

TEACHER GUIDE

1932 DOC. #1: “Happy Days Are Here Again” Song

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1932 the new technologies of radio and film brought candidates’ messages to the public in immediate and powerful ways. Songs had long been used in presidential campaigns as sing-alongs but radio allowed live music to travel beyond the rally or concert hall for the first time. Film added another dimension by putting popular songs into a visual form, much as MTV would do fifty years later.

The song that you will hear had gained popularity before Roosevelt’s 1932 campaign. It was written for a Hollywood film, *Chasing Rainbows*, and had been recorded by an orchestra. At the Democratic convention FDR’s advisor Edward Flynn suggested that the band play “something peppy like ‘Happy Days Are Here Again.’” It quickly became Roosevelt’s theme song and continued to be played at both Democratic and Republican conventions many years after Roosevelt’s passing. The song gained even more exposure as the theme song of the popular radio program, “Your Hit Parade,” which was sponsored by Lucky Strike cigarettes and ran from 1935-1955.

The Democratic platform in 1932 promised relief from the hardship of the Depression. With unemployment high and money scarce, people wanted to believe that change was possible and that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

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

QUESTION	What messages about FDR’s 1932 candidacy are communicated with this song? What is your evidence?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Economic and personal recovery will be possible with Roosevelt.
EVIDENCE	lyrics stress putting away the bad days and embracing the good; the song has a bouncy rhythm; Roosevelt is associated with this happy and hopeful song
QUESTION	What evidence does this song offer regarding Roosevelt’s ability to lead? Explain your answer.
SUGGESTED ANSWER	No evidence is given about FDR’s leadership abilities.
EVIDENCE	Roosevelt is not mentioned, neither are his ideas or his party’s platform

1932 DOC. # 1

1932 doc. #1
HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN
 Words: Jack Yellen

So long, sad times!
 Go 'long, bad times!
 We are rid of you at last.
 Howdy, gay times!
 Cloudy gray times,
 You are now a thing of the past.
 'Cause happy days are here again!
 The skies above are clear again.
 Let us sing a song of cheer again.
 Happy days are here again!
 All together shout it out!
 There's no one who can doubt it now,
 So let's tell the world about it now.
 Happy days are here again!
 Your cares and troubles are gone;
 There'll be no more from now on.
 Happy days are here again;
 The skies above are clear again;
 Let us sing a song of cheer again.
 Happy days are here again!

“Happy Days Are Here Again” Song

Audio Clip

Lyrics on PowerPoint slide and Student Handout

QUESTION

Many people consider this to be the most effective campaign song of all time. Why do you think this might be?

SUGGESTED ANSWER

The song’s lyrics are very positive, linking the candidate to good times and happy people. The song’s radio exposure extended its reach into a nonpolitical context. The melody is upbeat, tempo fast, and the octave range is limited. The verses repeat, thus making it a great choice for group sing-alongs at conventions.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Why has music been consistently used by campaigns over the years?

Discuss the relative advantages of 20th-century radio and 19th-century group sing-alongs for campaign effectiveness.

Why do you think voters seem to prefer optimistic messages even when they seem to defy reality?

ADDITIONAL INFO

Roosevelt became the first candidate to receive his party’s nomination in person when he flew to Chicago to address the Democratic convention. Many thought this was a rash gesture, both because it broke with past precedent of candidates keeping their distance and because the air flight to Chicago was still seen by some as risky in the early days of cross-country air travel. At the convention Roosevelt offered his famous promise, “I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American people” (Cornog 212).

FDR campaign buttons portrayed the democratic donkey as a “Depression buster,” kicking away hard times.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Music

Reaching Voters (recorded music)

Today candidates regularly use music as part of their convention imagery (see 2000 doc. #1).

Roosevelt was the first presidential nominee to appear in person at his nominating convention. The tradition of the candidate’s entrance and speech at the convention has become more and more of a spectacle in recent years through the power of television (see 2000 doc. #3).