

TEACHER GUIDE

1840 DOC. #6: “Rock-A-Bye Baby, Daddy’s A Whig” Song

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Democrats, who had initially put forward the log cabin and hard cider images as an attack on Harrison, were simply overwhelmed by the popular appeal of these images in casting the challenger as a frontier “people’s candidate” from the Andrew Jackson mold. They tried to suppress the overwhelming public enthusiasm for the Harrison campaign by reminding voters that Harrison had himself grown up in a palatial home and was part of the Virginian planter aristocracy. They also pointed out that, unlike Jackson, Harrison’s military career had been undistinguished. His men had actually suffered heavy casualties against the poorly armed Native American confederation at the Battle of Tippecanoe.

> **Play** the song and **project** the lyrics and/or **hand out** lyric sheets.

QUESTION	Which candidate does this song support, Harrison or Van Buren? What is your evidence?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	It supports Van Buren.
EVIDENCE	“Tip (Harrison) is a fake,” “Van Buren will affix” what Tip “would ruin”
QUESTION	What impression do the lyrics and music give you about Harrison? What is your evidence?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	He is a drunkard.
EVIDENCE	“hard cider he’ll swig,” “he’ll fall in a stew,” “he sits in his cabin a drinking that rum”
SUGGESTED ANSWER	He is not a real war hero.
EVIDENCE	“Tip is a fake, far from the battle, war cry and drum”
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Harrison is boring and his presidency will put the country to sleep.
EVIDENCE	familiar lullaby tune invokes slumber

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ROCK-A-BYE BABY

Words: Anonymous

Melody: “Rockabye Baby:

Adapted by: Oscar Brand

Rock-a-bye Baby, Daddy’s a Whig
 When he comes home, hard cider he’ll swig
 When he has swug he’ll fall in a stew
 And down will come Tyler and Tippecanoe
 Rock-a-Bye Baby, when you awake
 You will discover Tip is a fake
 Far from the battle, war cry and drum
 He sits in his cabin a- drinking that rum
 Rock a bye baby, never you cry
 You need not fear old Tip and his Ty
 What they would ruin Van Buren will affix

“Rock-a-bye Baby, Daddy’s a Whig” Song

Audio Clip

Lyrics on PowerPoint slide and student handout

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What are the dangers of negative campaigning? What aspects of the 1840 campaign are still with us today? How did this campaign hurt or help American democracy?

ADDITIONAL INFO

In the end the Van Buren campaign had to concede defeat against the great chorus singing for "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too." One Democratic newspaper editor wrote: "Some of the songs I shall never forget. They rang in my ears wherever I went, morning, noon and night...it was a ceaseless torrent of music" (Johnson 3).

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Attack

The Democrats' attack on Harrison as a drunkard from a log cabin surely backfired. Look at other examples where campaign strategies backfired. In 1988 the campaign of Michael Dukakis constructed a photo-op of the candidate riding in a tank in order to redefine him as strong on military issues. The strategy backfired and his opponent, George H. W. Bush used the images in attack ads to present the smiling and suited Dukakis as a wimp (1988 doc. #6).