ban the playing of Dixie in state sponsored events such as school functions.

QUESTION SHEET FOR CIVIL WAR MUSIC

(With possible answers)

Compare the lyrics for *Battle Cry of Freedom*, and answer the following questions.

1. In the first stanzas of the two versions of the song, what seems to be the main difference between them?

(The Southern version of the song seems to infer that the Confederates have taken the offense to advance their cause ("Beneath it oft we've conquered, And we'll conquer oft again!") The Union version seems to be more peaceful... the use of the word "rally" compared to conquer, gathering, etc.)

2. What does the Southern version mean by "Down with the Eagle, And Up with the Cross"?

(Some Southern flags had crosses on them, or it may mean they wanted to support the "Stars and Bars" of the Confederacy over the American Eagle.)

3. Summarize the meaning of the third stanza of the Northern version of the song, which begins, "We will welcome to our numbers..."

(This stanza seems to equate the fight between north and south to the issue of slavery, especially when the author notes, "not a man shall be a slave, shouting the battle cry of Freedom.")

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4. How do you think the Southern version of the song symbolizes the Confederate cause?

(Answers vary. At several points in the song, the lyrics promote the Southern idea, such as “Down with the eagle, up with the cross”, “rally round the bonny flag”, as well as “their motto is resistance—to tyrants we’ll not yield...”)

5. How do you think the Northern version of the song symbolizes the Union cause?

(Answers vary. At several points in the song, the lyrics promote the Northern cause, such as “The Union Forever...” “Not a man shall be a slave...” “From the East to the West”, “We’ll hurl the rebel crew from the land that we love best...”)

Compare the lyrics for Dixie’s Land (Dixie) and Union Dixie and answer the following questions.

6. While the Confederate States of America did not have an official “national anthem” (even the North did not recognize the Star Spangled Banner as the nation’s anthem until 1931), Dixie’s Land (or Dixie, as it is more commonly known) was truly a “national song”. What aspects of the song might make it significant in regard to the Confederate cause?

(Answers vary. Students will probably look at the first stanza of the song as the most significant, with lyrics like “I wish I was in the land of cotton, old times there are not forgotten” as indication that the south had sentimental value to soldiers who might be fighting in battle, and hopefully fighting in the north. In addition, the chorus of the song continues the nationalistic feeling, “Then I wish I was in Dixie, Hooray! Hooray! In Dixie’s Land I’ll make my stand, to live and die in Dixie.”)

7. How does the song *Union Dixie* (in the first stanza) describe the South?

(The author notes the South as “the land of traitors, rattlesnakes, and alligators”. He (or she) notes also (it’s the land) “where cotton’s king and men are chattels (property)”...)

8. While the first verse and chorus of *Dixie* are well known, the rest of the song is not. Frequently, the tune is used without lyrics. Why do you think the rest of the song is obscure?

(Probably the rest of the song isn’t well known because it doesn’t specifically deal with the South as much as the first verse and chorus do. It may be a good folk song, but it doesn’t lend itself to a geographic area, nationalism, or a cause.)

9. How could the song, *Union Dixie* be used to rally troops as a school fight song might rally the student body or athletes? Give at least three examples.

(The song mentions specific instances where Northern soldiers would prevail, including, in the first verse, “Union boys will win the battles”, in the chorus, the words, “Each Dixie boy must understand that he must mind his Uncle Sam”. Also, in the second verse, the author notes, “I wish I was in Baltimore, I’d make Secessionist traitors roar.... We’ll put the traitors all to rout...”.)

10. *Dixie* is still a well-known song in the 21st Century, while the *Union Dixie* has generally been forgotten. Speculate why this is so.

(Answers vary. Some may note that Union Dixie is more topical to the Civil War, while Dixie’s Land is more simply a memory of the Old South, and not as military in nature. Others may note that the lyrics of neither are remembered well, but the tune is.)

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2. What does the Southern version mean by “Down with the Eagle, And Up with the Cross”?
3. Summarize the meaning of the third stanza of the Northern version of the song, which begins, “We will welcome to our numbers...”
4. How do you think the Southern version of the song symbolizes the Confederate cause?
5. How do you think the Northern version of the song symbolizes the Union cause?

Compare the lyrics for Dixie’s Land (Dixie) and Union Dixie and answer the following questions.

6. While the Confederate States of America did not have an official “national anthem” (even the North did not recognize the Star Spangled Banner as the nation’s anthem until 1931), *Dixie’s Land* (or *Dixie*, as it is more commonly known) was truly a “national song”. What aspects of the song might make it significant in regard to the Confederate cause?
7. How does the song *Union Dixie* (in the first stanza) describe the South?
8. While the first verse and chorus of *Dixie* are well known, the rest of the song is not. Frequently, the tune is used without lyrics. Why do you think the rest of the song is obscure?
9. How could the song, *Union Dixie* be used to rally troops as a school fight song might rally the student body or athletes? Give at least three examples.
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