

Song Title: **BYE BYE BLACKBIRD**

Rating: **YES: Note**

REVIEWERS' NOTE

This **song is admissible** because it was not created to demean, and both lyrics and message are innocuous, with no racial references at all. It remains a popular standard to this day, having been recorded [nearly 600 times](#), since its release through 2021. Its popularity, no doubt, is what led to its use by bad actors.

Segregationists used *Bye Bye Blackbird* to taunt Black civil rights protestors in the 1965 [Selma to Montgomery, Alabama marches](#) for voting rights. On "[Bloody Sunday](#)," [loudspeakers blared Bye Bye Blackbird](#): "there are people who remember vividly the crack of billy-club on skull and the whiff of teargas as the state troopers sang a jeering 'Bye Bye Blackbird' while driving the marchers back, leaving 70 in hospital." Many African American artists, however, have covered the song before and since (for details, scroll down to the Song History section).

The song was also racially weaponized in the following ways:*

- [1927 Chicago Mayoral race](#): supporters of the incumbent mayor sent calliopes "through the streets playing Bye Bye Blackbird and distributed cartoons showing a trainload of Negroes coming up from Georgia, piloted by Thompson [the mayor's challenger]."
- [1983 Chicago Mayoral race](#): "Who can forget the blatant racial appeals of the 1983 mayoral campaign in Chicago, when opponents of Harold Washington sang 'Bye Bye Blackbird' and wore campaign buttons that pictured a crossed-out watermelon?"
- [2013 President Obama's visit to Arizona](#): "A protester waves a sign 'bye bye black sheep' and a small chorus chimes in and puts it to the popular song ditty of *Bye Bye Blackbird* in front of Desert Vista High School in Phoenix where President Obama spoke about housing finance reform."

**screenshots of references regarding the above are provided [at the end of this document](#).*

Bye Bye Blackbird was also [appropriated by Nazis during World War II](#), using lyrics designed to demoralize the Allied forces.

* * *

What year was this song written? 1926

Who wrote the lyrics? Mort Dixon

What did your research tell you about the lyricist?

Mort Dixon (1892 – 1956) was an American lyricist and was active from the early 1920s into the 1930s. He achieved success with his first published effort, 1923's "That Old Gang of Mine" and scored musicals for Broadway & Hollywood. His chief composer collaborators were Ray Henderson, Harry Warren, Harry M. Woods and Allie Wrubel. His composing output declined in the late 1930s and he retired early in life. He is a member of the Songwriter's Hall of Fame.

What other material has been written by this lyricist?

That Old Gang of Mine, I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover, Nagasaki, Would You Like to Take a Walk, I Found a Million Dollar Baby (in a Five and Ten Cent Store), You're my Everything, River, Stay 'Way from My Door, Flirtation Walk, Mr and Mrs is the Name, The Lady in Red.

Who is the composer of this song? Ray Henderson

What did your research tell you about the composer?

Ray Henderson (born **Raymond Brost**; 1896 – 1970) was an American songwriter who was a popular composer in [Tin Pan Alley](#). He was one third of a successful songwriting and music publishing team with [Lew Brown](#) and [Buddy De Sylva](#) from 1925 through 1930, responsible for several editions of the revue called [George White's Scandals](#) and such book musicals as [Good News](#), [Hold Everything!](#), and [Follow Thru](#). He also worked with lyricist Ted Kohler. Inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1970 and in 2001, into the Buffalo Music Hall of Fame. In 1956, a biographical film about DeSylva, Brown and Henderson was made with the title being one of their songs, *The Best Things in Life Are Free*.

What other material has been written by this composer?

Henderson's biggest hit songs include Annabelle, Alabamy Bound, Bye Bye Blackbird, Has Anybody Seen My Girl? (a/k/a "Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue"), I'm Sitting on Top of the World, Don't Bring Lulu, The Birth of the Blues, It All Depends on You, The Varsity Drag, The Best Things in Life Are Free, You're the Cream in My Coffee, Button Up Your Overcoat, Sonny Boy, You Are My Lucky Star, I'm a Dreamer, Aren't We All, (Keep Your) Sunny Side Up, The Thrill Is Gone, Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries, Animal Crackers in My Soup.

Please provide a link to the song lyrics.

<https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/sheetmusic/1825/>

Who and what is this song about, as originally intended by the composer and earlier performers?

Much speculation has been made that this song is about a prostitute. Some suggest the narrator is a young man who is disenchanted by the big city, where he has become mixed up with a prostitute, and ready to return home to his wholesome girlfriend ("sugar sweet so is she"). Or is it about the prostitute leaving the mean streets and going home to mother? No matter what the interpretation, most agree that the blackbird represents a dark period that the narrator is finally willing to move beyond.

What did you learn about the history OF THE SONG?

It is considered a popular standard and the first hit recording was by Gene Austin in June 1926. Other recordings include Paul McCartney, Peggy Lee and Ella Fitzgerald. It was first performed/recorded March 19, 1926 by Sam Lanin's Dance Orchestra (Vocal Chorus Arthur Hall). [Original versions of Bye Bye Blackbird | SecondHandSongs](#). It was the number 16 song of 1926 according to *Pop Culture Madness*. Recordings of the song often include only the chorus; the verses are far less known. The song was featured in the 1955 movie musical *Pete Kelly's Blues*, sung by Peggy Lee in the role of alcoholic jazz singer Rose Hopkins.

During the American Civil Rights Movement, segregationists adopted this as an anti-black anthem - spinning the title into hate speech against African Americans - blasting it from loudspeakers during the Selma to Montgomery marches. Many African American artists, however, have covered the song before and since, including Ella Fitzgerald, Nina Simone, Josephine Baker, Miles Davis, Sammy Davis Jr., and Sonny Thompson. Johnny Coltrane also performed a near 18-minute jazz rendition on his album *Bye Bye Blackbird*, which earned him a posthumous Grammy Award in 1982 for Best Jazz Solo Performance.

Share a link to the earliest performance of this song that you can find.

[SAM LANIN ARTHUR HALL -1926](#) | [Gene Austin 1926](#) | [Ella Fitzgerald - live recording 1967](#)

Does any illustration or other characteristic of the original sheet music reflect an inappropriate theme? No

Please explain why the illustrations ARE or ARE NOT problematic.

Shows a monocled man in a top hat and a blackbird:

<https://i.gyazo.com/e529f79c7a7f2fa7f5314419649ae9f9.png>

Did this song, originally or subsequently, demean a marginalized racial/cultural group (a group considered at a social disadvantage) through idiomatic expressions, metaphors, jargon, or message? And/or does the song present a sanitized/idyllic or false narrative regarding the American South and the life of the enslaved or newly freed? Unsure

Please explain your reasoning for the answer above and indicate if your group feels the song should not be performed by Sweet Adelines.

I'd answer No, if only looking at the words, lyricist and composer, even if it was written about a young man who is disenchanted by the big city, where he has become mixed up with a prostitute, and ready to return home to his wholesome girlfriend ("sugar sweet so is she"). Or if it's about the prostitute leaving the mean streets and going home to mother, no matter what the interpretation, most agree that the blackbird represents a dark period that the narrator is finally willing to move beyond.

The reason for Unsure: During the American Civil Rights Movement, segregationists adopted this as an anti-black anthem and turned the title into hate speech against African Americans, blasting it from loudspeakers during the Selma to Montgomery marches. However, African American Artists have covered the song before and since, including Ella Fitzgerald, Nina Simone, Josephine Baker, Miles Davis, and Sammy Davis Jr.

Please supply the links to any additional sources you used for this section of research.

[Ray Henderson](#) | [Mort Dixon](#)

[Blackbird Fly: Paul McCartney's Legend, Billy Preston's Gospel, and Lead Belly's Blues](#)

[BYE BYE BLACKBIRD? WHAT WHAT? \(Gene Austin\)](#)

[Stories of Standards: "Bye Bye Blackbird"](#)

[Bye Bye Blackbird](#)

Additional Questions to Consider (do not pertain to Admissibility)

The remaining questions pertain to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion issues other than those of race. As such, **THESE QUESTIONS DO NOT AFFECT A SONG'S ADMISSIBILITY**. They are provided to encourage your group to consider factors that may affect members of your audience and/or your performers with regard to religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and more. **Please refer to the Music Choices section of Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion** (in the [Chorus Toolkit](#)) for details and strategies related to these factors.

Could the message/lyrics of the song, original or subsequent, limit any singer or audience member's ability to engage related to the following? A YES answer does not imply that the song is demeaning or exclusionary. [Please see instructions here.](#)

Age: No

Disability: No

Gender: No

Religion: No

Sexual Orientation: **Yes**

Visible Physical Difference: No

Other? No

Please explain your reasoning for YES/UNSURE answers and any NO answers you wish to explain.

The more common/obvious interpretation is that the gender of the love-interest is identified in the lyrics as female: *Where somebody waits for me sugar's sweet so is **she*** ... possibly though, the "she" may refer to the narrator's mother.

Are there any adjustments to the lyrics that would make it more inclusive or current to our chorus culture or societal norms? *

Yes

Write any suggested changes to the lyrics (if applicable) or explain why changes to lyrics will not address identified categories (if applicable). *

To be more inclusive, ensembles may want to discuss and consider making changes to render the love interest gender neutral. E.g., *where somebody waits for me sugar's sweet **just for me***.

Given that the original lyrics contain a female love-interest, switching to male (rather than gender-neutral) may be problematic for a group, as it is a direct action that imposes this male love-interest for all singers, making assumptions about their sexuality. If gender-neutral changes are not made, ensembles may want to discuss and consider leaving the original lyrics intact. (See [Changing Gender Pronouns in Songs.](#))

***These decisions are left to the discretion of ensembles based upon their assessment of member and audience sensibilities.** Please consult the *Music Choices* section of [Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) (in the [Chorus Toolkit](#)) for details and strategies related to these factors.

- For information on **important considerations for lyric changes**, especially in contest songs, see Topic II. D. in the Music Category section of the [Judging Category Description Book](#).
- *To be inclusive, it is not necessary for 100% of an ensemble's songs to be gender neutral.*

RESEARCH SCREENSHOTS

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL theguardian.com/world/2000/sep/12/duncancampbell. The browser's address bar and a row of social media and search icons (Facebook, Twitter, Google, Washington Post, The New York Times, Amazon Smile, MarketV) are visible at the top. The article text is displayed in a two-column layout. The right column contains the main body of the text, which includes several paragraphs. The first paragraph describes the demographic shift in Birmingham's public schools from 50/50 black and white to 90% black. The second paragraph, which is highlighted in yellow, describes a rally on the Pettus Bridge and the experience of state troopers. The third paragraph mentions Lily Brown, a 69-year-old woman from Birmingham who was kicked by a police horse. The fourth paragraph mentions Diane Moton, whose brother Leroy was in a car with a white activist from Detroit, Viola Liuzzo, who was shot and killed.

theguardian.com/world/2000/sep/12/duncancampbell

User account | Ver... Facebook Home / Twitter Google Washington Post: B... The New York Time... Amazon Smile MarketV

Crown will be decisive and why it deserves to be...

"A lot has changed here but not for the better," he said, sitting in his back yard as campaigners stuffed envelopes. "I was in the first fully integrated classes during the desegregation era and they were 50/50 black and white. Now they are 90% black because all the whites have left the public school system." Residential areas were still largely, if unofficially, segregated except in the downtown area, he said.

Nowhere in the civil rights iconography holds a higher place than the Pettus Bridge, and at a 'Joe's Gotta Go' rally there on a hot afternoon there are people who remember vividly the crack of billy-club on skull and the whiff of teargas as the state troopers sang a jeering 'Bye, Bye Blackbird' while driving the marchers back, leaving 70 in hospital.

Lily Brown, aged 69, from Birmingham, was kicked by a police horse during the rampage and suffered a blood clot. She is back on the bridge today. "Everything changed but nothing changed," she said. "I can't for the life of me understand why they still have the man who oppressed us as mayor."

Diane Moton has a special reason to remember the final march to Montgomery. Her brother Leroy Moton, a young volunteer with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was in a car on his way back from Montgomery with a white activist from Detroit, Viola Liuzzo, when they were spotted by armed Klansmen and pursued along Highway 80 at 100 miles an hour. Liuzzo was shot and killed and her brother survived by playing dead.

I a week.

THE
NEW YORKER

quickly arranged the crowd in columns, six abreast—women and children in the middle—and the procession set out down Sylvan Street. It was about one o'clock. On Alabama Avenue, the marchers turned right, passing lines of silent white citizens on the sidewalks. On Broad Street, which is also U.S. Route 80 to Montgomery, they turned left, and as segregationist loudspeakers along the way blared “Bye, Bye, Blackbird” and the white onlookers began to jeer, the marchers approached and crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge. And the march entered another mood—jubilation.

The day was sunny and cool. The flat road, an amalgam of asphalt and the local sand, looked pink. The people in the line linked arms, and the procession was long enough to permit the marchers to sing five different civil-rights songs simultaneously without confusion; the vanguard could not hear what the rear guard was singing. Occasionally, various leaders of the movement broke out of the line to join interviewers from the television networks, which took turns using a camera truck that preceded the line of march. For the first few miles, the highway was flanked by billboards (“Keep Selma Beautiful, Cover It with

Result 1 of 1 in this book for **bye bye blackbird calliopes**

Cognitive Structure
By Lawrence M. Zbikowski
Chicago · 2002

Preview

Overview

About this edition

ISBN:	978019
Published:	October
Publisher:	Oxford
Author:	Lawrence M. Zbikowski University of Chicago

Create Citation

This book shows how re... and cognitive psychologi...

ing the sound and repertoire of his quintet, the choice of “**Bye Bye Blackbird**” was nonetheless somewhat odd. Unlike the other two tunes, “**Bye Bye Blackbird**” had never been a part of the jazz repertoire, but was simply an upbeat popular song usually played as a foxtrot. Recorded by Davis as a ballad, it acquired a melancholy and an irresistible groove that were thoroughly exceptional.

The choice was made odder still by the racial overtones associated with the tune. First published in 1926, “**Bye Bye Blackbird**” played a role in the racially charged election campaign for the mayoralty of Chicago in 1927. Big Bill Thompson, a Republican who had successfully cultivated the African American vote to become mayor of Chicago in 1915, returned in 1927 to challenge Democratic mayor William E. Dever. As part of their strategy to fight off this challenge, the Democrats appealed to racial prejudice, voiced specifically through “**Bye Bye Blackbird**.” The play ultimately backfired, for it galvanized African American support for Thompson:

When some of the Dever supporters sent **calliopes** through the streets piping the strains of “**Bye Bye Blackbird**,” and spreading a circular which displayed a trainload of Negroes headed from Georgia with Thompson as pilot of the train, and the caption: “This train will start for Chicago, April 6, if Thompson is elected,” the obvious answer of the colored leaders was: “Elect Big Bill or it’s going to be **bye-bye** blackbirds in Chicago.”⁴²

41. These three tunes, together with “Round Midnight,” “Ah-leu-cha,” and “All of You,” were released on Miles Davis, *Round about Midnight* (Columbia, [CD] CK 40610, 1987), originally recorded 27 October 1955 and 5 June and 10 October 1956. There are extensive transcriptions and a discussion of this recording of “**Bye Bye Blackbird**” in Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*; see esp. pp. 678–88.

42. Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago*, with an introduction by James Q. Wilson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966; originally publ. in 1935, with an introduction by Robert Park, *Social Science Studies*, 35), 54–55. There is a discussion of a similar cartoon from around the same time that invokes the phrase “**Bye Bye Blackbird**” in Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, *Big Bill of Chicago* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 256.

Result 1 of 1 in this book for **bye bye blackbird played in negro**

Ethnic Politics
By John M. Allswang

Preview

Overview

About this edition

ISBN:	978081
Published:	October

of prejudice. Calliopes went through the streets playing “Bye, Bye Blackbird,” and distributing cartoons showing a trainload of Negroes coming up from Georgia, piloted by Thompson: “This train will start for Chicago, April 6, if Thompson is elected.”³⁹ When, early in the campaign, Thompson apparently embraced a Negro child, Brennan distributed cartoons picturing this, and reading, “Do you want Negroes or White Men to Run Chicago? Bye, Bye, Blackbirds.”⁴⁰ In a speech Brennan cautioned his listeners not to turn the city over to “the black belt.” Numbers of Negroes were jailed during the campaign, in an apparent effort to exert political pressure.⁴¹

ks

Contents

bye bye blackbird 1983 mayoral



Result 1 of 1 in this book for **bye bye blackbird 1983 mayoral race**

[Clear search](#)

Contending Violence and Ethnoviolence

By Fred L. Pincus · 201

[Preview](#)

[Overview](#)

[Get 1](#)

About this edition

ISBN:	978042
Published:	April 18
Publisher:	Taylor &
Author:	Fred L. P

[Create Citation](#)

There are no other David Dukes in the 1990s, however. In the 1983 Chicago mayoral race, Bernard Epton ran unsuccessfully against Harold Washington with a racially charged slogan: "Epton for Mayor. Before It's Too Late." His followers sang "Bye Bye Blackbird" at rallies and sported buttons featuring a crossed-out watermelon. He thus had a reprehensible slogan and a racist following. Nevertheless, Epton was no former Nazi. Yet, like Duke's, his campaign made news precisely because that sort of racism had become so unusual. Moreover, it was the last mayoral race of its kind in the city; by 1989 the leading white candidate, Richard M. Daley, was working hard to attract black votes.

Racist campaigns have almost entirely disappeared because they cost votes. In Chicago, Epton's loss was followed five years later by that of the white Republican candidate for the recorder of deeds in Cook County (Chicago). He had asked reporters to "just run a picture" of his black opponent, Carol Moseley-Braun—a request to which voters did not respond kindly. Likewise, in the New Orleans mayoral race in 1994, the white candidate, Donald Mintz, used (but probably did not create) anti-black and anti-Semitic fliers. In the waning days of the campaign, those fliers galvanized black votes that tipped the balance against him.

Explicitly racist campaigns—blatant appeals to antiblack prejudice—are out. But what about references to controversial public policies that involve race? In North Carolina in 1990 the former mayor of Charlotte, Harvey Gantt, made a bid