

TEACHER GUIDE

1828 DOC. #2: “The Hunters of Kentucky” Song

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Eighteen twenty-eight saw the rise of campaign image-making to appeal to the average voter. Jackson wanted to show himself as the “the tribune of the people.” In *Life of Jackson*, the first campaign biography, “Ol’ Hickory” was presented as an outsider and a military hero. He was portrayed in much of the political press as a simple, courageous, and righteous frontiersman; a figure larger than life. Then, as now, the image doesn’t always match up with the reality. Jackson was in fact a wealthy land speculator and slaveholder. He had studied law, had become a judge, and then a legislator who helped to write the Tennessee Constitution. Many of his main supporters were every bit as wealthy and powerful as those of his opponent.

One of the techniques used to encourage voters in the new popular campaign was the use of songs that could be sung by the crowds at rallies and in parades. In the days before mass media, when many voters were illiterate, campaign songs were an effective way to get a message across. Labor organizer and songwriter Joe Hill commented that: “A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read more than once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over” (Joe Hill: About the Program: Script). A song’s simple message, memorable rhymes, and repetitive rhythm could deeply place an idea or a candidate in voters’ minds.

The song you will hear is entitled “The Hunters of Kentucky.” It was written in 1822 and thereafter used in all of Jackson’s campaigns. The “Ol’ Hickory” nickname referred to his unbending will as the military hero of the Battle of New Orleans at the end of the War of 1812. In this battle his Kentucky troops defeated the “John Bull” British under the command of Lord Pakenham.

> **Play** the song and **project** the lyrics and/or **hand out** lyrics sheets and invite students to listen carefully to the words.

1828 DOC. #2

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THE HUNTERS OF KENTUCKY
 Words: Samuel Woodworth
 Melody: “The Unfortunate Miss Bailey”
 (Attributed Verse)

Ye gentlemen and ladies fair, who grace this famous city,
 And listen if you’ve time to spare, while I rehearse a ditty,
 And for an opportunity, converse yourselves lucky,
 You’ll not often here you see a hunter from Kentucky.

Chorus:
 O Kentucky, the hunters of Kentucky,
 O Kentucky, the hunters of Kentucky.

’Tis you’ve read it in the prints, how Pakenham attempted
 To make Old Hickory Jackson wince, but soon his schemes repenting,
 For we with rifles ready cock’d thought such occasions lucky,
 And soon around the hero flock’d the hunters of Kentucky.

(Chorus)

But Jackson, he was wide awake, and wasn’t scar’d at rifles,
 For well he knew what aim we take with our Kentucky rifles,
 So he led us down to capture among the ground was low amuck,
 There stood John Bull in martial pomp, and here was old Kentucky.

(Chorus)

They found at last ’twas vain to fight, whose lead was all their booty,
 And so they waddy took a flight, and left us all our booty,
 And now of danger e’er amoy, remember what our trade is,
 Just send for us Kentucky boys, and we’ll protect you, Indies.

(Chorus)

“The Hunters of Kentucky” Song

Audio Clip

Lyrics on PowerPoint slide and student handout

QUESTION Who is the target audience for this song? Which voters does this song seek to persuade? Give evidence to support your answer.

SUGGESTED ANSWER This song appeals to the “common man,” those recently enfranchised in the Western states.

EVIDENCE the song celebrates “us Kentucky boys” for whom Jackson was the leader in battle and belittles “John Bull in martial pomp” (the British)

SUGGESTED ANSWER It targets those wanting strong military support from the federal government on the frontier.

EVIDENCE Kentucky was among the newer Western states at the time; Jackson’s victory against the British in the Battle of New Orleans suggests that he will be willing to fight to extend and protect the borders of the growing United States

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Given all his other accomplishments as a lawyer, judge, and legislator, why does the song focus solely on Jackson’s military prowess?

Can you think of other examples of presidential image-making where the image may not match the reality? Would it be possible to have a political campaign without any image-making? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL INFO

Jackson’s frontier egalitarianism also appealed to workingmen of the North. In his inaugural address Jackson pledged that “the majority is to govern.” His direct appeals to “the people” was the beginning of the effort to develop an electoral mandate by all future presidential contenders.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

“Hero”
 “Commoner”
 Music