

# COTTON-EYED JOE

Old-Time Breakdown; **CATEGORY:** Fiddle and Instrumental Tunes **DATE:** Late 1800's; **OTHER NAMES:** Miss Brown; Cotten-Eyed Joe; Red Dog; Sugar in My Coffee-O; Did You Ever See the Devil Uncle Joe?; **RECORDING INFO:** Fiddlin' John Carson; Skillet Lickers; Reno & Smiley; Bob Wills; **NOTES:** Marion Thede believes 'cotten-eyed' may refer to a person with very light blue eyes, while Alan Lomax suggests it was used to describe a man whose eyes were milky white from Trachoma. In Georgia, people with large whites to the eyes are called cotton-eyed. This usage is fairly common, as pointed out in the quote from a dictionary of slang (Gargoyle). Charles Wolfe (1991) writes that African-American collector Thomas Talley, in his manuscript of stories, *Negro Traditions*, related a story entitled "Cotton-Eyed Joe, or the Origin of the Weeping Willow." The story includes a stanza from the song, but more importantly details a bizarre tale of a well-known pre-Civil War plantation musician, Cotton Eyed Joe, who plays a fiddle made from the coffin of his dead son.

Do you re - mem - ber a - long time a - go, There was a man called  
Cot - ton - Eyed Joe, There was a man called Cot - ton - Eyed Joe.

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**A** **D**  
Do you remember a long time ago  
**A** **E7**  
There was a man called Cotton-eyed Joe.  
**A** **E7** **A**  
There was a man called Cotton-eyed Joe?

I could have been married a long time ago  
If it hadn't a-been for Cotton-eyed Joe. (etc.)

Old bull fiddle and a shoe-string bow  
Wouldn't play nothing, but Cotton-eyed Joe. (etc.)

Play it fast or play it slow  
Didn't play nothing but Cotton-eyed Joe. (etc.)

Where do you come from? Where do you go?  
Where do you come from Cotton-eyed Joe? (etc.)

Cornstalk fiddle and shoestring bow,  
Come down gals on Cotton-Eyed Joe. (etc.)

Wanna go to meeting and wouldn't let me go,  
Had to stay home with Cotton-Eyed Joe. (etc.)

Come a little rain and come a little snow,  
The house fell down on Cotton-Eyed Joe. (etc.)