

This is a solitaire card game called "Song of the South".

I intend it to simulate the process of living an examined life. It takes as a starting point that your life starts out mostly unexamined, and that other people have a stake in that.

Play this game using the "standard" deck of cards-- the Poker deck.

There are two phases of the game:

- a) the Proud Southern History/Family part**
- b) the daily grind**

Part One: The Proud Southern History/Family

Find yourself in a family: shuffle and deal out cards one after another. Stop when you have a Proud Southern History/Culture stack of 4 red face cards, and a Proud Southern Family of 3 red cards that are Aces or 2's.

You start with 3 family members, represented by aces and 2's. The Aces will be loyal to you, but the 2's are loyal to redness. You might someday have a non-red member of your family.

The 4 face cards represent your Ethics, as handed to you by your History and Culture-- the History stack. They start out all red, too-- it's a red state, buddy; these are our **values!** You try to turn them black; this represents how one replaces or updates components of one's identity as one lives one's life. You could think about red ink and black ink, Jeff Foxworthy, or Public Enemy. It ain't a *Socialist* red-- you understand.

Also, you start with some patience-- 4 more cards, unknown, face down. The patience cards could represent the ability of you and yours to continue examining yourselves, or to buy your way out

of problems, or even to shift blame. Either way, there's a finite supply.

Once you have Family, History and Patience, reshuffle the others and go on to the daily grind.



Part Two: The Daily Grind

At each turn, count out 3 cards and turn over the 3rd. This represents a bit of a conversation, a life choice-- something done in public. Only face cards, aces, and 2's are significant. After the last card is dealt, reshuffle the discards and keep going.

If the card is not a face card, ace or two, it's an event of no special interest: you paid the plumber, did your homework, or bought groceries. Moving on.

If the card is a face card, you face a public ethical dilemma.

If the card is a black face card:

If you have a matching card in your History stack that is red, trade it with the black card. You have successfully identified, and gracefully neutralized, a component of your own bigotry. Progress!

If you don't have any red cards of that type, the card simply represents the ongoing fulfillment of your commitment to the examined life. Way to go, white guy!

(Hmm, "Black Face Card"-- what's that about?)

If the card is a red face card:

This represents an event, some kind of entirely-understandable blooper (or, if you're all woke, "bigotry") committed by you or yours, for which you are responsible. If you have a matching black card in your History, you may exchange black for red. This represents backsliding-- giving up on ethical progress.

If you do not exchange, you may rely on patience. Kings use 3, Queens use 2, and Jacks use one patience card. Put it or them on top of the face card and continue.

If you pick up a single black History card, and then slide back to an all-red History pile, you lose: this is the "living our values" loss.

If you have no patience, and can't backslide, you can give up a member of your family. Put that family member on the face card and continue. Bye, Uncle Joe. Now we won't have to hear you go on about food stamps any more.

If your family is gone, you lose: nobody loves you, so it doesn't matter how good you are. This is the "pathetic old bastard" loss.

If the card is an ace, you have gained a new, loyal member of your family.

If the card is a red ace, great! Red aces are like your mother-- she loves you, no matter what kind of crazy stuff you get into (well, like *your* mother, maybe).

If the card is a black ace, and if you have a red king in your History pile, the black ace cannot stand to be with you. Red jacks and queens are tolerable.

If the card is a two, maybe you've made a friend.

Both red and black twos will befriend you, but only if all of your History and family cards are their color. Just one mismatch, and they all leave, instantly.

Tell me they're not like that. Go on.

If you get four aces into your family, you win-- that's the "good love" win.

If you take all four History cards from red to black, you win-- you are both good (as far as you can tell) and loved-- this is the "bless your heart" win.

Design Notes:

I wrote this game after seeing Brenda Braithwaite's presentation "One Falls for Each of Us", on her games about tragedy and genocide, also while thinking about yet another personal gaffe of my own, and my personal history.

No, I don't want to be a bigot. It happens, though-- guess I haven't cleared my stack yet. But who is remembered, a hundred years after death, as anything but a monster? And wouldn't it be awful for it not to be so?

Neal McDonald, 2010,2025