

# American Experiment

## The First Modern Presidential Campaign

### OVERVIEW

#### Theme Introduction

In this unit, we're exploring "the American Experiment." What kind of nation did the American Revolution create? How were our local and state governments organized? How are our leaders elected? We'll explore these questions and more.

#### Video

[The First Modern Presidential Campaign](#) with Katherine Gould, Curator of History Objects and Fine Art, and Jill Beitz, Manager of Reference and Research, Cincinnati History Library and Archives at Cincinnati Museum Center

#### Guiding Questions

As students watch the video, invite them to consider the following questions:

- William Henry Harrison's campaign contained many firsts for the time. What strategies did he introduce into the process of running for president that we still see in practice today?
- What story lines, propaganda and images did people use to create an image of Harrison that was exaggerated or even the opposite of the truth? What were those tactics designed to do? How did they make him more appealing to the average voter?

#### Key Vocabulary

- **Political campaign:** An effort organized by a candidate or party to win an election or pass a policy.
- **Election:** A formal process of people voting to choose someone for a political office or other position.
- **Slogan:** A short, attention-getting and memorable phrase used to describe the character or quality of something.
- **Propaganda:** The spreading of information to influence public opinion.
- **Iconography:** Images or symbols associated with a subject.
- **Symbol:** A sign, shape or object used to represent something else.
- **Cottage industry:** A small-scale industry in which workers make, create or assemble products in their homes rather than in factories or offices.



*Portrait of William Henry Harrison, James Henry Beard, ca. 1850, Cincinnati Museum Center.*

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### ACTIVITIES

#### Keep the Ball Rolling

*Recommended for grades 4-8*

As we learned in the video, William Henry Harrison's campaign for President changed the American campaign process. Harrison's team introduced slogans, jingles, merchandise, the candidate speaking for himself and more. In this activity, students will model one of his campaign tactics – that of the rolling ball of political propaganda.

Ask students to recall some of the campaign tactics that Harrison used to get attention and increase support. Ask students whether any of those strategies seem familiar to today's campaigns. Ask if any tactics seem unusual. If they don't mention it on their own, bring up the giant ball mentioned in the video. Remind students that large balls were created and covered with pro-Harrison slogans. These balls were rolled from town to town, adding material as they went. Ask students what purpose this would serve? Would it get catchy slogans out there? Would it gather attention? Would you want to participate in rolling the ball? Let students know that they are going to participate in a smaller-scale version of this campaign technique.

Bring a large beach ball or other round inflatable to class. Have students stand in a circle, facing inward. Choose one student to start the activity by writing a campaign slogan on the ball with a dry erase marker. Have them read their slogan aloud and roll the ball and marker to someone else in the circle, with everyone calling out "Keep the Ball Rolling!" as it is passed to the next person. (This is a modern expression attributed to this campaign activity.) Repeat this activity until all students have added a campaign slogan to the ball. Finish by discussing what the slogans had in common and the reasons they were effective in getting Harrison elected.

**Optional modification:** If coming up with novel slogans is too difficult or time-consuming, print and cut apart some of the slogans, phrases and quotes from 1840 Harrison campaign materials and hand them out to the students in advance (see below). When it is their turn, each student can read their slogan and either tape it onto or write it onto the ball.

#### Slogans:

- Hero of Tippecanoe
- Harrison and Reform
- Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!
- Farewell Dear Van, Not the Man
- To Guide the Ship, Old Tip
- Democratic Ball, Sent On
- With Heart and Soul, Ball We Roll
- May Times Improve, As On We Move
- Harrison and Our Country's Welfare
- Keep the Ball Moving
- A Frequent Change of Rulers is the Soul of Republicanism
- The Poor Man's Friend
- Martin Van Ruin
- Whig Husbands or None
- Candidate of the People
- Let the People Rule
- Frontier Patriotism and Military Heroism
- Our Country's Hope
- Glory to the Hero of the Thames
- The Farmer of North Bend
- Log Cabin and Hard Cider
- Van, Van, is a Used-up Man

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### Name That Campaign Tune!

*Recommended for grades 5-10*

As we learned in the video, Harrison’s campaign widely used songs and jingles, even printing songbooks with lyrics set to well-known tunes so that everyone could join in. Harrison’s campaign was not the first – nor the last – to use music to rally and unite supporters. In this activity, students will compare presidential campaign songs from across the decades through a “Name That Campaign Tune!” game.

Review that Harrison’s campaign, while not the first to utilize music, was the first to use it so widely. Show students images of two Harrison campaign songbooks (below). Ask them why the campaign set the words to catchy, well-known tunes. Ask how candidates since Harrison have continued to use campaign songs to rally their supporters, and invite students to name examples. Then tell students that you’re leading a “Name That Campaign Tune!” competition, and that they must guess the presidential candidate that used a particular song during his or her campaign.

Pass out the worksheet to each student (below). Use included links to play a snippet of each song for the class. Ask students to connect the song to the presidential candidate they think used it. They should pay attention to both lyrics and music for each song: ask them to note these details in the margins. Once you have played all the songs, review the answers (key below) and discuss the following:

- Did you notice any similarities among the songs?
- What did you notice about the music in most of them?
- Did you notice any common themes in the lyrics?
- What was the tone of the songs? Positive or negative?
- How might these characteristics have made these songs good at promoting a candidate’s brand or rallying supporters?
- Were there any songs that were completely different from the others?
- What, if any, characteristics helped you match the songs to the candidate?

#### Images of William Henry Harrison Song Books:

- *The Harrison and Log Cabin Song Book* (Page 4): <https://www.cincymuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/A250-WHH-HarrisonSongs-H323L.jpg>
- *A Drop of Hard Cider, or the Tippecanoe Roarer: Embodying the Soul of all the North-Bend Melodies, Whig Songs, Etc.* (Page 5): <http://cincymuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/A250-WHH-HarrisonSongs-D786.jpg>

#### Link to song audio:

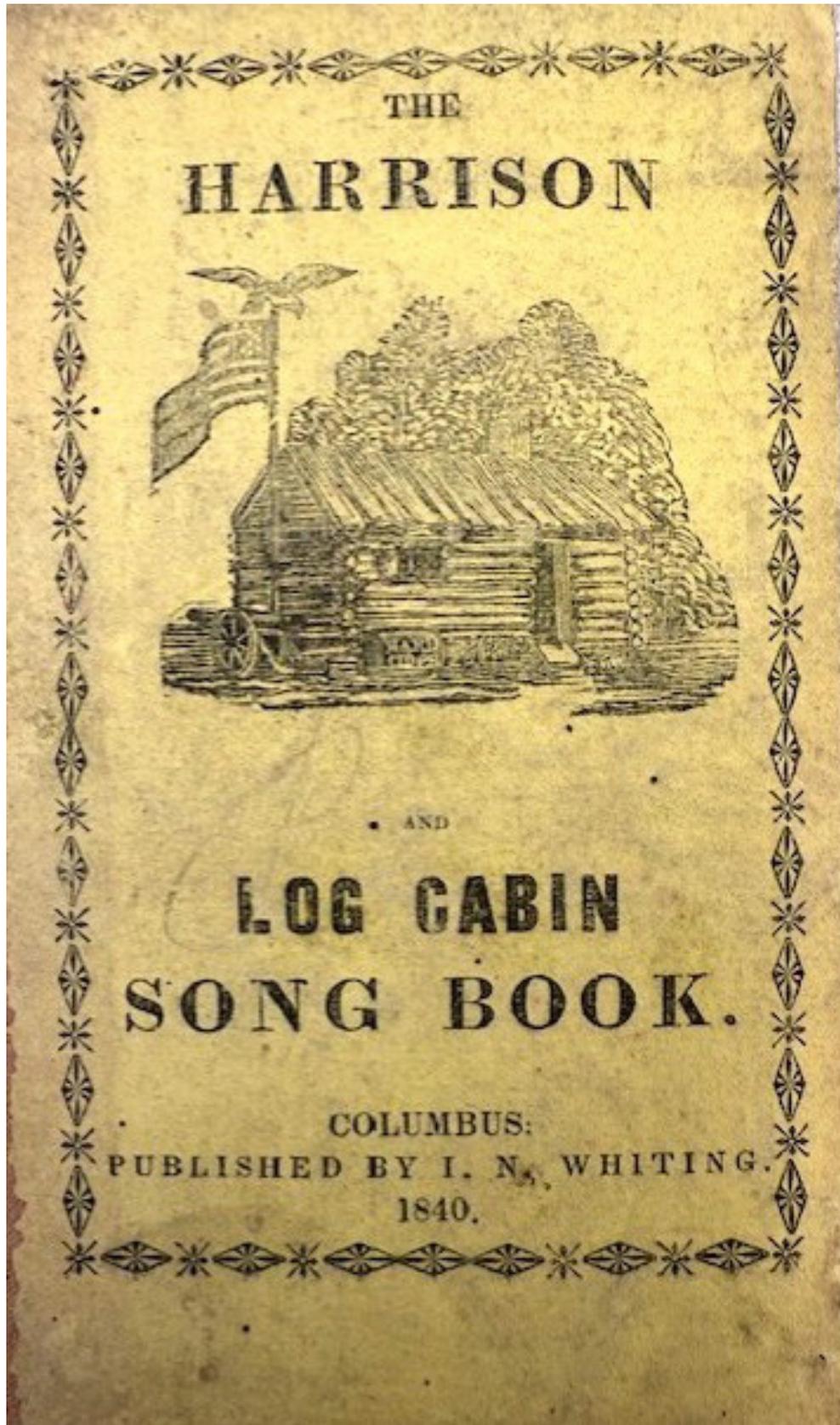
- Lupton, Danielle (2024): <https://goodauthority.org/news/campaign-songs-good-playlist-us-presidential-elections-harris-trump-2024/>

#### Song answer key:

- William Henry Harrison – “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!”
- Abraham Lincoln – “Lincoln and Liberty”
- Franklin D. Roosevelt – “Happy Days are Here Again”
- John F. Kennedy – “High Hopes”
- Bill Clinton – “Don’t Stop”
- George W. Bush – “I Won’t Back Down”
- Hillary Clinton – “Suddenly I See”
- Barack Obama – “We Take Care of our Own”
- Joe Biden – “Higher and Higher”
- Donald Trump – “God Bless the USA”

#### Student work sheet:

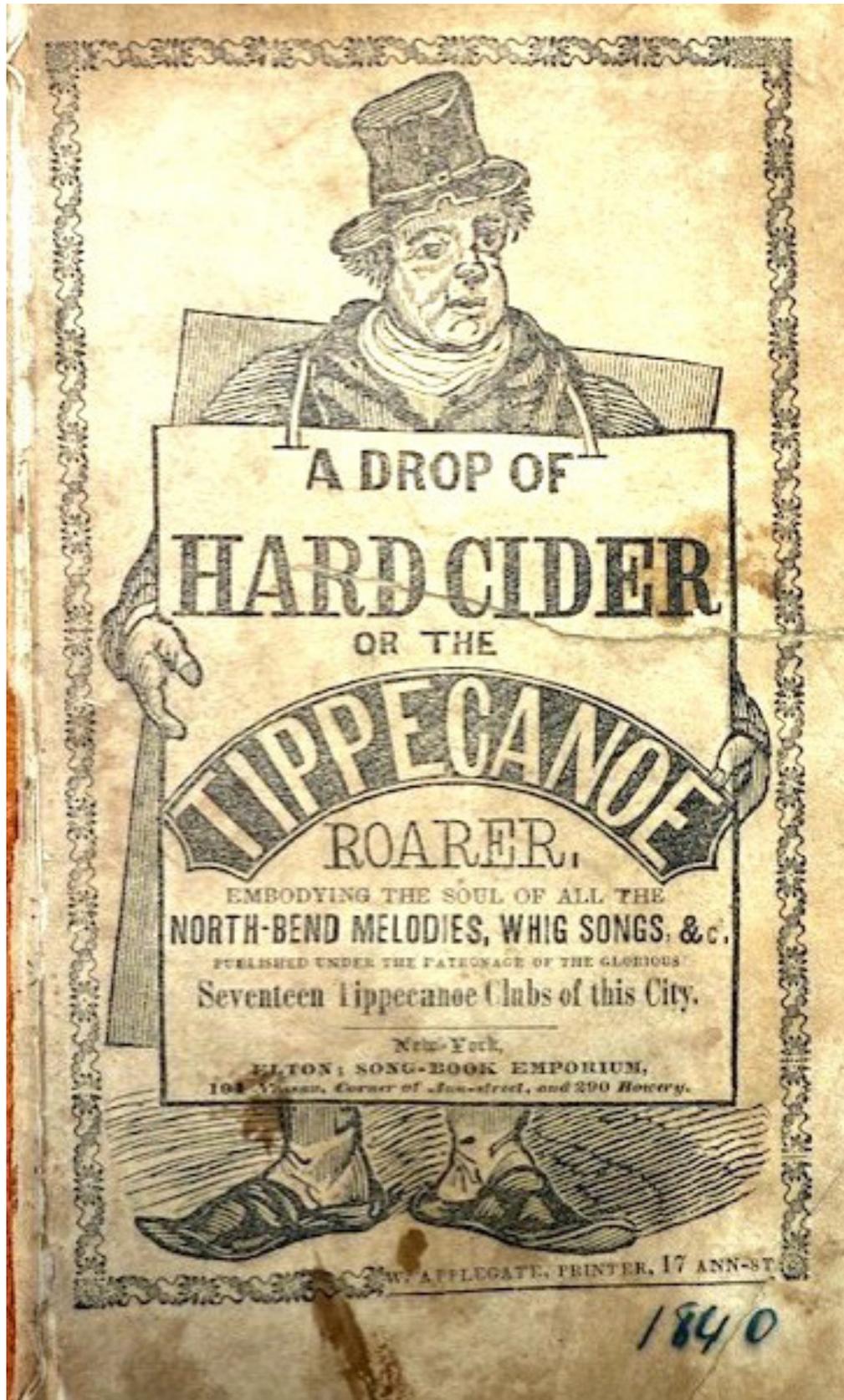
- See Page 6



*The Harrison and Log Cabin Song Book, 1840, Cincinnati Museum Center*

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*A Drop of Hard Cider, or the Tippecanoe Roarer: Embodying the Soul of all the North-Bend Melodies, Whig Songs, Etc., 1840, Cincinnati Museum Center.*



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### Guess Whose Campaign Song It Is

William Henry Harrison (1840)

“God Bless the USA” – Lee Greenwood

Abraham Lincoln (1860)

“Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!” – Alexander C. Ross

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1932)

“Higher and Higher” – Jackie Wilson

John F. Kennedy (1960)

“Happy Days are Here Again” – Jack Yellen, Milton Ager

Bill Clinton (1992)

“Don't Stop” – Fleetwood Mac

George W. Bush (2000)

“Lincoln and Liberty” – John Hutchinson

Hillary Clinton (2008)

“I Won't Back Down” – Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers

Barack Obama (2012)

“High Hopes” – Frank Sinatra

Joe Biden (2020)

“Suddenly I See” – KT Tunstall

Donald Trump (2024)

“We Take Care of our Own” – Bruce Springsteen

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### The Constitution and Elections

*Recommended for grades 7-12*

As we learned in the video, one important responsibility of American citizens is voting in elections. In this activity, students will examine the election framework within the U.S. Constitution, and how lawmakers have modified it over the years.

Ask students if they know why and how we have elections. Discuss that the U.S. Constitution set up the initial framework in 1788, and that amendments since have made changes to that process.

Place students in small groups and share the text of the U.S. Constitution and amendments (see below). Ask students to highlight each place in the Constitution where any aspect of elections (timetable, who is eligible, who is elected, etc.) are mentioned. If students are working on a device rather than on a paper copy, have them cut and paste the text into a Word document. Then, discuss as a class:

- Where in the Constitution is the process of presidential elections established?
- According to the Constitution, which positions in other branch(es) of government must be chosen by election?
- Does the Constitution establish when elections will occur?
- When were election amendments added, and what did they change?
- When Harrison was elected in 1840, who was eligible to vote? (Hint: look at amendments before and after 1840.)
  - Did the Harrison campaign engage any groups who couldn't vote at that time?

**Optional Modification:** Divide the text so that each group analyzes just one section. Then – proceeding through the document in order – invite each group to share what their section includes.

#### Links to text of U.S. Constitution:

- U.S. Constitution, National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>
- Amendments 1-10, National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>
- Amendments 11-27, National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27>

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### STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

- **OH Government 4.15:** Individuals have a variety of opportunities to act in the influence of their state and national government. Citizens have both rights and responsibilities in Ohio and the United States.
- **OH Government 4.16:** Civic participation in a democratic society requires individuals to make informed and reasoned decisions by accessing, evaluating and using information effectively to engage in compromise.
- **OH Government 8.21:** Informed citizens understand how media and communication technology influence public opinion.
- **OH Government 8.22:** The U.S. Constitution established a federal republic, providing a framework for a national government with elected representatives, separation of powers and checks and balances.
- **KY 5.C.CP.2:** Analyze the structure of the U.S. government, including separation of power and its system of checks and balances.
- **KY HS.C.RR.2:** Explain how active citizens can affect the lawmaking process locally, nationally and internationally.