

## **10. John Tyler (1841-1845)**

### **In Hindsight**

**Music and lyrics by Christian Kiefer; featuring Bill Callahan**

**Art by Jeremy Kalgreen**

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

##### Literary / Musical:

1. John Tyler was the first vice president to assume the office of President upon the death of the elected commander-in-chief. “By god they’ll remember me now,” sings vocalist Bill Callahan, the voice of John Tyler in this song. Based on the lyrics, what kind of person is John Tyler? Does he suffer from hubris or is it simply excitement? What does he think he’ll be able to accomplish in the office? Try to avoid historical research. (Don’t worry; you’ll have a chance to add in that research for question #4, below.)
2. Kiefer was heavily influenced by the gospel group The Staple Singers, particularly their earliest releases. There are certainly shades of the Staples here in Kiefer’s tremolo guitar, and in the overall structure of the piece. Why might the songwriter have chosen this particular musical genre as a touchstone?
3. Do some research on vocalist Bill Callahan, who has won wide acclaim recording under the name Smog. What kinds of songs does Callahan write? How might Tyler—a song that he did not write—fit into the overall thematic flow of his work?

##### Historical:

4. John Tyler is painted as a particularly interesting figure in this song, a man who claims the Presidency as his own and runs his own agenda. Research Tyler to determine if the policies apparent in the text are accurate. How does the song address those lyrics? Think of this question as an extension of question #1, but now you have the opportunity to add historical research to your response.
5. How did Tyler’s presidency directly affect the role of the Vice President in American political thought? How did he approach the office of the President upon the death of William Henry Harrison? How is this approach addressed in the song lyrics? What aspects of Tyler’s presidency are not addressed in the song? (Perhaps you could try writing another verse or two?)

##### Art/Visual Rhetoric:

6. Jeremy Kalgreen runs a successful t-shirt design company where he uses the same bold colors and shapes. He attracted the attention of the three principal songwriters for this project due to some Presidential t-shirts. (In fact, both Jefferson Pitcher and Christian Kiefer can be seen sporting these t-shirts.) In his image for John Tyler,

Kalgreen has chosen a superhero-style image with the huge caption “The Whig Outlaw.” Discuss how this image functions with its collection of stars and bright colors. What does it do for the viewer? How does it work? The image is done via a technique called “vector drawing.” Look up that technique and discuss how this might be considered as part of the overall effect of the image.