The Mackey family has a rich and diverse history that has been well documented for future generations to learn from. Notable people married into this highly esteemed family, as well. The notable member of the Mackey family to which this paper will focus is Lawrence W. Dixon. Dixon was a hardworking man and a talented musician, beloved by many people including his extended Mackey family.

The Dixon family settled outside Chillicothe, Ohio when Lawrence W. Dixon was born in 1895 (“Genealogy Manuscript of Mackey-Blanchette Family”). Chillicothe was a town where free slaves would migrate to until the latter part of the 19th century. Living in Ohio during the late 1890s was not easy but there were opportunities for African Americans regarding employment, especially in agriculture and entertainment. Dixon grew up on a farm where he learned to play the banjo at a young age (“Genealogy Manuscript of Mackey-Blanchette Family”). His success was marked by the numerous gigs he booked including square dances and taffy pullings all over Ohio. One day, Lawrence W. Dixon decided to move to a bigger city to expand his music career.

In 1923, Dixon moved from Columbus to Chicago with the all-Black Sammy Stewart Orchestra (Watkins 117). By 1925 the Sammy Stewart Orchestra was “the biggest band in Chicago, performing what they called symphonic jazz” (“Samuel Sammy Stewart”). Furthermore, this specific type of jazz was known as “a concert music whose musical language was derived from the European Romantic tradition, African-American jazz, and American popular music” (“American Symphonic Jazz”). Many times, Sammy Stewart’s Orchestra, along
with other all Black music bands, played for all-white audiences because they allowed for more opportunities for exposure and higher wages. Even though these African American artist were sometimes granted the opportunity to perform for White audiences, they were never allowed to dine, socialize or use the same facilities as them. These perplexed rules set in place by Whites demonstrate their level of social distance towards Blacks in the 1920s. The dominant society (Whites in power) wanted the Black musicians close enough to play for them but that was as far as their level of tolerance allowed. Dixon was still able to become a successful musician, even under the harsh Jim Crow laws of the time.

Music may have been the reason Dixon chose to move to Chicago but Virgil Mackey was the reason he stayed. Virgil Mackey was the daughter of Virgil McKnight Mackey, Senior. Virgil and Lawrence married in Lake, Indiana on November 29, 1934 (“Genealogy Manuscript of Mackey-Blanchette Family”). The couple was considered a good match because they were both middle class and well known in their community. They were from the same ingroup. Even though Laurence W. Dixon was a well-known African American musician during the early part of the 20th century, he decided to switch to a more secure career in insurance sales during the mid-1940s in order to better support his wife and son, Lawrence Vernon.

Laurence W. Dixon was an insurance agent for the Chicago Metropolitan Assurance Company for ten years (“Genealogy Manuscript of Mackey-Blanchette Family”). During this time, all that was required to sell insurance was a high school diploma, which is what Dixon earned. He never went to college. His clientele consisted of the African American population in Chicago (“Black Business in the Black Metropolis”). Chicago Metropolitan Assurance Company was an example of how African Americans created parallel institutions in order to survive in the dominant oppressive society. Additionally, Virgil Mackey Dixon worked in the Juvenile Court's
social service division in 1933 as a probation officer. For most of her career, she served as a social worker under Judge Sylvester White and was the coordinator of Juvenile Court's Lawndale unit when she retired in 1976 (“Genealogy Manuscript of Mackey-Blanchette Family”).

Even though Dixon had a job that kept him busy, he continued to play side gigs in clubs and theatres. After his retirement, he played in public venues until his health declined to the point that he could not perform. Laurence W. Dixon died in 1970 at Michael Reese Hospital after a long battle with emphysema (“Genealogy Manuscript of Mackey-Blanchette Family”).

The first sociological question that arose when I researched Dixon dealt with his music career. The popular music genre of the early 20th century appeared to be jazz. I want to know why jazz was so popular in the African American community, and eventually the White community. I would also like to know where the genre originally formed: Southern United States, Northern United States, etc. The second question that I thought about arose when I researched Virgil Mackey’s life. I was surprised to learn that she not only worked throughout her life but that she was educated well enough to become a juvenile social worker. I would like to know how common it was for women to have careers such as that during that time and what specifically motivated her pursue it. I would like to know more about the socioeconomic status of the Dixon-Mackey household and research whether her motivation to work was a result from having a desire for fulfilment and wanting to help children or if she needed to work to help pay the bills in her household and chose that occupation because that was what she was able to do, given the time period.