

**THE CENTER FOR POPULAR MUSIC, MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY,
MURFREESBORO, TN**

“ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC, BY GEORGE WASHINGTON DIXON” BROADSIDE

06-027

Creator:

Dixon, George Washington, 1808-1861

Type of Material:

Sheet Music Broadside

Physical Description:

1 broadside (15 3/8" x 10 3/4")
text in three columns, divided by rule

Dates:

1836

Abstract (Descriptive Summary):

This broadside was printed in 1836 by George Washington Dixon, one of the earliest American minstrel performers, as a public statement in his defense after being arrested for forgery. The broadside expresses facts and thoughts that had never before been published.

Provenance and Acquisition Information:

Purchased from Savoy Books, Lanesboro, Massachusetts, in March 2007.

Subject/Index Terms:

Dixon, George Washington, 1808-1861
Broadside
Blackface entertainers--United States.
Minstrel music

Agency History/Biographical Sketch:

George Washington Dixon was born in Fredericksburg, Virginia, (according to the broadside text), probably about 1801. He was educated in Richmond, Virginia and New Haven, Connecticut. He apprenticed in traveling circuses and rose to prominence as a singer and early blackface performer in 1829 after performing “Coal Black Rose” in New York theaters. His fame grew during the 1830s as he performed both in whiteface and blackface songs such as “Clare de Kitchen,” “Jim Crow,” and “Zip Coon.”

Later, Dixon became a journalist and newspaper editor. His first major paper was *Dixon's Daily Review*, published from Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1835. He frequently attacked members of the upper class in his publications. This, in turn, earned him repercussions from the journalistic press. In 1836 Dixon was arrested in Boston for forgery. During the trial, a character witness stated that Dixon “was *non compos mentis*.” The forgery was never proven, and Dixon was

exonerated. Dixon evidently wrote several treatises to the public during this time, of which this broadside is one. Porter’s *Spirit of the Times* reported, “We have received a long rigmarole address to the public, printed on a half sheet of whitey-brown paper, and signed George Washington Dixon, in which the writer endeavors to exculpate” himself.

Dixon continued his colorful vocalist and journalist careers throughout the 1840s, but was also attacked in the streets and taken to court on several occasions. His most successful paper was the *Polyanthos*, which began in New York City in 1838. He also flirted with new careers, such as hypnotist, spiritualist, and professional athlete. Dixon’s distinction to American popular music lies in his being one of the earliest American minstrel performers (possibly the first), and his trademark song, “Zip Coon.” George Washington Dixon died in New Orleans, Louisiana on March 2, 1861.

Scope and Content:

This broadside, entitled, “Address to the Public, by George Washington Dixon” was printed by Dixon in 1836 as a public statement in his defense, “having been the unprovoked and innocent object of the intrigues of unprincipled and unrelenting men to effect my ruin.” At the time of this broadside, Dixon was beginning to establish a newspaper in Boston. Dixon was arrested for forgery, was tried, and was acquitted. In this public statement, he defends himself from further accusations, provides an account of his life, explains his current misfortunes, rebukes his enemies, and thanks his legal associates. The narrative of his life includes his education, profession as a vocalist, various singing engagements, and publisher of various New England newspapers. Some facts expressed by Dixon in the broadside have never before been published.

Arrangement:

The original arrangement was maintained during processing.

Location:

Located in the CPM stacks with other manuscript materials, filed by accession number.

Related Materials:

The Center holds items related to George Washington Dixon and blackface minstrelsy, both in its Reading Room collection of secondary sources and its primary source material in Special Collections. Original sheet music, rarebooks, and performance documents may be searched in the CPM InMagic Database either in-house or online.

Notes: Biographical information for Agency History/Biographical Sketch above from *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World*, by Dale Cockrell.

Processed by Lucinda P. Cockrell, June 2007

Revised by Rachel K. Morris, July 2011