

4. James Madison (1809-1817)

Zinger

Music and lyrics by Christian Kiefer

Art by Christa Dalien

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Literary/Historical:

1. Like “Washington Dreams of the Hippopotamus,” “Zinger” is a song that takes popular culture as its subject. Analyze how “Zinger” utilizes forms of popular culture as a starting point for a larger discussion of how contemporary music utilizes popular culture. (And note that if the listener doesn’t know of the Dolly Madison company, then this song will make little sense.)
2. The arrangement of “Zinger”—banjo, acoustic guitar, acoustic bass, and very spare percussion—seems evocative of a simpler, less complex time. Using this arrangement as a starting point, argue for or against the notion that this song argues for a more simple delineation of personal “value.” Could the simple instrumentation be viewed as ironic? What exactly is Madison asking for in the song?
3. Analyze the rhetoric of Madison’s argument. What is he basing his claims on? Is he employing real logic or logical fallacies? On what basis is he jealous of his wife’s fame?

Historical:

4. Madison was the principal author of both the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and yet today he is not nearly as well known as earlier presidents such as Washington and Jefferson, nor later presidents such as Andrew Jackson. Discuss why this might be the case by exploring what, how, and why political figures become “famous” in American culture.

Research-Based:

5. Outline and discuss the impact Madison had on the Federal government and on the formation of the Republican Party. Given this impact, why do you think Madison’s public image be under-valued compared to that of Presidents Washington and Jefferson and/or government officials such as Alexander Hamilton or Benjamin Franklin? Is there evidence of “image shaping” during the era of the founding fathers?

Art/Visual Rhetoric:

6. Christa Dalien’s pen and ink drawing of Madison contains several subtle oddities. For example, the image represents Madison calmly sitting before a piece of cherry pie. It appears that he’s seated to eat it and yet note that there’s no fork in his hand but rather a

polka dot handkerchief. Madison's face appears weirdly wrinkled and his chin is stubbly as if he has not shaved. Viewing this image as a piece of visual rhetoric, define what it might be saying about Madison, both as a man and as a president. What aspects of the song lyrics are represented? How do the song and image work together to form a more complete picture of Madison?