

Making American Culture
A Social History, 1900–1920

PATRICIA BRADLEY



Making American Culture

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A Social History, 1900–1920

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MAKING AMERICAN CULTURE

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Preface

How is culture made? Do cultural artifacts bubble up from a collective unconsciousness like Old Faithful, a force that cannot be denied? Or, the point of view argued here, are cultural works the result of a variety of influences connected to the times, both naturally occurring and heavy handed?

One way to look at the formation of a national culture is to examine how the influences of the time impacted its cultural products. There were enormous social forces in the early twentieth century—challenges brought about by gender, race, and immigration demands; by reform; by changing notions of religion; by industrialization; by population shifts; by the ascent of bureaucratic values; by government. Although the period in overview is sometimes called “The Confident Years,” in its time, life often seemed less confident than chaotic. Interests clashed, goals varied, old values seemed lost and new ones unclear. It is not surprising that the turn of the twentieth century was accompanied by a search to define “America,” as if to find a defining rationale would make sense of all the change.

In that search, cultural products came to have importance in the definition of America. Cultural products, indeed, were found to provide yeoman service to the nation, offering a set of core values in a framework that was embraced by all. The embrace of a cultural product was in some sense the embrace of the national values with which it was associated. This might be most simply illustrated by a patriotic song in wartime, whose acceptance is spurred by a sprightly tune. But the acceptance of any cultural product entails the acceptance of its framework. We might consider that the most critical of the muckraking novels, perhaps Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, rested firmly on the right to criticize. *The Jungle* becomes a definer of American values not because of its critique of labor-capital relationships but because it was a critique. By contrast, modern art was not accepted as a definer of American values, at least in its time, because the framework was not so easy to recognize. Even though modern art represented the search for common understandings that undergirded the time, to embrace it came with little comfort of a shared base, unless that was to be the acceptance of the search.

In the time, however, the overwhelming pace of change made more intense the search for common understandings. Consider that the popular arts developed amid new waves of Eastern European immigration, and popular songs and recordings arrived at the same time as a massive movement of Southern black Americans to the nation's cities. American modernism, although not so quickly accepted, still emerged from the same time period and was no less affected than popular arts when it came to making sense of a new world cleared of Puritan and Victorian inhibitions. All those social forces of the time prompted cultural products to develop in particular ways: immigrant audiences wanted "story" films that helped order their lives; popular song accommodated the emergence of black songwriters and the rise of immigrant Jewish managers; artists, free from previous restraints, experimented with form and color. And all those responses existed under even larger institutional change: the industrialization that took its products to the nation's every hamlet; the domination of entrepreneurs in cultural production as much as in other business; and twentieth-century sociology in which values and strategies for success shaped both the popular and the modern.

But what is interesting about the emergence of American culture during this time period is that despite the divergence of the prompts American culture came to be more the same than different. By World War I, American culture was recognizable, accepted, and in some regard even envied as a representation of the nation.

The emphasis here is on the negotiation and adjustment of the interests that impact cultural formation and its reception. After a brief overview of the time, including the Progressive presence operating in a sensate age, the rise of vaudeville suggests how the entrepreneurial impulse expanded vaudeville's attraction to the middle class. The discussion of American popular song examines the interaction of American outsider groups—Jews, black Americans, and white working class. The discussion of early film focuses on the rise of the story film as a reaction to audience demand with an eye to the cultural guardians. The expectations and understandings of gender are interpreted as the chosen tool to maintain the status quo when applied to cultural products. The organizations of artists as a cultural community in a city geography is viewed as important for the exchange of ideas, the construction of a common spirit, and the practical applications of both. In tracing the emergence of modern dance in America, middle-class preoccupations with imagined Grecian ideals served the purpose of opening the door to the expression of female physicality while rejecting African American influence. But modern art had a more difficult route into American culture of the time, fractured by a mass media that set the course for modern art as outside the purview of most Americans. By the end of the period, in an

examination of Eugene O'Neill's rise, I suggest the early optimism of America's artists had been replaced by an adoption of the careerist standards of the day.

I conclude with the role of popular culture in World War I. The war helped nationalize American culture as never before. Prompted by the military approval of popular entertainment, including jazz, as expressions of American life, the mass audience was expanded, setting the stage for the mass audiences ready to accept radio as an entertainment medium. The popular culture that had been nurtured in the city sensate in the early years of the century was to cross into all regions of America by way of broadcast and a partnership that equally served governmental and industry interests.

While it is nothing new to note how the popular arts reflected their times, the interpretation here includes "high" art as influenced by some of the same social levers as were at work in the popular field. Although this is the period that has been identified as a time in which high and popular art became two distinct streams in American life, the influences on all kinds of cultural products, high and low, were more likely to commingle than not. The city drew novelists and artists to its streets as much as immigrants, and the children of the prairie had to negotiate its demands as did immigrants from the Russian steppes. Indeed, the work by what we now call and canonize as "serious" artists did not easily find a place of acceptance without the artists' clear-eyed engagement with the larger world. In their search for the meaningful, the moderns, at least those who became iconic figures, worked with the material world. Isadora Duncan introduced modern dance by avenues that were open to her; modern artists sought to introduce their works to the public by a massive exhibition that called on the demand for the spectacular; and writers such as Eugene O'Neill, Theodore Dreiser, and Willa Cather came to understand the world of agents, publishers, and trends in order for their work to come before the public. Artists of the time could have high artistic ambition and still operate within the realities of their world, and our present canon includes such artists in large part because they established their primacy in their own time.

No last word is intended. What I hope to do is to encourage a participatory discussion across disciplines—the modernists' early hope—and one that encourages explorations of why some artists come to be heard and why others are submerged. The choices I have made for artistic subject matter and their interaction with social forces are selective. There is no study here of modern American poetry and the emergence of Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, or Ezra Pound. America's burgeoning symphonic tradition as reflected by Charles Ives and Florence Price are in the purview of others, as are explications of the influences on the grand works of many of America's celebrated writers of the period. Social historians may consider other social forces as important, or more

important, than those that I have chosen to examine. Some may miss the discussion of the cultural theories that have established the importance of the study of culture in the social context. That discussion is a world unto itself. Researchers after World War II considered that cultural messages were “magic bullets” that proceeded unilaterally and uninterruptedly from sender to receiver, still a widely shared popular belief that makes censorship an ongoing concern in this country. Other postwar researchers saw larger meanings in even the most mundane of everyday culture—a method of national control from some perspectives to expressions of audience resistance to many of today’s postmodernist writers. In the true vaudeville manner of offering multiple places to fix on a continuum of choices, I will leave it to scholarly professionals to make their own interpretations and share their perspectives with their students. I hope general readers will engage with this book in ways that will lead to a lively and uninhibited understanding of cultural works.

PATRICIA BRADLEY
Sonoma, California

CHAPTER 1

Culture and Nationhood

The American temperament, as viewed by races that have, or have had, a genuine art life may sometimes seem a bit cheap.

—Henry B. Fuller, “Art in America,” in *Bookman; a Review of Books and Life*

At the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of “America” became of great interest to the nation’s commentators.¹ The magazines provided unrelenting overviews of anything that might be its representative—“Waterways of America,” “A Retrospective of American Humor,” even “Fruit Growing in America,” from Theodore Dreiser, who remained a working journalist even after the publication of the groundbreaking *Sister Carrie*.² Books took on grander views, with titles such as *Spirit of America*, *The Expansion of America*, and *America Today*. The influential English writer and editor W. Thomas Stead was a proponent of such a view. He saw America as coming into its own, as he put it, *The Americanization of the World, or the Trend of the Twentieth Century*. Americans were eager for the mantle.

Yet amid the bombast was a note of unease. “In fact, broadly speaking,” the composer Reginald De Koven observed, “up to the present time, this country can hardly be said to have produced any distinctively national art at all in any branch, and in music—the last art to develop in any civilization—least of all.”³ Another commentator saw the nation’s literature wanting; only a real national literature could “be the bright sword to slay the dragon of materialism which menaces our culture.”⁴ One of the monthly writers was not surprised at the lack of national art. The American character was composed of alternate layers of “slush and grit”—altogether without the sensibilities that art demanded.⁵ Could the caustic British observation be true? “Wipe out American civilization as it is, and as it has been for a hundred years, and tell me to what extent the world would be a loser?”⁶

Such dismissals had prompted well-to-do Americans at the end of the nineteenth century to devote themselves to building cultural institutions, great museums, opera companies, and symphony orchestras, all rivaling those of Europe. But such institutions did not necessarily make a place for American culture. For some of the institution builders, the rivalry was mostly about expressing intimacy with the European canon and establishing a set of social rituals for the use of the upper class.⁷ Such an acquaintance marked the aspirations of a leadership elite who had little faith that there could ever be contributions from the new groups crowding American cities, the immigrants, the rural poor, and black Americans. Were these groups even American, at least as American was defined by those in charge? Cultural products from such groups could hardly be regarded as American. At best, the author of *Home Life in America* could only hope that facial types of the descendants of the foreign born would eventually conform to an “American type.”⁸

When American cultural products were put forward, it was with the hope that they would also conform to an American type. An American poetry anthology was advertised as “purely American.”⁹ But how does one describe “purely American”? The presentation of a *preferred* American character and values as viewed by elite groups? Could culture be imposed from above, keeping the suspect at bay? There were certainly attempts in that direction. Censorship advocates struggled to control matters of public discussion and viewing. Thomas Edison and other early filmmakers fought the challenge of Jewish entrepreneurs. Proposals that “Negro music” was likely to be the foundation of a national American music was not universally embraced. “We can, I think, hardly admit that the negro music is in any sense national until we are ready to admit at the same time that the negro is the predominant race-type of this country, which I fancy few of us would be willing to do.”¹⁰

The loss of the American type seemed imminent given immigration. In the 1880s, the Chinese had been excluded from settling in the United States, largely as a way to maintain American identity as it was thought to exist. But by the turn of the century, with factories and Southern farmers seeking workers, the ship lines invented a mass “steerage” class to deliver their parcels of workers cheaply. Nine million immigrants, poorer and less educated than those of earlier waves, arrived in the first decade of the century. By 1910, a hearing by the Immigration Commission of the U.S. Senate supported a growing animus: jails were found to hold a proportionately high number of immigrant lawbreakers; immigrants were the main tenants of the city slums; infection could spread from immigrant carriers; pauperism was on the increase; native Americans were put out of work by immigrants. And there were the eugenics questions of the day. George William Curtis voiced the common concern that immigration portended that an inevitable “watering down of the nation’s life blood.”¹¹ Ivory

Soap adopted its most famous slogan at the turn of the century. Its soap was “ninety-nine and forty-four/one-hundredths percent pure.” It was a remarkable few words, capturing a broad swath of concerns of the day, none less than the vigilance needed to maintain white America’s view of itself in a time of assault, even if that involved a hint of compromise.

If immigrants could not be kept out—although the Immigration Restriction League worked to that end¹²—assimilation was promoted. But it was the reverse assimilation that was to be feared. Was the old American way to be subsumed—“overrun” in the word of the time—by all that was changing in the nation? The nation was in flux on every level—by population shifts and the rise of the cities, by new technology and industry, and even by some old-line Americans who represented a new leadership class that embraced change and newness.

The Promise of American Life

In the Progressive classic *The Promise of American Life*, Herbert Croly urged retreat from what he called the Jeffersonian legacy of governmental noninterference: “The experience of the last generation plainly shows that the American economic and social system cannot be allowed to take care of itself, and that the automatic harmony of the individual and the public interest, which is the essence of the Jeffersonian democratic creed, has proved to be an illusion.”¹³ By the time of its publication in 1909, the Progressive political movement was in full swing, seeking to reduce the ills produced by the rampant capitalism of the time, as Croly urged, by national legislation. President Theodore Roosevelt took on breaking the “trusts,” the ever-enlarging business enterprises that controlled the industry of the nation, while other reformers sought legal protections for exploited workers and consumers, all in the belief the national promise could be achieved by activism, rejection of the old, and with the optimism that a new course could be steered. Change was not only the correction of wrongs of the past but also the sweeping away of the Puritan past. In its stead was to be intuition, democracy, and societal improvement, all embraced with a confidence that had no room for failure. Inez Haynes Irwin, a suffragette and fiction editor of the socialist magazine *The Masses*, described the period as “full of hope and freedom. Great movements were starting everywhere. Everyone was fighting for something. Everyone was sure of victory.”¹⁴

Optimism and action existed even in the face of an array of strongly oppositional levers and attitudes. The liquor industry held back passage of women’s suffrage in the belief that votes for women would lead to the prohibition of alcohol (which it did). The formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) came at a time when Jim Crow laws constrained black Americans in a new servitude. The flood of immigrants

unleashed a concomitant flood of anti-immigrant feeling in which white Protestant families were encouraged to have many children to avoid “race war.” President Roosevelt, the Progressive who took on the big trusts, nonetheless authorized a “lily white” Democratic Party, a bow to Southern politicians. Labor and political “isms” brought powerful enemies. Emma Goldman, the avowed anarchist and “free love” advocate, was driven from speaking platforms by threatening crowds much as the abolitionists had been seventy years earlier. In service to the “suppression of vice,” mention of birth control could result in a police raid, and the burgeoning film industry put in censoring boards as early as 1903. In 1914, the “Ludlow Massacre”—when Colorado mine owners turned on striking employees with their own police force—seemed to be the precursors of a full-style war between the classes. The period concluded with U.S. entry into World War I and the rise in U.S. corporate power, including the establishment of U.S. broadcasting, film, and entertainment in ways that remain with the nation today.

Yet, by World War I and its aftermath, a consensus had emerged that American culture had come of age. *Modern American Poetry* was greeted as the ideal book to give to a foreigner who wanted to know something about the American spirit, “for the spirit really exists between those two blue covers.”¹⁵ Moreover, popular culture was celebrated as integral to American culture, no longer associated solely with lower-class culture. “The Superiority of American to European Films as Explained by a French Critic,” one article headlined.¹⁶ The new status of American culture, in the popular realms as well as in the contributions of modernist American artists in dance, art, fiction, and theater, had much to do with the Progressive faith in permeability and openness and rejection of the past. American culture was to be built on what was new.

Change and Art

The triumvirate of intuition, democracy, and oversight that Progressives applied to social change came to be applied to cultural products. The literary critic Van Wyck Brooks believed that American culture could not flourish in a frame of past values. The American who clung to a Puritan inheritance, only concerned with thrift and industry and “inclined to believe that whatever was not in the some way economically necessary was in some way wrong,”¹⁷ was not to forge the nation’s art.

Artists were eager to reject old forms. “The trouble is,” said the poet Walt Whitman early in the process, “writers are too literary . . . too damned literary.”¹⁸ The worship of “art” for its own sake was a “horrible blasphemy,” according to Robert Henri, the leader of what came to be known as the Ashcan school of art because its art focused on everyday life. He wrote in 1910, “In this country, we

have no need of art as a culture; no need of art as a refined and elegant performance; no need of art for poetry's sake, or any of these things for their own sake. What we do need is art that expresses the *spirit* of the people today."¹⁹ In Philadelphia, the young Dorothy Norman, later acolyte and lover of the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, was infected with the excitement of the new ideas: "Modern music and literature and art wiped out all the artifice and the overdone quality of the nineteenth century that I saw. It was fresh, it was alive, it contained the elemental quality of life that I found so lacking around me."²⁰

In rejecting culture as defined by the elite and its capitalistic base, artists excised the boundaries of the past: modern dance shucked off Victorian prohibitions about the female body; poetry jettisoned formal verse structure for vernacular rhythms; and painters and writers found in ordinary people the locus of cosmic questions. Observers thought it logical that artists such as Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, Susan Glaspell, Zona Gale, and Carl Sandburg, among others, were emerging from journalistic roots: "To be an artist is to be a gigantic journalist," according to the *Atlantic Monthly*. "It is to be able to do the timely thing with the eternal touch."²¹

The sticking point was how to deal with topics of the day and still have the "eternal touch." Art should not operate from a pedestal, but it was not just about popularization and accessibility either. Alfred Stieglitz established his influential photography magazine, *Camera Work*, in 1903 in an effort to move photography away from its role as a recording device. In doing so, he faced formidable barriers, not only from elite cultural custodians, who thought photography could never equal painterly production, but also from the audience of the popular.

The openness to the new was not so automatically accepted by the ordinary people who were the concern of the artists who took up their cause. No matter the artists' emphasis on ordinary people, whether in Carl Sandburg's poetry glorifying the working man, the Ashcan school's attention to street life, or the call of socialist writers to "the masses" to throw off their chains, ordinary people were generally not the audiences for such works, nor grateful to be their subjects.

Moreover, the experimentation with new artistic forms and the use of new subject matter could be distressing to groups that found some security in traditional content and responded affirmatively to the new inventions of film and sound recordings because they were grafted to familiar narratives. Ordinary people came to comprise the audiences for early films when they involved tropes of proved popularity—the Western motif, the virginal female, the separation of races. Similarly, the technology of musical reproduction, from wax cylinders to gramophones, came to replace the piano in the parlor, as the new inventions were conduits for the popular song and its permutations into dances.

However much cultural workers may have wanted to lead them to new understandings, immigrants, working people, and the new white-collar classes were not quick to support artistic adventures when they were most imbued with the idea of personal choice in a new land. By the array of consumer goods that beckoned in what was, indeed, a new art form, advertising, the industrialization that fueled the popular culture and its messages also lured their audiences from class solidarity. The working poor and those just above were as likely to be most interested in acquiring the goods and lives offered in the stories of the mass newspapers and periodicals at the same times as they hummed melodic new songs from immigrant song makers or learned the new dance steps to music emerging from music from the American black culture. If lyrics lacked the old complications of Gilbert and Sullivan, it was the fault of the Broadway audiences, who were just “tune-mad.”²² A 1910 assessment of American life made a generalized judgment: “We want sensational moments, in our work or diversions.”²³ Audiences in general wanted not only melody in their tunes but also sensation in most aspects of their lives. Electrification of the cities opened new visual territories, as sound recordings had for hearing. In the cities especially, the sensate permeated the air, where new immigrants, the older poor, and the new artists who flooded the cities came to jostle one another on the streets. An emerging young Ashcan artist, Glen O. Coleman sang the praises of the city sensate. “New York awakens in the morning, and it awakens again at twilight and still again at night. It seems to me that whenever I go about New York, at any time, I find far more material than I can ever use or ever expect to recreate into pictures. I simply accept it. I love it.”²⁴

The American culture that would soon be embraced as representative of the nation was embedded in the city sensate, with its flood of immigrants, its artists open to new ideas, and the inescapable capitalistic mode that was not so easily overturned.

The City Sensate

As counter to the struggles that the immigrant and the rural poor faced when they arrived in the city were the offerings of the sensate world. Department stores drew working-class women shoppers into tableaux of middle-class life by encapsulating them in the lights and smells and even service of a world that was not their own. City skyscrapers, billboards, and the promise of flight introduced exciting new ways of looking. But unlike societies in which monuments proclaimed power relationships, the oversize elements of the time did not seem to dwarf the lookers as much as encourage them to seek the same elevations. Business men’s (and women’s) luncheon clubs sought high-rise quarters whose

windows could lay the city out below them. Encouraged by the advent of flight, magazine advertisements provided topographical maps of the lands below, as in Sappolo Soap advertising, which divided the world's nations into the washed and the unwashed. Given such mapping, washing with the right soap was an easy navigational tool. For those who ate off pushcarts rather than lunch in private clubs, tenement districts teemed with cheap amusements—organ grinders, buskers of popular music, and out-of-work actors performing on street corners. As one resident of New York's Lower East Side put it, "Something was always happening, and our attention was continually being shifted from one excitement to another."²⁵

Whether uptown or downtown, modern life came with sensual reminders: the color and floats of suffragist marches; the glitter of electric lights of theater marquees and street lighting; reflections from store windows that seemed to put the viewer amid the displayed goods; the smells and clatter of the new automobiles, trams, trolleys, and elevated railroads; and the cries of vendors. From the doorways of the Edison Stores, where the nation's leading inventor-entrepreneur sold his Edison Phonograph and Edison Records, any passerby could hear a selection from the company's monthly minting of popular songs. Advertising now slathered every outdoor space "the billboard abomination" as some would call it,²⁶ reminding all that new sensations awaited. Longing and its handmaiden, anxiety, joined the mix. Still, the British novelist Arnold Bennett could only be awestruck at the perpetual motion made possible by the marriage of advertising and electricity: "A mastodon kitten playing with a ball of thread, an umbrella in a shower of rain, siphons of soda water being emptied and filled, gigantic horses galloping at full speed, and an incredible herald of chewing-gum. Sky signs! . . . 'I suppose this is Broadway?' I ventured."²⁷

Mass media were part of the sensationalist culture. The mass press had found benefit in mass emotion in the campaign to promote the Spanish-American War when newspapers sold by the millions, fueled by propaganda stories of innocent girlhood endangered by upstart foreigners. The murders and sex trials of industrialist Harry Thaw and later the film celebrity Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle provided voyeuristic excitement while eroding public and private spheres. The mass newspapers took up reform subjects when sympathy of the downtrodden could be counted on to evince a few sentimental tears but veered away from calls for systemic change. Fear, perhaps, was the greatest sensation purveyed by the yellow press. News of downfall and tragedy, corruption in high places, and the dangers of various races and ethnic groups served to sell newspapers, provided the comfort of already-established prejudices, and gave notice of society's boundaries—altogether secrets to building a mass audience that was to be emulated in other forms.

This was not the content of newspapers read by readers who subscribed to the “quality” monthlies, *Lippincott’s*, *Scribner’s*, *Century*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s*, and a host of others that considered world history and culture subjects for general readership along with examination of American life and an emphasis on its improvements. These magazines, the locus of Progressive public discussion, reached their point of highest influence in the early years of the century, but despite their own emphasis on illustration and color, they could only decline in favor of the competition from new permutations of media that were less concerned with high-mindedness.

However, the mass magazines, which had developed in the post–Civil War era to meet the need to advertise the new products of the industrial age, were in tune with the comfort provided by pleasing the senses. Magazine paper grew glossier and sweet-smelling, art lush and colorful, design airier. It was the age of magazine illustrations—the Philadelphia artist Jessie Wilcox Smith provided images of sunlit women in rippling gowns, children close by, in the favored version of luxuriant motherhood that the mass magazines favored. Illustrations of Charles Dana Gibson’s “Gibson Girl,” as provocative as the sexual curves of the French star Anna Held, seemed to call for the undoing of her abundant hair, while medieval fantasy had its imaginary pleasures in the book and magazine illustrations of Maxwell Parrish and N. W. Wyeth. Imaginary worlds spread to Broadway productions, none more extravagant than those mounted by Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr.

Bringing back game trophies from Africa, Theodore Roosevelt was similarly larger than life and the example of masculine physicality at a time when women were the moral governors. In 1900, Roosevelt’s exaggerated achievements were satirized in a fake advertisement for “Teddy Rosenblast” singing, “The Strenuous Life.” The song was to be accompanied by an orchestra of bass drums and cymbals, fires burning at both sides of the stage, and “a stuffed eagle with a fish-horn concealed in its throat gives a blast and flaps its wings at the end of every line on the song.” And even more, “the stage is sanded with dum-dum bullets, and at every break there is a salute from thirteen Gatling guns.”²⁸ Given the times, it did not seem so far-fetched.

The spectacular existed in some degree in every corner in the nation thanks to the circus, in their “Golden Age,” in the Wild West shows, in huge, citizen pageants that cities mounted to honor their own history, and by the “Tom troupes.” The latter were the traveling shows based on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Civil War novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which maintained popularity by the addition of special effects such as electric lights, brass bands, or African American choruses known as “jubilee singers.” Thanks to the nation’s railroads, dozens of different kinds of traveling shows brought new experiences to small towns, from modest lantern shows, revivals, and speaker series to tastes of larger worlds. The

comedian Fanny Brice first trod the boards of burlesque in Hazelton, Pennsylvania. The Gish Sisters were famous vaudeville names before they entered silent films. When her tour reached Lincoln, Nebraska, Sarah Bernhardt dazzled even the usually hard-nosed young theater critic Willa Cather.

Vaudeville emporiums, even in small cities, soon came to reflect the spectacular in their exotic facades, a legacy that would be passed on to movie theaters whose outside lights and inside luxury provided sensate experiences. Like vaudeville, film produced celebrities, and so popular did the actors become by 1909 that independent film companies, fighting for their share of the market, found allowing the film actors to be named could attract audiences. The early film stars, Mary Pickford the most famous, represented easily recognizable types and thus provided yet another aspect of the sensate that mass entertainment would come to embody—fandom. Such sensations were gathered up and intensified in the flourishing amusement parks that were on the outskirts of most American municipalities. The nation's resorts, none livelier than Atlantic City, delighted even middle-class visitors.

When darkness falls, the whole place leaps out with a full glare of electric lights till, seen from a boat outside, the entire coast seems to be a single sheet of fire. Huge iron piers shoot their noses far out into the ocean and blazon forth, in flaring letters twenty feet long, the merits of somebody's pickles and somebody else's cigarettes, and on one good-sized theatre wakes up for an evening performance of some "latest New York success"; on another the animals of a full fledged circus roar and bellow and whine restively; on another "loop the loops," and the "loops of death," thunder and grind; bands crash discordantly; scores of orchestras in the different hotels and eating-houses awake, for Atlantic City is the eatingest place in the world; street pianos plunk away; concert-halls send forth fragmentary shrieking apparently of agony; the "barkers" at the peep-shows along the Board Walk get into the action. It is infernal, astonishing, and, it must be confessed, infinitely picturesque.²⁹

The Italian immigrant artist Joseph Stella found a modernist sensibility could best capture the electric age for *Battle of Lights*, *Coney Island*. This was no sentimental effusion of twinkling lights of the midway, but a clashing and coordination of colors and shapes, as surely American as Vincent van Gogh's uncluttered *Starry Night* was not.

The Merge to the Middle

Who could resist the charms of amusement parks, street lights, melodic songs, theatrical spectaculars, or film drama? Perhaps not the old guard who saw

genteel culture disappearing into the “the reign of the spectacular.” Critic and writer Annie Russell Marble decried the “excess of picture-teaching” and the “excess of scenic material.”³⁰

Some saw the emergence of two cultures. In his second book, in 1915, Brooks saw a clear delineation between a “high” and “low” culture. Indeed, despite the Progressive belief in a democratic arts culture, Brooks saw from the nation’s founding “two main currents in the American mind running side by side but rarely mingling.” One, he considered, was “the current of Transcendentalism, the world of the ideals”; the second, the “catchpenny of opportunism.”³¹ For some, the new forms of film and sound recordings represented the “catchpenny of opportunism.” A Yale professor of stage writing, perhaps with some vested interest, described cheap movies as “spiritually stultifying” entertainment that blunted the proletariat’s access to “finer aesthetic appeals.”³² Yet even as both social reformers and the defenders of the culture bastions worried, it was clear that popular culture was not universally condemned. Even De Koven, composer of operas, saw in popular song “a germ of melodic feeling and expression.”³³

What came to be essential for the making of American culture different from the cultures of other countries was that American middle classes came to adopt some version of the cheap amusements. Whether from ideological positions that rejected Puritanism or from doubt in higher authority, the sensate was not to be eschewed and newness was to be welcomed. Not every American read poetry and appreciated the new modern art, but more Americans enjoyed more of the same kinds of popular entertainments than citizens of any other nation. American popular culture became the ideology of shared nationality. It was a process of merge to the middle, where some differences lost their edges and other were subsumed in a larger frame.

That merge to the middle was promoted by business interests for sure, but came to be adopted largely because of the Progressive and democratic instincts of the time. In one assessment of the nation in the first part of the century, a Princeton professor, surely a member of the elite, noted, “Underneath the surface of American life, often broad and careless, there is this widespread feeling that human nature everywhere is made of the same stuff; that life’s bumps and storms are felt in the same way whether they are hidden under homespun and calico or under silk and broadcloth; that it is every man’s duty to do good and not evil to those who live in the world with him.”³⁴

From a present perspective, such a statement seems idealistic. But at the time of optimism and change, it came to be the hope for the new definition of the American type and one that would come to be reflected in the cultural products of the age.

CHAPTER 2

Vaudeville

Template for the Century

It isn't what I do, but how I do it.
It isn't what I say, but how I say it,
And how I look when I do and say it.

—Mae West, *Goodness Had Nothing to Do With It*

In 1893, the fledgling impresario Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., took on management of the strongman Eugen Sandow to help his father's failing Chicago vaudeville enterprise. At the conclusion of the initial performance under his oversight, the young Ziegfeld came on stage and promised a donation to the favorite charity of anyone who would feel Sandow's muscles. Two society matrons, Mrs. George Pullman and Mrs. Potter Palmer, volunteered. Running her hand over the Great Sandow's bicep, Mrs. Palmer remarked, glowingly, "What wonderful muscles you have, Mr. Sandow." The press noted her regard. Ziegfeld's vaudeville enterprise was saved, and the Great Sandow went on to success at the Chicago World's Columbia Exposition as the nation's first body builder. Flo Ziegfeld, Jr., had also launched his career, having established the principle that no American, upper class or not, was too far from his or her own roots not to enjoy popular entertainment. By 1909, marking the first appearance of the annual Ziegfeld *Follies*, three aspects of American entertainment had come to undergird American popular entertainment: entrepreneurial drive, creative peaks, and the availability of a sufficient number of messages to serve the most diverse audience.¹

Notably absent in the tributes to all things American at the turn of the century was attention to vaudeville. Cultural custodians had some discomfort with the lively, brash entertainment embraced by ordinary people. American humor,

thanks to Mark Twain, was something to be proud of and merited a place in the American pantheon, but there was something subversive about vaudeville—too much flesh, too many immigrants, and a bit too much freedom. “During my youthful days,” the art critic James Huneker recalled, “it was called the Variety Stage, and was not much talked about in polite society.”² Church leaders and marchers in the purity campaigns were concerned with the easy laughter, the burlesque of values, the displays of immodesty. “In the cheap places young women of pretty face and buxom form sally forth to show their physical beauties in changing dress (and undress), and with song and dance display their activity (and their person) in more or less wanton form.”³ A researcher for the Progressive reform organization, the Russell Sage Foundation, had nothing good to say about vaudeville: “Its most striking characteristic is simple stupidity.”⁴ Writing in one of the serious Progressive monthlies, a contributor complained that vaudeville operated under an ethic of “giving the public what it wants” and producing “bilge-water in champagne glasses.”⁵ Another monthly characterized vaudeville audiences as “intellectually lazy,” their minds “drugged by such a wealth of cheap and obvious entertainment.”⁶

But no matter how commandingly they held up their hands, the critics could not hold back the vaudeville sea. Vaudeville was the great cheap amusement for the swath of working-class and immigrant Americans in the 1880s. Vaudeville houses were located close to the working-class neighborhoods of its audiences. Its greatest chronicler was the *National Police Gazette*, the racy sports magazine known as the “barber shop Bible” to indicate the place where most of its male readers read it, boasted that the paper carried the latest of vaudeville news and “the snappiest of all girl pictures.”⁷ Vaudeville personalities were staples of the yellow press, although in a guise of morality. When Alan Dale, the theater critic for Joseph Pulitzer’s sensational *New York World*, interviewed the vaudeville star Anna Held, the story was headlined, with quivering outrage, “Anna Meets Alan Dale in a Nightie.” The outrage did not prevent the accompanying illustration of Ms. Held in all of her hourglass curves.⁸

Even as working-class appeal continued, managers were having increasing success in their appeal to middle-class customers. Fashionable theaters, identified as “big-time vaudeville” with stages graced by stars from the legitimate theater, culminated rather than displaced the kinds of acts that appealed to working-class sensibilities. The carriage trade was won over. The vaudevillian entrepreneurs liked to call attention to its new middle-class respectability, but there was no disguising that vaudeville audiences were various—middle and working class, immigrant and native born, all of whom had expectations that vaudeville had not lost its risqué roots. “Historians have often been misled by entrepreneur’s claims of cleanups and moral improvements,” Robert Snyder

writes. “Such claims were part of an old practice in nineteenth-century show business—that of establishing a show’s claims to refinement before going beyond the boundaries of acceptability.”⁹

The decision of the American vaudeville entrepreneurs to set their sights on a middle-class audience without giving up the working-class base assumed that both audiences would find fulfillment in the properly arranged vaudeville bill. The risqué loosened the Victorian constraints of the middle class, while the so-called middle-class entertainments offered avenues for a working class dedicated to upward mobility. Such an approach set the stage for American popular entertainment to build a mass audience composed of many segments. It was a remarkable feat for American entrepreneurship and for the performers and audiences who made it possible; and it put in place the template for American popular culture that dominated the rest of the century.

The Entrepreneurial Model

The great social reformer Jane Addams yearned for a no-cost American popular culture, something akin to folk dancing on the village green, organic rather than manipulated. Vaudeville, indeed, often seemed to be an American village green, democratic in its openness and accessibility to performers and audiences alike. But clearly audiences were pursued by vaudeville entrepreneurs, who shaped vaudeville and its performers to what were thought to be the values of those who bought the tickets.

There could be little doubt vaudeville was fitted to an industrialized nation. Appropriate to a business culture that had discovered the efficiencies of factory production, acts were nonstop, fast-paced, and standardized, all in an ongoing loop. Acts had to be clearly classifiable. There were the “Hebe,” the “Dutch,” the “nut,” and the “dumb” acts. Performers were defined by a hit song or by a genre. Such categorization was in sync with a nation whose products were standardized by packaging and branding. And like other products, vaudeville flourished thanks to the nation’s railroads. The two major vaudeville circuits, Keith in the East and Orpheum in the West, were made possible by the railroads distributing vaudeville across the nation as much they carried local brands to national dominance.¹⁰

The industrial motif was also apparent in the entrepreneurs’ relationship vis-à-vis their workers. With the exception of a few headliners, most vaudeville performers were treated by the circuits as easily replaceable and anonymous. Like workers on the line, performers replicated the same performance several times a day. As much as children in factories, children in vaudeville were pushed onto the stage by families seeking another wage earner. The prohibition

of sexual innuendoes on stage did not protect adolescent and young girls from sexual advances off stage. Not without reason, the documentary photographer Lewis Hine included child vaudevillians in his series on the exploitation of child labor. For the bosses, however, what applied to chorus girls in New York could also apply to vaudevillians: “Interchangeable components in a complex, productive process.”¹¹ Moreover, given the numbers of willing men and women seeking entry, vaudevillians had little security. Managers who did not want successful performers to change their act were the first to release performers when they decided the original act had worn out. In 1900, when vaudeville managers formed the Vaudeville Managers Association, which established a booking office that made it more difficult for vaudevillians to work outside its imprimatur, vaudevillians countered with the first of several strikes by their union, the White Rats (“stars” spelled backward). In 1905, the strike produced the trade newspaper *Variety*, which attacked and ridiculed the syndicate owners. Vaudeville managers produced a publication of their own and refused to hire performers or use songs from publishers who advertised in *Variety’s* pages.¹² After utilizing strategies that were not so different from other entrepreneurs of their time, the owners won and the strike failed. Vaudevillians could not be hired without membership in the approved “union,” the National Vaudeville Artists, supplied by the managers, while the discovery of a performer’s membership in White Rats meant blacklist.

Like other American businesses, the vaudeville owners had also discovered that the most successful consumer products of the industrial age were those predicated on middle-class respectability. Facing down the yellow press, the genteel press marketed itself as “family” newspapers. The *New York Times* put itself forward as a paper that would not “stain the breakfast cloth,” that is, a newspaper that could be brought into the genteel home, unlike the street-sold sensational press. In the huge, double-page advertisements that supported the middle-class newspapers, the era’s grand department stores flattered their female customers that the act of shopping itself was putting middle-class life into practice. Similarly, the advertising and packaging for the flood of goods for the home turned on notions of middle-class housekeeping, as did the messages from the legions of women’s magazines. From the 1880s onward, mass media messages promoted a national culture of gentility so useful for selling the goods cascading from East Coast factories. Their products arrived promptly on prairie doorsteps thanks to the network of railroads, the nation’s five express companies, and rural home delivery provided by the U.S. Post Office, whose postmaster was not so incidentally a former department store scion.¹³

The availability of similar kinds of goods in all parts of the nation in a generally similar time frame could only encourage the zeal of the new towns

to establish their promise of genteel life. Not so removed from the male-only “belly-up-to-the-bar, boy” frontier bars, Western towns sought entertainment that reflected the civilized life they hoped to embody. Opera houses, often constructed close to rail lines in the tacit acknowledgement that entertainment was to be imported rather than home grown, welcomed traveling shows, musical groups, and legitimate theater as much as they did the Wells Fargo wagon. On one such tour, the New York Symphony Orchestra was performing in Fargo, North Dakota, when the violinist Efrem Zimbalist found his knee grabbed by a cowboy shouting, “God damn it, but I like that music!”¹⁴

No matter how successful, the urge for respectability in the West nonetheless mirrored desires of many groups poised between their recent histories and the promise of the future, tendencies that were soon recognized by entrepreneurs Tony Pastor, F. F. Proctor, Martin Beck, Alexander Pantages, Edward Albee, and certainly B. F. Keith. Writing for a middle-class magazine audience in 1898, Keith framed his goal in terms that were clearly aimed to attract the desired audience: “Two things I determined at the outset should prevail in the new scheme. One was that my fixed policy of cleanliness and order should be continued, and the other that the state show must be free from all vulgarisms and coarseness of any kind, so that the house and entertainment would directly appeal to the support ladies and children—in fact that my playhouse must be as ‘homelike’ an amusement resort as it was possible to make.”¹⁵

In vaudeville’s ongoing campaign, women shoppers were invited to make a show part of their day-out activities, class hierarchy ensured by differing ticket costs. The owners recognized that respectability did not mean drab. Comporting with the era’s demand for the spectacular, Keith turned vaudeville theaters into grand edifices of sensual delight. As in the 1902 film that spotlighted Philadelphia’s new house, *B. F. Keith’s Million Dollar Theatre*, the grand vaudeville theaters were as much sites of city pride as the new department stores, the marbled city halls, and the museums, public art, and grand boulevards made possible by the City Beautiful reformers. But less interested in emulating an unmoving past than in reflecting the energy of the moment, the vaudeville entrepreneurs were quick to integrate electrical display on facades that already included exotic ornamentation redolent of imagined Egyptian and Moorish adventure. Inside, at least in the best of the houses, the plaster ornamentation, velvet ropes, polished brass, and chandeliered lobbies were magical in their promise, surely as appealing to upscale working-class audiences as to the middle class and its aspirants.

Vaudeville also benefited from the acting profession’s own campaign for middle-class legitimacy. The nation’s most important women’s magazine, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, was helpful, spotlighting, for example, “The Theatre

and Its People” and giving an aura of respectability to young actresses such as Ethel Barrymore.¹⁶ Vaudeville performers without the Barrymore theatrical imprimatur also shared in the benign attention. May Irwin, known for her black dialect songs, was considered appropriate to offer advice in the monthly *Cosmopolitan* on “The Business of the Stage as a Career.”¹⁷ Like theater people, vaudeville stars were celebrities at a time when home magazines were finding that features on show business celebrities drew more readers than spreads on the wives of politicians. Still, the campaign for middle-class imprimatur had casualties. Marie Lloyd, a star of English music hall known for her unapologetic, bawdy, working-class humor, lost her place on the American stage. What became known as “polite vaudeville” was the norm, and the smaller houses in poorer neighborhoods sank into seediness.

The Performers

For ambitious performers, respectability posed some difficulties. On the Keith-Albee circuit, notices warned artists to avoid offensive language and double entendres as in the sign, with no lack of emphasis, “*Vulgarity, Suggestiveness and Cuss Words MUST GO.*” What was considered vulgar covered a wide swath—even forbidden were the words “nightshirts” and “hot dogs.” Such orders came at the behest of Edward A. Albee, of whom a contemporary noted, “It is impossible ignore the fact that Mr. Albee was a child of the Transcendental New England, with a lot of Puritan in his make-up.”¹⁸ Genetics likely had less to do with his policy than the example of commercial theater, which had found success by catering its products to women and their assumed standards. Lest women in the vaudeville audience be offended, artists who broke the rules were fined (as they were when they went over time limits) or fired.

Artists themselves were often squeezed by such rules, wanting middle-class legitimacy for the genre but pulled by the dependable audience response to a sexual innuendo. Moreover, from men and women in acrobatic tights to the wink of the comic, performers and their audiences were aware that one attraction of vaudeville was in its naughty bits. As the Progressive Caroline Caffin observed, “The fastidious may be a little shocked (the fastidious rather like to be shocked sometimes), they must not be offended, while the seeker for thrills must on no account be bored by too much mildness.”¹⁹

On the first level, Keith’s dictate of vaudeville as “something for everyone” came to mean a range of acts that included at least one act or two that pleased some members of the audience enough to put up with the parts that were not so interesting. But in practice, the something for everyone meant that performers, in every act, had to provide something for everybody. Vaudeville was a

performance art that had a place for everyone—like a bridge over a river, audiences could find the place meaningful to them and shut their eyes to the rest. Vaudeville was filled with sensual pleasure for sure, but it also cast a wide net of complication and talent. The fastidious did indeed like to be shocked sometimes as vaudeville performers were charged with giving meaning to their acts in multiple and even contradictory ways.

In its thirty-year history on the Keith-Albee circuit, the all-female Boston Fadette Orchestra was booked into vaudeville theaters across the nation, six thousand appearances in all, half of them as the headliner. The orchestra offered a multitude of levels for audience participation. First, it was a novelty act with high-class associations. On another level, as in the view of the suffrage magazine *Women's Journal*, it was yet another demonstration of women's competence and thus a call for equality. Also to be considered was the orchestra's mix of classical and popular music—a way to indulge in class attitudes while enjoying syncopation. Finally, the orchestra was not above comic routines, including one in which the orchestra members, feigning anger, walked off the stage, leaving the orchestra leader Caroline Nichols to show off her versatility by playing all the instruments.²⁰ This was a complicated stew that had several lines of attraction. The comedy material may have been expected to extend the act's appeal to the working-class ticket holders, but there is nothing to suggest that the comedy did not also appeal equally to the middle-class audience. By the same token, the bits and pieces of classical music—beyond the class attitudes that they may have evoked—was not necessarily eschewed by the working-class audience, some of whom, like the cowboy in North Dakota, may have been more appreciative than the middle-class members it was purported to attract.

On the face of it, the inclusion of one-act plays was another strategy for middle-class approval, since it showcased theatrical stars whose legitimacy did not have to be proved. Barrymore appeared in a one-act comedy written by J. M. Barrie, but it took no special background to appreciate the plot in which Barrymore played a divorced wife who successfully makes her way in the world thanks to her ability to type. Once again, there were multiple messages, including Barrymore's apparent approval of divorce, all wrapped in the sensate experience of seeing a famous person close up and the opportunity to be transported by the work of a great artist. Like Sarah Bernhardt, Barrymore was not a momentary comet on the vaudeville stage, suggesting her appeal was broad and her place was accepted. There was no room for purposelessness in the vaudeville program—each position on the bill had a role—the second act had a different role in the bill than the third and fourth acts. The headliner was not the conclusion of the bill but the act before the final act, which was expected to be noisy as the audience prepared to leave. In addition to how successfully they

filled their roles on the bill, however, the most long-lasting of the acts included something for everyone in their acts, whatever they were—drama, bicycle acts and, the most potent, ethnic humor.

Although the ethnic and racial humor in vaudeville now appear appalling (Al Jolson got his start in vaudeville in blackface, in an act billed as “The Jew and the Coon”), at the time, ethnic and racial acts were staple tropes that could be adopted by any performer. You did not have to be Irish to have an Irish act, German to have a “Dutch” act, or Asian to perform in “yellow face.” A turban signaled an Arab act that could transform a novelty act such as a regurgitator (a performer who could regurgitate water like a fire hose) into the realm of the mysterious and unexplainable.²¹ Chinese and Chinese American vaudevillians often performed in magic and acrobatic acts, but white performers also adopted yellow-face makeup and (what were considered) Chinese costumes for those acts. Chinese and Chinese American performers also sang sentimental American popular songs, harmonized in barbershop quartettes, and participated in blackface acts. One prominent Chinese performer sang in Irish dialect and in German; another donned kilts as part of a Scottish Highland act;²² while at least one white performer, Leo Carrillio, advertised himself as the only Chinese dialect comedian act.²³ Eddie Cantor performed “Waiting for the Robert E. Lee” in blackface but periodically broke into a Jewish accent to mix things up.²⁴

The famous Jewish team Morris (Joe) Weber and Moses Schoenfeld (Lew Fields) performed in comic routines as Irish immigrants, in blackface, and, most popularly, as Germans in a “Dutch” act, a German-accented act that Jewish performers often adopted in the belief that German was closest to the Yiddish accents that may have still characterized their speech. Weber and Fields represented performers of ethnic acts who eschewed their own ethnic heritage of folk songs and dance in favor of a different and constructed ethnicity aimed at a broader appeal. When Weber and Fields opened their permanent Broadway house, the team found ways to transform the message even more broadly for audiences growing distant from immigrant pasts. The barbs of ethnic humor were transformed, aimed at the “dashing soldiers, saintly women, and other society folk” in efforts of “piercing pomposity and verifying superiority,” ideas that all could enjoy.²⁵ Some Jewish performers did take on the “Hebe” act or its variation but increasingly only in ways that could be appreciated by all. Sophie Tucker sang “My Yiddisha Mama” in Yiddish and English, but only when she was sure that her audience would appreciate it as a song about motherhood in general.²⁶ In a later period, Jack Benny’s skinflint act lost its vaudevillian Hebe-act roots as radio took the act across the nation to audiences who had largely put away immigrant memories or never had them.

There were also acts that played with gender. Julian Eltinge was a famous female impersonator starring in elaborate productions in female costumes, although his photograph was on sheet music without costume. Neither his gender nor his gender preference was ever in dispute, and audiences may have found Eltinge's impersonations most about the reassertion of male power in a female-dominated era.²⁷ West was a male impersonator early in her career, perhaps a female counter to misogynist male power. Meantime, Kate Elinor played an outlandish and brash Irish woman in an ethnic act most usually in the purview of male comics.²⁸ Hints of the homosexual could occur in unlikely places. Bert Williams and Eddie Cantor played an act in blackface in which Cantor is the returning, college-educated son to Williams as the down-to-earth working man. But Cantor played the role "slight and effeminate, with white-rimmed glasses and mincing step."²⁹ Cantor's effeminacy, although ostensibly about working-class views of the college educated, was only one of the many guises that vaudeville provided for homosexual representation.

In any case, the variety of personas was always about blur, and it can be argued that the blur was the attraction as it was a way to present multiplicity in a compressed, single moment. Like the Chinese performer in a Scottish kilt, no performer in blackface, yellow face, or in any of the ethnic modes ever entirely disappeared into the impersonation. The doubleness (sometimes tripleness) made for complex understandings of identity.

Fanny Brice, who had been born on New York's Lower East Side but whose childhood was spent in relative comfort in New Jersey, developed her act using Jewish stereotype, sometimes blending it with characteristics of blackface. Jewish performers have often been associated with the use of blackface, and blackface was employed by Brice, Tucker, Cantor, Nora Bayes, and, most famously, Jolson, who took the tradition to early film. However, no one who ever saw Jolson in blackface, as in the 1927 film *The Jazz Singer*, concluded that he was making a statement about black American identity. In the film, Jolson, in blackface, sings his heart out to his white Jewish mother, the woman who supports him over his father's disapproval of his show-business career. This was a plot line that likely resonated with members of a national audience, who, like the Jolson character, were seeking to find an accommodation between past and present. George Seldes, a Progressive critic of the period who lived into the modern era, recalled Jolson's performance of "Swanee" as "an experience." "In the absurd blackface which is so little Negroid that it goes well with diversions in Yiddish accents, Jolson created image after image of longing."³⁰

Still, blackface cannot be divorced from its racial overtones. As scholars explore, minstrelsy was a white invention at the hands of pre-Civil War white performers who donned blackface in imitation and satire of Southern blacks

and, according to Eric Lott, white male envy of black male bodies.³¹ By the 1860s, African Americans took up white minstrel traditions in traveling shows featuring all-black casts. The traveling shows were controlled by white syndicates and aimed at white audiences, but in what has been called the “trickster” tradition, black performers and composers served up black caricature that still showed off black talent even in the guise that denied it.

While black minstrelsy is often portrayed as caricaturing white stereotypes in a resistance mode, the dance historian Brenda Dixon Gottschild argues that to interpret minstrelsy only in terms of white power or black resistance to it is to ignore the African contribution to black performance and its overwhelming impact upon American culture as “an aesthetic redefinition that would stand American performance on its head.”³² The new dances and music, new patter, and new comic tropes (including men as female impersonators) that found their way into vaudeville as a result of American minstrelsy were not just driven by either accommodation or resistance to white power, she writes, but by an aesthetic influenced by including African music and African musical instruments (such as the banjo), ways of holding and moving the body, the enunciation of a song phrase or note, dance patterns, and call-and-respond traditions drawn from African culture. Although white audience appreciation of black performance at the time is generally viewed as an expression of their racist views, it might also be considered that the appeal to white and black audiences was the realization of something beyond either racial stereotypes or resistance. “In the end the American Negro has come into his own,” according to one assessment of vaudeville’s future. “The real Negro is on the stage himself in full feather, for the first time in his history the professional disputant of the white actor in the same line.”³³

In concrete terms, however, black performers in white settings had to maintain a complicated balance of white expectations of black performance. M. Sissieretta Jones was one of the African American women classically trained at the New England Conservatory and subsequently toured internationally on the concert stage. When she was prevented from pursuing an operatic career in the United States, Jones reinvented herself as “Black Patti” and formed the Black Patti Troubadours, a minstrel act that parodied opera. But clearly “Patti” was a trickster, parodying a form of art in which she herself excelled, and which, for all the parody, was still central to the act. In the end, what came through loudest was not a satirical representation of a particular group acting above their class by performing opera, or even a ridicule of opera as high art, but the talent of M. Sissieretta Jones, who, despite all odds, had found an avenue to display it.³⁴

The great vaudevillian Bert Williams performed in blackface most of his career, but in ways that suggest talented actors (Fanny Brice might be another

example) found opportunity in the blackface mask. From all accounts, Williams's performance—in the cakewalk, in his half-spoken singing style, or in his feigned surprise at audience applause—was not the minstrel of white invention. Williams's use of blackface played up its role as a mask, and his singing style was the antithesis of the mode of white “coon shouting” performance. The cakewalk that Williams helped popularize was itself a descendant of the slave practice of mocking the dance of their owners and had African roots, but it was nonetheless appreciated in its time as an art form without a connection to its antecedents from either black or white audiences.

A year after his death, in 1923, a tribute book sought to explain Williams's talent. The impresario David Belasco credited Williams's subtlety. “His artistic method was so perfect that it completely concealed his artistic mechanics, making all which he said and did appear to be wholly unpremeditated, while he seemed entirely unconscious of his comicality of his words and actions.”³⁵ A white reviewer noted, “He is a man of another race who can lampoon us and cartoon us in our own foibles and weaknesses and make us like it.”³⁶ “He is the only actor I know” another reviewer acknowledged, “who can express melancholy, if only for an instant, then suddenly cause wild outbursts of laughter and applause in his audience.”³⁷

Williams was a man of study and erudition and his performance represented the same care as his day-to-day negotiations of the times. Blackface provided him with the opportunity for multiple identifications, as did his usual dress, in disconnected pieces of a full-dress suit and an askew top hat, but still more subtle than the grotesque exaggeration of minstrelsy costume. He had many songs, stories, and skits in his arsenal—but the song “Nobody” was demanded as an encore at every performance. Regretfully, sighingly, he responded to the audience calls by searching his pockets. Finally, finding a small notebook, he turned its pages wearily, until coming across his place. He began his song, reading the words with difficulty, as if the words were not etched into his brain after thousands of performances.

When life seems full of clouds and rain
 And I am full of nothin' but pain
 Who soothes my thumpin', bumpin' brain
 Nobody!

When winter comes with snow and sleet,
 And me with hunger and cold feet
 Who says, Here's 25 cents, go ahead
 Get something to eat
 Nobody!

The audience always howled and demanded even more encores, making us wonder what was so humorous about this doleful account of constant rejection. It surely was the antithesis of the happy minstrel. He would comply this time, his performance suggested, but perhaps not next time. A recent biographer interprets the performance as a way for him to delay audience satisfaction, proving his “control over them, even as they demanded an encore.”³⁸ Another way to look at the performance is in terms of audience interaction with the performer, a dialogue about power, about who is up and who is down, and who in the end has control.

The *Follies* gave Williams a platform from which he came to change audience expectations of black performance and he influenced other performers, including Mae West, who credited Williams in her own development.³⁹ West also performed for the *Follies*, but critics were puzzled. Was there something male about her performance? Her dancing seemed close to that of George M. Cohan. Was she like the blackface comic Frank Tinney, or was she the vaudeville diva Eva Tanguay? Was she too brazen for polite vaudeville? Was it all a send-up? Such questions followed West into her film career, and even to her later career in Las Vegas. Some critics long suspected she was a man in drag.

One way to interpret West’s performance is to consider that she adapted some of the traditions of black American performance. One of West’s early signature songs was “I’ve Got a Style All of My Own,” filled with implied meanings, innuendo, double entendre, boasting, sampling, imitation, and parody that are connected to traditions of black performance. West consciously incorporated them all. As she described her style, “It isn’t what I do, but how I do it. It isn’t what I say, but how I say it, and how I look when I do and say it.”⁴⁰

All this rejection, adoption, or rearrangement of identity that Williams, West, and vaudevillians in general represented has been explained in a number of ways: Jewish performers in blackface bringing their own angst to the form; older immigrants given a sense of superiority toward the rube immigrant; a controlling device for middle-class audiences, fearful they would be subsumed in an ocean of the newly arrived; an affirmation of status and a warning of slide; the comfort of familiarity; or the adoption of Africanist traditions that came to influence white performers. For some, there was clearly the lure of the idea of moving from one personality to another. As Susan A. Glenn writes, “For audiences, the pleasures of the comedy of personality were many. The fantasy of the fluid self was one appeal.”⁴¹

It was a fluidity perhaps of a whirlpool, not a river. Movement seemed most about the spinning plate kept aloft as the performer remained in place. What seemed admired was the ability to do several things at one time rather than move upward in a hierarchal fashion. Black Patti, the Boston Fadette Orchestra,

the comic who could really play the instrument he was holding, and hundreds of other acts turned on the surprise of their versatility. It was a characteristic of adaptation, perhaps of more necessity in a changing culture than ideas of hierarchy. When the society magazine *Town and Country* wrote about George M. Cohan, it was in terms of not just his rise, but his stretch. The headline put it, “The Remarkable Versatility and Success of George M. Cohan as Author, Composer, Promoter and Star.”⁴²

We might consider that what gave racial, gender, and ethnic humor such a long life in vaudeville were complications that went beyond ideas of subordination. Audiences had to ask themselves: Was it to reject one’s own personality to take on another? Was it a democratic possibility to take on a costume that had originated somewhere else? Was it, indeed, an exercise in inferiority-superiority or a backhanded way to claim allegiance with other members of the disenfranchised?

The Audience and Performers

William Dean Howells, novelist of the Genteel Tradition, editor, and “inveterate vaudeville-goer,” considered that “Nothing is lost upon the vaudeville audience, not the lightest touch, not the airiest shadow of meaning.”⁴³ No matter the strictures put upon performance, the arrangement of the bill, or the stereotypes and branding of the act itself, what was most important to performers was their communication skills with the audience. Despite Keith’s demands that successful acts not change, vaudeville performers tailored their performances to audiences. As Caffin observed, “They have learned, either by experience or instinct, so exactly the key to which to pitch their appeal, in order to evoke that answering vibration for their audience, that they can sound it as will, modulate it into what harmonies and expression they please.”⁴⁴

John Lahr, son of the famous vaudevillian Bert Lahr, recalled how his father found ways to nuance his performance according to his recognition of differences in audiences.⁴⁵ Barrymore, returning to vaudeville after periods in the legitimate theater, always recognized the talent of the vaudevillian performers to adjust the act to the needs of the audience. “I found out that you had to be awfully good in vaudeville.” Audiences, she said, were “exacting.”⁴⁶ Consequences accrued for performers who were less exact. On the Pantages circuit, Harpo Marx recalled, “If an audience didn’t like us we had no trouble finding it out. We were pelted with sticks, bricks, spitballs, cigar butts, peach pits and chewed-out stalks of sugar cane.”⁴⁷

What audiences demanded was not production-like perfection, but a sense that the act was working in the moment. Brice said her comedy was spontaneous.

“Whenever it isn’t, the feel of the audiences tells me so I throw out that particular piece of business and work out something else to use in its stead.”⁴⁸ Nora Bayes, vaudeville’s most successful “songstress,” thought of her audience as friends who were best served by sincerity and simplicity. “I have never sung the song [a farewell-to-a-soldier song] without frankly yielding to its drama, and at the farewell moment there are always tears in my eyes. As my back is to the audience much of the time, they do not know that I am really crying.”⁴⁹ May Irwin cautioned, “A subtle perception of the hidden value of every line is part of the business of the stage, and sometimes that requires the most constant study and development.”⁵⁰ While still a teenage performer, Eddie Cantor adopted the rule “the audience is never wrong.” If a performance failed, it “was either the fault of the material or the manner of presentation.”⁵¹ His autobiography was titled unambiguously, *My Life Is in Your Hands*. Mae West struggled with finding a way to please changeable and unpredictable audiences. “I learned to adjust the mood, tempo and material of my act. I did whatever seemed necessary to get the best response from each type of audience. I gave it to them fast or slow, or low or mean or sultry. I changed a song, I adapted myself to the way they liked it best.”⁵²

This trend by performers to deconstruct their art for the edification of the general public in interviews, in magazine articles, and in their memoirs was in line with the campaign to professionalize—performance, like any other profession, was learned. That push, however, confronted the idea that entertainment was an industrialized product. Timing, inflection, and wit countered efforts at standardization, even at a time when entrepreneurs sought to find formulas that resisted tinkering.

American Trinity: Ziegfeld *Follies*

The *Follies* certainly represented a peak of theatrical production values thanks to the set designs of Joseph Urban, who took his inspiration from a magical medieval past of Maxwell Parrish illustrations. Costumes were designed by the fashion entrepreneur and British couturier to the higher classes, Lady Duff Gordon, and were made of the finest materials, even when worn in unseen places. In terms of its fashion, the spectacular, and its preference for white female beauty, the *Follies* informed the film musicals of the 1930s and 1940s, television of the 1950s, and the showgirls of present-day Las Vegas. Parodies have been scarce, although a famous one by Lucille Ball in her 1950s’ television comedy series had her toppling down the grand staircase following the weight of the headdress. For the most part, however, a reference to the Ziegfeld *Follies* does not provoke a laugh out loud so much as suggest

affection for a peculiarly American mélange of excess and elegance, sensationalism and sentimentality, aloofness and *kitsch*.

The emphasis of the *Follies*, from its first production in 1909 (despite the financial panic) and running until 1931, was on opulence, on breathtaking technique, on light and color, all devoted to what was called in the Zeigfeld publicity “Glorifying the American Girl.” The chosen few who became the “showgirls” were trained in a special walk and fitted out with elaborate costumes with huge headpieces. So arrayed, the showgirls were expected to perambulate the stage in an unnatural, hip-forward walk for the benefit of the costumes and scenery, but they were not expected to display individual talent. Clearly, the glorified American woman was most about knowing her place, display, and standardization. Moreover, at a time of eugenics, the so-called science that saw the Aryan American as the repository of the most desired national characteristics, the American woman thus glorified was fair skinned and possessed particular kinds of facial features that met the requirements of the “American type.”

However, in the typical multilevel message delivery of vaudeville, the real Ziegfeld stars were not American types. The *Follies* made stars of Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker, Bert Williams and Fanny Brice, whose acts were ostensibly intended only to fill the time between the showgirls but who instead became the headliners.

Like Williams, Brice provides one example of how she moved beyond her role as a female comic intended to highlight what she was not, nor ever could be—a glorified American girl. Brice is most associated with the contributions of Jewish immigrant humor to American popular culture and her birth on the Lower East Side is cited as proof. But we know that Brice’s growing-up years in Newark did not offer her enough material to fuel her performing ambitions, and for that inspiration she turned to the already established tropes of black dialect and the Yiddish theater of her birthplace. Brice performed in both modes, but her earliest success came when she put the two together. In the *Follies of 1910* she received star treatment for her rendition of “Love Joe,” a black dialect song that turned on seduction. But what caused her performance to be praised by reviewers was how she melded the black dialect lyrics with the comic gyrations and expressions that were usual to Yiddish comic theater. Brice received numerous ovations at every performance while the press said she was “the real star.” George Seldes thought only Jolson could compare with the way Brice “could hold an audience in the hand.”⁵³ And for years afterward, audiences remembered her send-up of the boudoir queen, Camille: “I have been a bad woman, Armand—but awfully good company.”⁵⁴

In 1914, Caffin devoted a book to the examination of vaudeville. Her account of racial and the ethnic comedians received no special attention. Like

contortionists, singers, dancers, and magicians, the humor evoked by the “Fun-Makers” made no differentiation between the “Hebrew” and the Irish comedians, or between the blackface humor of Al Jolson and that of Bert Williams. They were all part, Caffin suggested, without moralizing upon content, of the American parade. Instead, she glorified the art and craft of vaudeville stars, saw a democratic vista in the variety of performances, and, indeed, viewed vaudeville as the expression of the national folk mote. At a time when most Progressives attacked syndicate controls in all fields, including the substantial syndicated operation of vaudeville, Caffin interpreted vaudeville as a both a reflection of the audience and under its control. “Well! It is YOUR show,” she concluded. “If you want it different you only have to make the demand loud enough, large enough, persistent enough.”⁵⁵ By 1922, Herbert Croly’s *New Republic* called vaudeville “The Great American Art.”⁵⁶

The vaudeville entrepreneurs had sought to build a business along a nineteenth-century vertical business model of ownership of production, but in the course of constructing it, vaudeville set American cultural production along a course that would have relevance for all of American popular culture. American national culture came to be accepted as what could appeal to Americans of all classes. New forms of sound and film expanded from early working-class audiences to find favor among Americans regardless of class background as men and women of all classes increasingly hummed the same songs, danced the same dances, and admired the same performers.

The acceptance of American popular culture on such a large scale, however, served as a barrier for artists who challenged the familiarity of popular culture. There were no ready audiences for modernist art in America or, indeed, for the work of any artists who were not willing to cater to an audience’s perceived taste. Moreover, as film, recording, and, eventually, broadcast came to offer new opportunities for artistic expression, the forms developed according to the successful parameters already in existence, the American tripartite of business, performance, and audience.

CHAPTER 3

Outsider Art

American Popular Song

The long-haired high-brows call me “vulgarian”
When the “Great Big Beautiful Doll” I croon
For the music that’s real American
And the joy of my heart is a rag time tune.

—Eugene O’Neill, “Ballad of the Modern Music Lover”

When Bert Williams was performing the audience favorite “Nobody,” he was one of the most well-known Americans of the time, certainly among the best-known African Americans in the first two decades of the century. It is not incidental to his success that Williams was an immigrant, literally so, born in Antigua in the West Indies; and symbolically so, in terms of his relocation to a metropolitan center alongside thousands of other African Americans who moved northward in the Great Migration—Northern cities increasing their black populations to an average of 22 percent in the first two decades of the century. Williams shared his immigrant status with thousands of others, including the nation’s most famous songwriter, Irving Berlin, born in Russia, and a huge immigrant community in New York City, a third of whom did not speak English.

Nothing impacted the formation of American popular culture more than the population flux of the new century in the nation’s cities, especially New York, where immigrants and other new arrivals were both the makers of cultural products and their audiences. Like so many of the vaudevillian performers, the nation’s songwriters emerged from the racial and immigrant neighborhoods and from the borderland neighborhoods occupied by the new arrivals from the hinterlands. Like many an immigrant, the early songwriters were driven by the

ambition to benefit from the city's opportunities and were willing to listen to the demand of the market to achieve success.

The Great Migration brought black Americans from the rural South in numbers that resulted in the doubling and tripling of the number of black residents in Southern, Midwestern, and Northern cities. From 1910 to 1920, New York's black population grew to 152,467 (a 66.3 percent increase); Chicago's to 109,400 (a 148 percent increase); Cleveland's to 34,452 (a 307.8 percent increase); Philadelphia's to 134,339 (a 58.9 percent increase), and Detroit to 40,838 (a 611.5 percent increase).¹ In New York, already crowded with white immigrant populations, black populations were forced into separate neighborhoods that came to serve their residents with institutions of their own, including entertainment venues—the cellar clubs, juke joints, and black-and-tan clubs, usually patronized by single, displaced male workers who liked a high quotient of sexuality in their entertainments. Young women who began their careers in these clubs, such as Ethel Waters, had no other choice but to develop a sensual singing style.

The racially defined neighborhoods encouraged black talent to coalesce, orchestrated by black leaders who developed black performance circuits and found opportunities in both black and white performance venues. The long-popular traveling minstrel shows under white management were challenged by black musical theater from Harlem's Williams and Walker Company, from the composing team of Robert Cole, Rosamond Johnson, and James Weldon Johnson and Paul Lawrence Dunbar, from J. Leuprie Hill, from serious composition and arrangements for orchestra by Will Marion Cook and James Reese Europe, and many others who moved in and out of each other's circles in some regard because black artists lived in segregated settings that encouraged proximity. As New York's Harlem moved toward becoming home to the nation's largest aggregation of black Americans, black neighborhoods in other cities also nurtured arts and culture. In Washington DC, for example, musicians and performers also lived in the same neighborhood and knew each other well enough that they seldom played with strangers.² As in other cultural communities, the proximity of talent had both practical and artistic implications.

The increase of black populations in Northern cities was an added component to the Eastern European immigrant flood. Nine million foreign-born immigrants arrived during the century's first decade, almost triple of the 1890s' flow. On one day alone, May 7, 1905, twelve thousand immigrants arrived at Ellis Island. New York had the largest number of the foreign born at the turn of the century, some 37 percent of the total population. Indeed, fully three-quarters of New York's population were the children of the foreign born.³

A remarkable number of Jewish immigrants came to play a part in the making of American culture in the period, in vaudeville, filmmaking, song writing, modern art, and early broadcast. The songwriter Irving Berlin, the broadcast magnate David Sarnoff, and modern artists Abraham Walkowitz and William Zorach all came from small Russian villages whose families immigrated to the United States when forced from the countryside by Russian pogroms and “May Laws” that demanded relocation. Al Jolson found his way from Lithuania to the United States on his own. Eddie Cantor was born to Lithuanian immigrant parents both of whom died in poverty after struggling to get to the new world. And all the movie magnates—Louis B. Mayer, Lewis Zelenick (Selznick), the Warner brothers, Schmucl Goldfish (Samuel Goldwyn), William Fuchs (Fox), Adolph Zukor, Marcus Loew, and Carl Laemmle—were part of the turn-of-the-century Jewish immigrant surge. Their decisions to come to the United States rather than other nations had to do with joining relatives who had already immigrated, the promise of jobs, and the U. S. openness to Jewish immigration. The United States also had its anti-immigration movement, leading to the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1880s, and the number of Eastern European Jews involved in the U.S. anarchist movement—Emma Goldman the most prominent—gave an anti-Jewish subtext to the Anarchist Exclusion Act of 1901. But nothing in the United States was as clear at the British Aliens Act, passed in 1905 specifically to halt the flood of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to Great Britain.

We might also include the American white underclass as part of the immigrant wave arriving in the cities. For these newcomers, like the immigrants from overseas, popular culture was one of the fields that was open to the newly arrived without the necessity of specialized education or contacts. In the mid-nineteenth century, Stephen Foster was one of those aspiring young songwriters, living in dire circumstances in New York in order to sell his songs in the flourishing sheet music business. “Oh Susannah,” “The Old Folks at Home,” “My Old Kentucky Home,” and others that have come to represent America’s folk music were written to fit the rage for minstrel or “Ethiopian tunes” of the time. Foster himself was born and bred in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Later, Paul Dresser, older brother of the novelist Theodore Dreiser, followed the same trajectory. Dresser escaped the poverty of his large Midwestern family by joining a theatrical troupe. Once in New York, he took up the song trade and became known for his songs of sunny optimism, such as “My Gal Sal” (only family members recognized that the “Sal” of the title referred to the town’s most successful madam, a Dresser paramour) or his achingly sentimental “On the Banks of the Wabash,” upon whose banks, in real life, the Dreiser family had nearly starved. Like Dresser, Harry Von Tilzer, composer of “A Bird in a Gilded Cage” and hundreds of other songs that included racial dialect songs, escaped

his poverty-stricken Michigan home by joining a circus troupe at fourteen and also landed in New York. Song writing offered not only escape but a chance to remake oneself—in Von Tilzer’s case, the dropping his birth name Gubinsky for the addition of “Von” to his mother’s unmarried name, apparently to make it fancier. Charles K. Harris fashioned his first banjo out of an oyster can. Songwriting became a place of entry for outsider groups—the white underclass, African Americans, and Jews—men, and a few women who were willing to adapt to demands of the commercial marketplace.

Songwriting was demanded by a song culture that was part of city life. William Randolph Hearst published sheet music in his big-circulation *New York Journal*, a sensational newspaper that sought a working-class audience.⁴ At a time when a piano was a fixture in the parlor—in 1905, Sears and Roebuck offered pianos for \$85—sheet music was often included in magazines such as the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Singing waiters and song buskers promoted specialty songs wherever an audience could be found, on the street, in eating and drinking establishments, and in department stores. The Edison Stores played the latest Edison records loud enough to be heard by passersby. A street child of New York’s East Side, Eddie Cantor escaped his crowded household at night to meet his pals: “For the East Side at night is not only menaced by the caterwauling of cats, but by gangs of youngsters who sit on the stoops and the corner stands, singing all the popular songs with all their might.”⁵

Song culture was also a part of middle-class life when every community had its local band and music store, and singing, from lullabies and hymns to popular songs, was part of everyday life. When the young men of the era came of age and went off to war, the U.S. Army, concerned about morale, equipped them with songbooks and song leaders. By World War I, it was recognized that American song had become one of the outstanding characteristics of American popular culture and might even be the basis of an American national art. The composer of tomorrow would get “his inspiration not in the Metropolitan Opera House but in vaudeville shows and cabarets.”⁶ By the end of the war, critics were noting that American music was a worldwide phenomenon: “American music is sweeping the world and its progress is due not to any artificial characteristic but to certain elemental melodic and rhythmic features which have given musical vitality to all who listen to them.”⁷ Eugene O’Neill would not be alone in his love for a ragtime tune.

“What Gives a Popular Song Its Vogue?”

“What Gives a Popular Songs Its Vogue?” a music critic asked in a monthly magazine at the turn of the century.⁸ It was, he thought, simple melodies and emotional appeals. The genteel “parlor” songs of the 1890s were filled with

longing and nostalgia, but what was just becoming clear was that popular songs were increasingly about the world around them. Like the mass newspapers and department store retailers, the new entrepreneurs fashioned the sheet music along lines of newness and change, the attributes that made ongoing purchase necessary. Popular songs did not strive to be timeless, but often were anchored in their period by contemporary references, as in Gus Edwards's "In My Merry Oldsmobile" (1905) and Jimmy Monaco's "There's a Wireless Station Down in My Heart" (1913), and included odes to archery, ping pong, and bowling—"Spars and Strikes" (1902). In a period when mothers were revered, "mother" songs composed a genre of their own, while fears of changing gender relationships were apparent in "A Hundred Years from Now" (1914).

I wonder if they'll have a tango-dance
A hundred years from now
I wonder if men will wear short pants
A hundred years from now

Finally, a relief from the saccharine parlor songs, the reality of sexual attraction increasingly came to be represented outside the plantation dialect genre—"Cuddle Up a Little Closer" (1908), "Kiss Me, My Honey, Kiss Me" (1909), "You Made Me Love You" (1911), "Hold Me in Your Loving Arms" (1915). Popular songs also elided into dance music—the "Black Bottom," the "Grizzly Bear," the "Turkey Trot"—all of which called upon body parts to be used in new ways regardless of whether the dances were practiced in the nation's dance halls or in middle-class living rooms. Altogether, this was the kind of music that worked in a sensate culture, not only for the youthful working-class workers, but also for the adventuresome Progressive liberals, who were willing to toss out Victorianism of any shape as they adopted the new songs and their dancers. Popular songs helped fuel the vaudeville stage and helped sell sheet music.

A songwriter of the period believed many of the popular songwriters had exceptional abilities that simply were not called on. "The masses have only a musical voice range of eight notes, so what can a ragtime king do but pass out musical baby food to his subjects?" The writer of a guidebook for would-be vaudevillian composers—yet another indication of the role of vaudeville as an entry point—also stressed the simplicity of the popular song: "You cannot express a complex idea in the popular song-form, which is made up of phrases that sometimes seem short and abrupt. And, even if you could overcome this technical difficulty, you would not find an audience that could grasp your complex idea. Remember that a majority of the purchasers of popular songs buy them at the five-and-ten-cent store. To sell songs to this audience, you must make your music easy to sing, your words easy to say and your idea simple and

plain.”¹⁰ Harris, after his long and successful career, argued that the “the masses, the untrained musical public” had to be served simple fare.¹¹ Thomas Edison set up a shop to compose and sell records for his phonograph, and charted the sale of 126,000,000 records he sold. “It is amazing to see how the law of average works with surprising regularity. The public likes music of a certain kind and goes on liking it year after year.”¹²

These directives to be simple arrived at a time when America was flush with musical influences derived from its immigrant and diverse populations. Every town had its German band; Yiddish theater introduced sounds and instruments unfamiliar to most native-born Americans; and music composed and performed by black Americans, from spirituals to ragtime, was straining the limits of white-imposed constraints. However, the familiar song structure that undergirded popular song came to be an organizer of the American experience, useful in flattening diversity with lyrics easy to grasp for new arrivals struggling with the language and giving some sense of common values by its varied and cheeky subjects.

No one composer represented the connections between popular song and culture of the day more than Berlin, whose career demonstrated the trajectory of outsider to capitalist and consummate insider. Berlin dominated popular music for decades by his ability to grasp the forms of the day, the extent of his repertoire, and his lifelong control of his own product. Concern over ownership led to his participation in the founding, in 1914, of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). To the end of his long life, Berlin was recognized for his unrelenting supervision of his work, which came to be counted at some three thousand popular songs, many of which surpassed the moment to become standards of America’s songbook.

Berlin—born Israel Baline—was out of his crowded Lower East Side household by the age of thirteen, first making a living by selling newspapers, a job that provided lessons in popular taste, and eventually finding work as a song plugger and singing waiter. His subjects, as Charles Hamm writes, were drawn from his social environment, “producing a body of songs more autobiographical than most of his peers.”¹³ As in vaudeville, ethnic diversity, parodies of politics, and novelty songs, were all put forward, part of the American parade. He published two or three songs (having to hire a musician to notate them) before his popularity as a singing waiter brought a commission for some special material, a “wop” dialect song. “Dorando,” based on an Italian marathon runner in the 1908 Olympic Games, became a popular vaudeville song and launched Berlin’s career. Berlin and a partner also took advantage of another popular moment, the controversy over the opera *Salome*, with its notorious “Dance of the Seven Veils,” to compose a parody, this time in Yiddish dialect. “Sadie Salome, Go Home” sold three hundred

thousand copies of sheet music. The eighteen-year-old Fanny Brice picked it up. Flo Ziegfeld, Jr., heard her sing it and hired her for the *Follies of 1910*, a show that included two other Berlin coauthored songs. Like other composers of the period, Berlin insisted he was not so special: “We depend largely on tricks, we writers of song. There’s no such thing as a new melody. Our work is to connect the old phrases in a new way, so that they will sound like a new song. Did you know the public, when it hears a new song, anticipates the next passage?”¹⁴

His 1911 “Alexander’s Rag Time Band” may best suggest his strategy of the familiar wrapped in the packaging of the new. It became the huge international hit of the year—a million and a half copies in the United States and another million in Europe. Yet it was not really ragtime, as Berlin would often say, but a kind of imitation of ragtime set in a popular-song frame. Whether Berlin expropriated ragtime or served as a conduit for its influence, the song represented the negotiations of American popular music. “Come on and hear, Come on and hear,” the song called in its insistent refrain. In 1914, Berlin expanded his accomplishments by writing his first New York stage musical, for the popular English dancing team Irene and Vernon Castle, whose carriage-trade audience was as attracted to his songs as much as anyone else.

The Publishers

Irving Berlin quickly became his own publisher, as did many of the successful songwriters who found a New York base useful for its proximity to vaudeville and other publishers.¹⁵ But at the turn of the century, music publishing was not located entirely in New York but dispersed across the country in cities of any size. Kansas City was the base of twenty or more music publishing firms while Galveston was home to a multigenerational firm, Thomas Goggan & Brothers, founded by two Irish immigrant brothers. Oliver Ditson of Boston, Root and Cady of Chicago, Lee and Walker of Philadelphia, John Church of Cincinnati, and the Willigs of Baltimore were all leading publishing firms that served customers for band and choral music, musical instructional needs, chamber music, and piano and vocal arrangements. Entry into the sheet music business was often the extension of their services selling musical instruments. However, the period’s most successful female songwriter, Carrie Jacobs-Bond, founded her music publishing firm in a spare bedroom of her rooming house in Chicago. Although her “I Love You Truly” (1905) is still remembered today, it was “The End of a Perfect Day” (1910) that sold 5 million copies, the largest sale of any popular song up to that time outside of “Home Sweet Home.”¹⁶ Another female songwriter, Hatti Nevada, the self-styled “Queen of Song Writers,” published her sentimental parlor songs through the family business in Kansas City.¹⁷

The popular song was not the mainstay of all firms but the profits that could be made from popular song publishing was made clear when a Sedalia, Missouri, firm published Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" and began the ragtime craze. The regional firms also published the sentimental "parlor" songs, as well as minstrel songs and that most difficult of popular songs to accept today, the coon song. Goggan published Fred Lyons's "Paint All de Little Black Sinners White" and "Dem Chickens Roo Too High" in 1887, just after the first of the genre appeared. Coon songs were published by many of the regional firms including those in Boston, Cleveland, and Chicago.

These new songs were different from dialect songs known as "darker" songs and emanated from the all-black minstrel shows. James Bland was part of an all-black minstrel group, the highest-paid minstrel performer of the period before the turn of the century. He wrote some seven hundred songs, almost all in dialect, such as "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers," a song that was picked up by the Philadelphia Mummers organization as its signature song (and remains so today). Such "darker" songs were often about mythologizing the South—one response to the Civil War—the yearning for home or, for the peppier ones, like "Golden Slippers," resilience when all hope is gone.

But no one had to be from the South to yearn for home or to admire resilience in the face of a lost cause. In the middle-class Progressive community, the "darker" songs were connected to plantation spirituals, which were considered America's true folk songs and provided the great white hope that black musicality would become the nation's music. The editors of *Outlook* magazine could not help but amend the warm review of a concert by the classical composer, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, with the caution, "It is to be hoped that Mr. Layton [the conductor] and other musical leaders of his race will not neglect the plantation songs and other distinctly negro music which really form the only body of music approaching what may be called folk-songs in this country."¹⁸ The success of ongoing tours of various troops of "Jubilee Singers" attested to white notions that Negro musicality represented spiritual truths. Nathaniel Dett, the musical director of the Hampton Institute, was regarded as a precursor to the development of the "folk-song of the American Negro." "A folksong, expressing as it does the heart of a race, is almost a holy thing," declared Miss Natalie Curtis in the New York *Evening Post*.¹⁹ However, the humor magazine *Puck* satirized the Progressive call for uplifting Negro song. "The negro, as now environed, may not feel like singing. The spread of lynching from the South to the North, East and West and the debonair style in which mobs grab the nearest negro, if one first desired is not hand, may fail to call forth again those 'crooning lullabies of the nursery.'"²⁰

No matter how sentimental the white Progressive's views,²¹ they nonetheless opened doors for black musical talent. The New England Conservatory in Boston and the National Conservatory of Music of America accepted African American

men and women of musical abilities. Florence Price graduated from the New England Conservatory in 1906 and went on to a career of symphonic compositions, although like other African American musicians who did not pursue a popular career, her recognition has been slow. Will Marion Cook returned from the study of the violin in Europe for further study with the Czech composer Antonin Dvorak at the National Conservatory of Music. That institution was founded by the American philanthropist Jeannette M. Thurber to help establish an American classical music tradition and was open to all races and both sexes at little or no cost. Cook was among several African American students, including Harry T. Burleigh, the first conservatory-trained African American composer.²²

As the white Progressives were pinning national hopes on the training of African American musicians, vaudeville had transformed the admired folk songs into comic songs turning on racial stereotypes whose performers came to be known as “coon shouters.” Songs for the coon-song range, beginning in 1880s and lasting until about 1910, were composed by black and white composers and picked up on comedic traditions of the minstrel shows, especially those that had parodied white views of black life. But now, as coon songs played to white audiences, the parody of whiteness was subsumed to white concerns about themselves. As we noted earlier, that might be in exploration of identity, as in Fanny Brice’s performances, a way for ethnic whites who were not so powerful to feel they were superior; or to provide permission for expressions of sexuality or vulnerability that were prohibited elsewhere. Sometimes the appeal could be a mixture off all these factors. But whatever service coon songs provided for their white customers, they were a long way from the simple statements of James Bland and Stephen Foster. The popularity of such coon songs when performed by talented men and women on the vaudeville stage (who may have been paid to introduce them) could only enlarge the demand for such songs for the parlor piano. In the first decade of the century, dozens of such songs were published, accompanied by covers that are shockingly racist to modern eyes, bound to find more or less permanent display on the tops of parlor pianos.

The rage for coon songs already established by the regional firms was expanded when the center of music publishing shifted to New York. By the early years of the century, the New York publishers were, as Charles Hamm writes, “the most powerful force in the business.” They were men who could determine “what songs and even what kinds of songs were to be published.”²³

The New York firms were primarily interested in publishing sheet music that would reach a national audience and instigated a modern merchandising model that seeks to replicate few items in large numbers. In the new emphasis on marketing, the firms turned to vaudevillians. Harris had found success with “After the Ball” because he had made arrangements for the song to be included in a traveling show. It was a formula he stuck to for the rest of his publishing

career: “The real start at popularizing a song is to sell it to the performer,” he wrote in his memoir. “Common sense tells one that the bigger the reputation and ability of the performer whose assistance the author and composer enlists, the more chances it has in catching the public’s favor.”²⁴

To make the song appealing to a vaudevillian, the song was composed with a performer’s needs in mind. The successful songwriter, said one observer of the process, “should know what words sing easily on high notes and what combination of syllables to avoid so that an actor does not tie his tongue into knots when syncopating over the footlights.”²⁵ Sometimes popular vaudevillians were paid to include a new song in their acts. By 1915, vaudevillians were being paid a total of a million dollars annually for such services.²⁶

In the cities, songs were promoted by song pluggers, which was how Berlin got in the business. As described by Harris, song plugging was a competitive business: “Daily in Tin Pan Alley, the song pluggers, from early morning until late at night, stood in front of their respective publishing houses waiting for singers to come along, when they would grab them by the arm and hoist them into the music studios.”²⁷

In order to be catchy, songs came to emphasize their choruses. The chorus was regularly appearing, and often included the title of the work. The chorus, indeed, became the nugget of the popular song. “Water boys”—ostensibly distributing water to thirsty audience members during a stage performance—were actually boy sopranos hired to help audiences learn the chorus as it was being performed onstage. The chorus, with its title embedded, helped audiences remember the song when it came to purchase. Members of the audience paid by the song publishers were sure to give the new song an enthusiastic reception.

Applied to coon songs, the new techniques could only aid in the proliferation of vaudeville’s blackface acts. The nation’s composers churned out new songs in the genre, available for any performer who wanted to black up and take the form across the nation. Eddie Cantor picked up his first blackface hit, “Waiting for the Robert E. Lee” in 1912 when he was “hanging around the song publishers” and the songwriter, L. Wolfe Gilbert, another Russian immigrant, agreed to let Cantor introduce the song. Its publisher was F. A. Mills Music Publishing, a new firm specializing in cakewalk material.²⁸ The songs were popular enough to be used in movie houses, accompanied by slide presentations and song leaders.²⁹ Arthur Collins was the first performer to record coon songs, in 1898, recordings that were available not only in the home for those who could afford phonographs but available in the coin-operated phonographs of urban centers.³⁰

The New York music publishing industry was dominated by firms established by Jewish American entrepreneurs, and discussion of the role of these publishers in the expansion of blackface material continues to be a contentious one.³¹

The earliest of the new entrepreneurs was the New York firm of M. Witmark and Sons, a Jewish German family able to expand the family printing business into music publishing thanks to the vaudeville expertise of two brothers, Julius, a boy soprano on the Orpheum circuit, and his brother, Isidore, a songwriter, song doctor, and theatrical producer. Isidore Witmark had a particular affection for comic dialect songs and included such songs in his catalogs, produced minstrel shows as a hobby, and later published a guide to the productions of minstrel shows for amateur groups. All these productions featured dialect songs that could be purchased from Witmark.³² The Witmark firm got an early start, but coon songs were similarly published from firms established by Leo Feist, Edward Marks, Maurice Shapiro, Sol Bloom, Louis Bernstein, Joseph Stein, and Charles K. Harris.

By 1910, the Jewish population composed a fourth of New York's general population, thus the emergence of the Jewish entrepreneurs in many fields is not surprising. Often denied entry into established professions and living at the center of the popular culture industry whose only requirement was successful material, Jewish American entrepreneurship was usually in step with popular culture developments. And in their time, coon songs were not so surprising for a popular culture that parodied all ethnic types. Among his many parodies, Irving Berlin composed comic Jewish songs, "Yiddisha Eyes" (1910); "Yiddisha Nightingale" (1911); "Yiddisha Professor" (1912). Jews as well as other ethnic minorities were discriminated against at the time, and the proclamation of ethnicity by way of a novelty song that was humorous rather than mean-spirited may be considered a kind of resistance, a parody of stereotypes.

But coon songs, so unremitting in their stereotypes and carrying the burden of American history, are hard to fit into that rationale. The emergence of the coon song rage seems more readily to represent the Jim Crow period in American history, of which lynching, poll taxes, and separation of the races were characteristic. Coon songs were popular at the time of acceptance of Charles Carroll's *The Negro as Beast* (1900) and Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1902). Early silent film, before *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, included *A Nigger in the Woodpile* (Biography 1904), *The Dancing Nig* (Essanay 1907), *How Rastus Got His Pork Chops* (Lubin 1908), and *The Pickanninies and the Watermelon* (IMP 1912).³³ What seems clear is that coon songs, despite the comic frame, comported with the era's need to maintain white superiority as an organizing principle for white daily life. Given the failure of Reconstruction, the rise of Social Darwinism, and a fluctuating economy (two economic setbacks in the period), coon songs perhaps more than any other comic stereotypes provided some guarantees that some things remained the same. James H. Dorman writes strongly, "It was by fulfilling the need for rationalizations

on the part of the dominant population that the coon songs gained and maintained their inordinate popularity. Over and over the dominant themes were repeated and reiterated until their variant images were rendered indelible.”³⁴

The Master’s Tools

Black and white composers contributed to the coon song genre. The Witmark firm early published Ernest Hogan’s “All Coons Look Alike to Me” (the title apparently supplied by the firm), and many other black composers figured in all of the catalogs of publishers who marketed the dialect songs. Black composers surely found black comic songs a way to enter the marketplace, but it was a complicated negotiation, with many doubters.

In his early career, Bert Williams performed in blackface to Walker’s stereotypical dandy character, and the productions mounted by the Williams and Walker Company remained in the frame of white expectations of black performance, in effect “staging race,” in Karen Sotiropoulos’s term.³⁵ Williams and Walker titled their first show *Two Real Coons*, as if to put their race forward as a measure of the show’s authenticity, as Fanny Brice nurtured the myth she was a child of the Lower East Side. While Williams’s signature song was “Nobody,” outside of the coon tradition, his partner George Walker was known for “Bon Bon Buddy.”

Bon Bon Buddy, the chocolate drop, Dat’s me
 Bon Bon Buddy is all that want to be
 I’ve gained my fame and ain’t “shame”
 I’m satisfied with my nickname.
 Bon Bon Buddy the chocolate drop. Dat’s me.³⁶

No matter their stage personas, Williams and Walker were impresarios who produced several musical shows that were to find places on Broadway and go on international tour, all the time negotiating various black-and-white prohibitions. The 1903 *In Dahomey* was the first all-black musical to appear on Broadway and went onto a successful London run.³⁷ The 1909 tour of *Bandana Land* involved a twenty-piece orchestra and seventy-five performers, including Aida Overton Walker, the company’s premiere singer and dancer (who had begun her career with the Black Patti Troubadours). As black theatrical productions achieved success, they were performed for black and white audiences (although in segregated seating) that put double consciousness to test.

The productions did not counter white expectations of black performance. Songs were generally in dialect and plots were set in the all-black environment. But David Krasner argues that the productions were really parodies, pointing

out that “No Coons Allowed” in the Bob Cole production of *A Trip to Coontown* was not about a character forgetting his place in the world but the injustice of the demand. After seeing the sign “No Coons Allowed,” the song concludes:

So he rush'd on downtown to a lawyer
 And told him bout the sign that he had seen
 He said, “Boss can't you sue the firm for damage
 'Cause I think that I've been treated mighty mean.”
 So the lawyer took the coon to the courthouse
 And the started in the courthouse with a crowd
 But his head began to swim
 When he saw that sign again
 O'er the courthouse door which read
 “No coons allowed.”³⁸

Indeed, the coon songs were not automatically accepted in African American communities, nor by all songwriters. Hogan's 1896 “All Coons Look Alike to Me” was considered a fighting song in some African American communities and by the time of his death in 1905, Hogan had been attacked by the black intelligentsia so many times he regretted he had ever composed it.³⁹ Critics of the caricature in performance included many of the black leaders in musical circles. Walker noted, “Nothing seemed more absurd than to see a colored man making himself ridiculous in order to portray himself.”⁴⁰ Rosamond Johnson made the point to his publisher, Edward M. Marks: “We want to clear up the caricature.”⁴¹ As Lester A. Walton, the cultural arts writer for the black newspaper, *New York Age*, wrote, “The disgraceful antics performed by white actors under cork, are, in the main, regarded as correct imitations of how colored people conduct themselves in everyday life.”⁴²

Williams, a follower of Booker T. Washington, thought change could be achieved incrementally, with delicate negotiations with white attitudes. He performed in blackface but in an act as we know that was not so dependent on blackface stereotypes. But, at his request, his contract disallowed white women on the stage with him, and he maintained a constant public attitude of equanimity despite insults and rejection. In 1910, for example, the cast of the *Follies* objected to his hire, views strongly overridden by Ziegfeld. When the cast of the *Follies* went on strike in 1919, even his best friend Eddie Cantor did not tell him, and Williams arrived to an empty theater while the rest of the cast was participating in the actors' strike parade. During the same years, he was also being criticized in the black press for abandoning black theater.⁴³

Earlier, Williams was a principal in one of the few black-owned music publishing firms, Gotham-Attucks firm, established in 1905. The firm published

songs from the Williams and Walker productions and others that were notable for their lack of grotesque images in cover art. The firm was short lived, sold in 1911, when it was clear it was not large enough to compete with New York's big firms.⁴⁴ In its time, however, the company served as a rallying point for a circle of black artists who would later figure in the Harlem Renaissance. One of those artists was Will Marion Cook, who, in 1895, made his Carnegie Hall debut as a classical violinist. A reviewer wrote, "He is the world's greatest Negro violinist." In the iconic story, the temperamental Cook arrived at the reviewer's desk. "I am not the world's greatest Negro violinists," he stormed. "I am the greatest violinist in the world!" Cook is said to have smashed his violin on the man's desk and swore he would never perform on the violin again. At any rate, Cook turned from classical music to the compositions of ragtime, then at its peak, and to the composition for the Williams-Walker musical shows. He did indeed pick up the violin again, as a member of the famous Clef Club Orchestra, which played in Carnegie Hall in 1912—for Cook the second time.⁴⁵

Like Cook, Rosamond and James Weldon Johnson were also middle class in education and ambitions—Rosamond educated at the New England Conservatory; James a diplomat, poet, and novelist. In 1915 they collaborated to mount *Walk Together Children* for orchestra and chorus. But serious composition from black composers was not easily accepted, and for many years the Johnson brothers turned to writing popular songs, often in dialect. Black composers could also find opportunity in writing for vaudeville performers, who were willing and anxious to give a hearing to new songs without much concern for the race of the author. The headliner Sophie Tucker heard the Canadian-born Shelton Brooks perform his song, "One of These Days." She purchased it, and utilized it as her signature over her long career. By such means, African American influences began to permeate into the broader culture in what has been called the "prehistory" of jazz.

Jazz Begins

"Jazz" was an imprecise term in the period, although it was beginning to be used to describe changes in the rhythm and pace, the use of instruments, and extemporaneous interpretations that were being brought to popular songs by black musicians and composers. These changes in popular music were advanced by annual Clef Club concerts that played in Carnegie Hall from 1912 through 1915. The concerts were the result of a collaboration of two organizations, the Music Settlement School for Colored People, established by the white violin player David Mannes and the orchestra of the Clef Club, established by orchestra leader and arranger James Reese Europe.⁴⁶

Europe was seeking to organize black musicians to gain jobs in New York hotels and private parties and established the Clef Club Orchestra as part of that wider move. For Mannes and his supporters, the concerts were seen as a way to take advantage of what was so constantly on the minds of the white Progressives—black musical talent. “They may have other gifts,” according to one white organizer, “but assuredly the musical gift is one. Hence, I see in this movement not merely a slight charity added to others, but a step fully equal in importance to anything that has ever been consciously undertaken in the way of helping forward the negroes.” This familiar refrain was now coupled with a new respect for ragtime considered to be, according to Mannes, “The only original contribution to music that has come from America.”⁴⁷

Europe’s symphony orchestra was filled by men who played different instruments from those of traditional symphonies. Europe included 47 mandolins and other stringed instruments and 10 pianos among the 125 spots of the Clef Orchestra.⁴⁸ The repertoire of the members was ragtime, spirituals, and musical comedy, as well those in the Western classical tradition, altogether resulting in a varied program that drew on multitudinous threads. Cook conducted a chorus of 150 voices in spirituals; and another choir of 40 boys and men sang a specially composed cantata by the classically trained Samuel Coleridge Taylor. Johnson played piano solos, Harry Burleigh sang, and the Versatile Entertainers Quintette provided the ragtime contributions. The significance of the concert was acknowledged by a black and white audience, all in evening clothes, and a lack of segregated seating.

A contemporary observer, however, writing in the African American newspaper *New York Age*, noted that the audience gave its primary hosannas to Cook’s “Swing Along,” which was played three times, and “The Rain Song,” one of the hits from *Bandana Land*.⁴⁹ The performance of a classical aria was dismissed out of hand by the reviewer for *Musical America*. What was successful, he wrote, was when the performers stuck to what they did best: certainly “natural-born musicians” but only in “their native vein.”⁵⁰ One reviewer for a white Progressive journal considered it had put to rest the fear that “the Negro musician would abandon the musical riches that are stored in his heart” in favor of music resulting from white manipulation.⁵¹ By the third concert, in 1914, *Musical America* took the group to task for playing too many popular favorites, the “vulgar dance music of Broadway originated by the tone poets of Tin Pan Alley.” More attention, and more feeling, should be paid to the old spirituals, the “negro music” that deserved to be preserved.⁵²

We might consider that the three annual concerts helped bury the coon song, elevated the spiritual beyond white nostalgia, and legitimized a range of innovative techniques that had emerged from black musicianship. But neither

the first concert nor its successors encouraged works if they did not have immediate popular appeal. The longer and more complicated works of Joplin, Johnson, Cook, or Taylor were not to get accepted into the concert-hall canon.

Europe took this new legitimization of black-influenced music into his career as society orchestra leader and arranger and conductor for the dancing rage of Irene and Ted Castle. In doing so he helped introduce the dances from the black community that became white vogues. Europe's success led the way for other black musicians to play in white venues—although the bands would be quite segregated on the bandstand. His own fame grew and he was asked to put together a band during his army service in World War I. The kinds of syncopated music that he introduced to New York white venues and, by way of World War I popularity, expanded into the hinterlands thanks to the growth of yet another new business, the recording industry.

Recordings

In 1913, after the Clef Club success, Europe was given one of the rare recording contracts given to African Americans at the time, and the first offered to a black orchestra. The contract was proof of Europe's proved popularity with the white middle-class audiences who were so wooed by the record companies. For the same reason, artists from polite vaudeville were invited to record. The Victor Talking Machine Company issued fifteen of Williams's titles beginning as early as 1901. Later Williams recorded for Columbia Grafonola, whose advertising featured Williams and Jolson in blackface clustered with the label's other popular artists: Al Jolson, Nora Bayes, and Ted Lewis's Jazz Band. While the record industry knew the value of known performers, the inclusion of a jazz band in their early lists suggests the industry was also in tune with audience demands.

The Edison Home Phonograph, the "machine for the millions," was first produced in 1896. By 1910, three companies controlled the phonograph industry, Edison, the Victor Talking Machine Co. (today's RCA), and Columbia (today's CBS). Record production was in the hands of the phonograph companies, because records could only be played on the machine they were designed for. As awkward as the system seemed to be, one estimate puts U.S. annual sales in the 1910s in the neighborhood of 30 million records.⁵³

Of all the early record companies, Victor was considered the most successful because it captured Enrico Caruso. Caruso would have been famous with any audience, vaudeville or otherwise. But to capture the world-famous Caruso as a product of a new technology was to provide a genteel imprimatur to the selling of phonographs. In a familiar trajectory, the wooing of the middle class resulted in ornate cabinets aimed at putting the new technology in the center of

the parlor. Beginning in 1906 with the sale of Victor's Victrola, the first major American machine to be sold in a cabinet, the grander pieces could cost a thousand dollars or more.⁵⁴

In this latest marriage of business and art, phonograph executives became the new musical impresarios. This set of gatekeepers did not bode well for enlarging musical tastes. Edison had his own strong views. He urged his piano arranger to emphasize the melody rather than "complicated music." He wanted "straight" tones and examined the grooves in the record in his search for fidelity. His own tastes ran to "heart" music, presumably the sentimental parlor songs. He did not like the blues, and he turned down "Sheik of Araby" because it was not true to his demand that songs be constructed simply. Vibrato was verboten, considered artificial and performer driven. His taste was absolute, even though he was deaf and made some of his musical decisions by clamping his teeth on the piano so the vibrations would reverberate through his skull. As his biographer notes, he was in a position to purvey his taste to the rest of society "and was not shy about exercising that prerogative."⁵⁵

It was another Jewish entrepreneur who was at the forefront of establishing black artists as recording stars and African Americans as record purchasers. In 1915, a successful European entrepreneur, Otto Heinemann, established the General Phonograph Company in New York to move his investments out of Germany. By 1920, Okeh recognized that African Americans provided an audience and released the first lateral-cut recording (a record that could be played on multiple phonographs) of an African American vaudevillian, Mamie Smith. Smith's recordings of "That Thing Called Love" and "You Can't Keep a Good Man Down" sold ten thousand copies each when marketed to a black audience by Okeh's advertisements in the black press. Such songs became, as the label had it, "race songs," thereby generally excluding most white Americans from their purchase. (The designation existed into the 1960s.)⁵⁶

Black artists recording for a black audience were encouraged in 1920 by the establishment of the first black-owned record company. Black Swan Records recorded a majority of black artists, and advertised with messages exhorting purchasers to make connections between purchase and black ownership. It also issued records beyond blues, ragtime, and comic songs to opera, spiritual, and classical music. Its advertising eschewed racist images that still marked the advertising of other record companies. Despite early success, including the introduction of Ethel Waters's first record, the company failed, put under in some part by the rush for the newly designated market of black consumers by Okeh and joined by Columbia, Aeolian, Ajax, Gennett, Brunswick, and Victor.⁵⁷

The white record companies' rush to capture black audiences was prompted by the availability of free music on radio after World War I. Record sales dropped

dramatically—Victor's by half. Prompted by the success of Okeh Records, Victor and Columbia also turned to "race records." The business strategy worked. Smith's 1923 recording of "Downhearted Blues" for Columbia sold two million copies in its first year of release and kept Columbia afloat in bad times.⁵⁸

The music of radio often relied on the performances and recordings of vaudevillians whose repertoires were composed of songs constructed in the first decades of the century. In recordings and performances by artists who disavowed the original dialect, some of the old coon songs lost their racist roots. However, parts of the tradition lingered on, as in movies to which Eddie Cantor took his blackface act. The tradition also came to undergird a famous contribution to what had been so much the concern of Progressives at the turn of the century, a prestigious national music. In 1935, George Gershwin described *Porgy and Bess* as an American "folk opera." The work was based on the play *Porgy*, written by DuBose Heywood, which had a popular run in the 1920s. Heywood and his wife, Dorothy, with Gershwin's brother, Ira, a Tin Pan Alley veteran, composed the lyrics. The dialect of the coon song remained ("Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man o' Mine" is the title of the famous song), as well as many of the white preconceptions of black life that prompted the genre, including violence, heightened sexuality, and caricature, all in a tragic rather than comic frame that removed opportunities for parody. Although major black and white artists have reinterpreted the work in ways that seek to remove a racist presence, its ongoing veneration provokes some questions.⁵⁹

Vaudeville, sheet music, dance halls, and recordings helped spread popular music across the country, and in doing so established an uncomplicated popular music vocabulary that was quickly taken up by the new film industry. The songs were so well known that musical accompaniment to silent film needed only a hint of the song for the audience to recognize the song and its meaning. As a movie critic wrote at the time, "One can use just the title of the popular songs, or the first few lines of the chorus."⁶⁰ Theater musicians relied on such songs, since they themselves knew them better than the classical music that theater owners, in their upscale ambitions, sometimes preferred. However, the use of popular songs helped establish film along lines of easily accessible genres. From the beginning, it seemed clear film was to fall back on what had gone before.

CHAPTER 4

Silent Film

The Private Experience

We in the audience are privileged characters. Generally attending the show in bunches of two or three, we are members of the household on the screen.

—Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture*

Vaudeville did not easily give up its place as the nation's premiere entertainment, much to the distress of the film industry. "The American public is vaudeville mad," the trade magazine *Moving Picture World* declared despairingly in 1910.¹ "Our patrons are demanding more and more vaudeville," said one exhibitor the same year. "You see, the motion pictures are too much alike."² Moving pictures, the *World* agreed, are "not keeping pace with the public's demands."³

Charges that audience tastes were being disregarded seemed at odds at a time when the movie industry was offering films to suit every taste for audiences who had made moviegoing part of their day-to-day lives. In 1909, New York City had more than 340 movie houses and nickelodeons, with a quarter of a million people going daily, another half million on Sunday, and by the following year movies drew a weekly attendance of 1.5 million people—a fourth of the city's population.⁴ By 1911, ten to twelve thousand theaters or nickelodeons nationwide⁵ were devoted solely to what was called "nickel madness."⁶ In that year, some seventy film companies existed worldwide, forty in the United States. Movies were "an epidemic over the land."⁷ By 1913, the New York Motion Picture Company was turning out two films *a day* on its eighteen-thousand-acre Hollywood lot.⁸ In Chicago, the settlement house founder Jane Addams found it difficult to attract young working women to a healthy day in the country if it interfered with an evening at a movie.⁹

The movies were indeed drawing city audiences, but they were the immigrant audiences of working-class neighborhoods, willing to pay a nickel for a movie if it could include a few vaudeville acts. When movie men talked about vaudeville killing “the business,” they meant they had not found a way to turn film into middle-class entertainment. A study at the time described audiences as “composite.” “On the Bowery we have seen Chinamen, Italians and Yiddish people, the young and old, often entire families, crowded side by side.”¹⁰ As Kathy Peiss notes, movies changed the nature of working-class leisure, less separated by gender, age, or ethnicity than other leisure pursuits.¹¹ Eventually, movies would also include class in that mix.

We might consider that although movies would develop along lines of genres, the multiplicity of viewpoints looking upon the screen did not encourage common understandings of what was on the screen. Enclosed in the dark, prohibited by convention to share responses (no clapping, no appreciative hoots and hollers outside of comedies), the realistic mode of story telling that characterized American movies invited private, not communal experiences. This marked a departure for American popular culture, which had thrived on the participation required by vaudeville, popular song, and popular dance.

Gentrification

The motion picture trade press was at war to defeat vaudeville, seeking to follow the vaudeville model by turning movies into an entertainment favored by the middle class. Gentrification of movies offered a strategy to overcome the perception begun in the nickelodeon era that movies were most known for providing sites for lustful encounters. By the 1910s, film companies were responding to the call by producing films on epic themes that lent themselves to elaborate casts and scenery in breathtaking recreations.

But such films did not eschew lower-class audiences, who could enjoy the spectacular and the story as much as the next person, another lesson from vaudeville. It would be wrong to consider that literary works and subjects that we now might consider middle class were always middle class. As Lawrence Levine reminds us, Shakespearean works were widely known in the nineteenth century because of touring shows and the use of Shakespeare in schools.¹² Vitagraph’s decision to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* to the screen in 1908—an ostensible response to the critics to be more highbrow—was as much a popular choice as a highbrow one. The emphasis on biblical subjects similarly dipped into a shared knowledge base that could be brought to life in spectacular recreations of common understandings. Like Alice Guy Blaché’s *Life of Christ* (1906), considered a benchmark in the history of narrative film making,¹³ films based on the Bible

could not take liberties with the story itself when audience members had their own sense of ownership of the material and wanted reflection of the stories in recognizable ways.

Although Bible stories did not become the staple of feature films, familiar kinds of stories, in settings that emphasized verisimilitude, characterized American filmmaking. The hard edges of familiar tropes offered audiences the security of a handhold—there could be no confusion about what a movie was ostensibly “about,” as there had been no confusion about a “dumb” act or an acrobatic act in vaudeville. Like vaudeville, multiple interpretations were not forbidden; unlike vaudeville, the public setting of movies was incidental to the private experience of viewing them. We might consider that audiences came to experience movies in the same way that readers, whether the middle-class readers of novels or the working-class readers of the story papers, interiorized plots and characters.¹⁴ The screen absorbed its viewers with films that eschewed any reminders that it was not what it seemed, diminishing and even extinguishing the communal nature of the surroundings. Members of an audience came to be absorbed, one member at a time, in the most popular form of film, storytelling in a realistic mode.

Thus, in this most elastic of forms, American film—with few exceptions—did not take fanciful flights that the technology allowed. One of the most famous of the early French films, Georges Méliès’s *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), told a story for sure, but it was a fantastical one. In contrast, another famous film of the following year, the Edison Company’s *The Great Train Robbery*, was realistic in its setting, from the real train, to a booking office that looked like a real booking office, to passengers who looked like passengers, and a set of believable villains. *The Great Train Robbery* succeeded not only in telling the story but also in telling the story in what seemed to be realistic terms, unlike *A Trip to the Moon*, in which, indeed, the moon winces when struck by a *papier-mâché* rocket.

In the thousands of films that followed, whether in the chase scenes in comedies, the cowboy and Indian confrontations, or the stories of the innocent young women put in jeopardy—no matter how ludicrous the premise, U.S. films were characterized by an adherence to an approximation of reality. Street chases were on real streets; cowboys and Indians were on real horses; and young women were tied to what looked like real train tracks. Film was valued for its ability to approximate real life, not for its imaginative reach. A participant in the making of a 1906 film noted that, even if the films were silent, the public taste was “so exacting in the matter of realism that in order to make the pantomimes as lifelike as possible, the performers are required to talk as well as to act their parts.”¹⁵ Filming in Los Angeles, the Selig Company had an arrangement with

the Los Angeles Fire Department that allowed them to shoot during actual fire fighting calls to capture the realism necessary for their fire movie specialty.¹⁶

To maintain the emphasis on realism, plots needed to represent some degree of plausibility. In the 1890s, movies had thrived on “actualities,” that is, filmed glimpses of everyday life. In the same period, however, reformers who were mounting art exhibitions for settlement houses noted that the preferred paintings were those “in which a story may be read, rather than for mere landscapes.”¹⁷ Audiences quickly tired of actualities without a story to go with them. The young woman tied to the train tracks escaped from the incoming locomotive, but only in a plot device in which she or her savior actually untied her ropes. She was not set free by a miracle or magic.

Accessible stories in realistic settings were so powerful a combination that audiences found themselves absorbed in the story as it unfolded, like an unseen presence on the sidelines of the story itself. The movie experience became different from those of other popular entertainments, more passive than reciprocal and more private than communal. But it was the kind of filmmaking that seemed to serve all its stakeholders, certainly the entrepreneurs, who could attract a wide swath of audiences in a formula that lent itself to an industry model of replication; the reformers, who thought they had discovered a new source of uplift; and the audience, whose fantasies could be indulged as frequently as the movies changed.

The Turn to Realism

Certainly less known than the French filmmaker Georges Méliès is the American filmmaker and studio founder, J. Stuart Blackton. Blackton was an English immigrant and a founder of Brooklyn’s Vitagraph Studio. But Blackton started in vaudeville as “Komika Konjurer” and learned further lessons about American popular culture as a cartoonist for Pulitzer’s sensational *New York Evening World*. Blackton’s move into moviemaking was prompted by entrepreneurial opportunity, but he had a fascination with the medium that led him beyond the usual Edison-like shorts. Using stop-action photography, Blackton had produced *The Enchanted Drawing* by 1900, where an artist-actor draws a face, a cigar, and a bottle of wine. When the actor appears to remove the drawing of the cigar and wine, the face reacts with disappointment, thus ushering in Blackton as the “father of animation.” Other experiments followed, but none more captivating than *The Princess Nicotine* in 1909. Here, a gentlemen smoker is amazed by a diminutive fairy who appears at the tip of his cigar in an imaginative and humorous film remarkable for its use of stop photography. *Scientific*

American could only marvel at the realism of the little fairy, missing perhaps the point of its imaginative thrust.¹⁸

Meantime, at the Edison studio, Edwin S. Porter, even as he was advancing the techniques of narrative film making, experimented with animation in *The "Teddy" Bears* (1907). Based on the fairy tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, the film includes a joyful segment of dancing and tumbling teddy bears—a minute-and-a-half sequence that, in a period when movies were allotted a day or two for production, took a week to shoot. Despite the animation, *The "Teddy" Bears* was a darkly told satire: the Theodore Roosevelt character ends up shooting the kindly parental bears, although Mama Bear reels and staggers to her demise with the élan of a cowboy star.

About 1912, as film technology improved, there was a renewed interest in the techniques of what were called “trick” films, especially the use of the double exposure. Several pictures used the double exposure so actors could play dual roles, such as Edison’s *The Corsican Brothers*, Kalem Studio’s *The Parasite*, Selig’s *Merely a Millionaire*, and Essanay’s *Day Dream of a Photoplay*. Mary Pickford played a dual role in which, thanks to double exposure, she could be on screen with herself. Some directors also used the double exposure to express a character’s memory, the “flashback” technique of literary production. But whatever the use, the overarching realistic storytelling frame was not broken. One exception was D. W. Griffith, as in the 1914 film *Home Sweet Home*, in which the protagonist rises toward heaven, a visual expression of the sentimental storytelling of the day.

By that time, Porter and Blackton returned to the business along lines that it was developing. Porter as Edison’s best-known director, and Blackton as studio head. Blackton’s studio had its “Vitagraph Girl” and the “Vitagraph Dog,” produced Westerns and comedies starring John Bunny, the most popular comedian until Charlie Chaplin, and eventually became the largest movie production company in the world. As the representative studio of the new industry, Blackton moved the studio into films that placated reform critics while courting the middle class. Following *Romeo and Julia*, *The Life of Moses* (1910) appeared, in five respectable parts.

But even in the grand historical epics, the emphasis was clearly on a perceived realism. Sets—when films moved inside to studio production—had to look like what they purported to be. For historical films this meant that ancient Rome had to look the part—a demand that was nowhere more fully met than in the films of Griffith, with his thousands of extras and the construction of huge sets. The same rule certainly was in place for more modest productions. Child actors in film (Mary Pickford was the great exception) had a shorter shelf life than in vaudeville, which was better prepared to disguise aging. Moreover,

performers were expected to conform physically to common understandings of certain types. Actors who wanted to play Indians needed to be dark complexioned, as did performers who played any role than involved distrust, from vamp to villain. In the 1915 *The Birth of a Nation*, Griffith used white actors in dark makeup to portray African Americans. This was not the usual exaggeration of blackface makeup, but makeup that sought to emulate, with some nod to realism, African American skin tones. Indeed, film eschewed blackface and toned down ethnic exaggerations that had designated them as comedic performance in vaudeville. In black makeup, but not blackface, actors in *The Birth of a Nation* portrayed their characters in leering stereotypes that dipped into white America's most racist memories but had none of the mitigations of vaudeville blackface.

In its time, the emphasis on realism reflected a belief that looking the part was proof of truth telling, a notion already at work in naturalistic fiction and commercial theater and culminating in nineteenth-century photography, which had come to be regarded as, above all, a document to truth. The moving picture inherited the photography tradition and was able to do so by the development of editing techniques that disallowed nonlogical intrusions. The trade press constantly railed against filmmakers who did not pay enough attention to detail, such as allowing an actress to stay in the same dress even though the action was to take place over several days.

Early filmmakers also understood their audiences were men and women who were observers of their environment, not only finding astonishing things to look at in what surrounded them, but also finding ongoing surveillance useful for their own survival and ambitions. Commercial culture provided plenty of opportunities for visual guidance. The department stores turned their plate-glass windows and in-house displays into compositions of middle-class life; popular magazines and newspapers provided behind-the-scenes glimpses of society and their manners in Sunday rotogravure sections; and advertising, ever more spectacular by way of electrical displays and billboards, carried messages of instruction on how to achieve the promise of the nation. Indeed, for immigrants and rural newcomers to city life, many of life's decisions could be based on information gained from simply looking.

We should also note that issues of spectatorship were not limited to the up-and-coming. The newly wealthy found it necessary to display their wealth ostentatiously, to show that it was equal if not better than their compatriots. At the height of the Gilded Age, Thorsten Veblen coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption" for such display. But conspicuous consumption was based on the expectation that someone would be interested enough to look: after all, an audience is required if status is to be acknowledged. For all classes, including

the wealthy, what could be seen was the currency of the time. From the grand houses of the wealthy to the neat lawns and tidy houses of the growing suburbs, better-off Americans identified themselves pictorially, understanding they were as scrutinized as they scrutinized others, all necessary in a country where fixed place was not assured and the spectacular reigned.

We might consider that stories helped make sense of all that was seen. Storytelling in a recognizable mode provided audiences with the comfort of benchmarks. One account of the rise of the sensational press in the nineteenth century rests on the assumption that lower-class audiences, ostensibly living chaotic lives in their struggle to survive, wanted assurances, not demands, in their popular culture.¹⁹ Film took its stories from previous forms and genres that provided familiar storylines: the Western heroes would act courageously; the true heroine would be rewarded; the unrepentant would be punished. Framed in real-life settings—the document to truth—the comfort level of such plots could only be affirmed. As the movie critic Stephen Bush wrote, in 1911, “The modern audience everywhere, but nowhere more than in this country, loves the story that pours a drop of balm on the heart; it likes to see the brighter side of life.”²⁰ This was a formula long followed by other forms of popular culture—providing recognizable worlds, including familiar plot lines, that could supply interesting things to look at, lessons from which to learn, and reassurances to be taken home. To a generation that had little experience with predictability, including those who were newly wealthy, the real-life setting of film stories surely was a guarantee that a story had value.

The Problem of the Nickelodeons

In cities, vaudeville had been the primary place for film showings up until 1906 or until the advent of nickelodeons. But early films could be found in fairgrounds and amusement parks as well as vaudeville theaters, high and low. Early films fit into the episodic and sensate conventions of the popular entertainments in the opportunities they offered for display and showmanship. Audiences were taken on breathless train rides, shown exotic places, amazed by objects enlarged, motion stopped, slowed, or speeded, or history recreated—as it happened, often in New Jersey, the site of much early filmmaking.

Yet unlike many vaudeville acts, which went unchanged for years and still drew audience interest, audiences grew tired of such filmed acrobatics. Nor did vaudevillian audiences take to filmic versions of vaudevillian staples. For all its standardization, vaudeville centered on the relationship between an audience and performer. This was not so clear in early film. Whether seen once or many times, a filmic outcome was always the same and seemed much more a

reflection of the mechanistic culture than the potpourri of the vaudeville stage. Thus, even after films moved into theaters of their own, some distributors still found it helpful to include vaudeville acts as part of the film program.

After the initial novelty had worn off, film never found overall acceptance in vaudeville houses. It was not until movies moved to their own venues that film began to build audiences on its own merits. The first audiences were largely working-class men and women who attended movies in converted shops in immigrant neighborhoods. Although the first nickelodeon was in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, New York was the center of the nickelodeon boom. Doing their best business in thickly populated areas, nickelodeons flourished in Jewish zones of New York's Lower East Side and East Harlem. But nickelodeons quickly blossomed in all cities run by hardscrabble, small entrepreneurs in the neighborhoods they served.

Nickelodeons became another of the cheap amusements of working-class life, cheaper than vaudeville and favored by children and young working people whose contributions to the family income gave them an increasing amount of independence from family control. Like amusement parks, dance halls, and the electrically lit shopping districts, movie theaters gave to young working men and women freedom from parental surveillance and a place to meet and flirt with the opposite sex.²¹ The cover of darkness allowed new freedom for young couples, but it was their absorption in the movie, pretended or not, that provided the real cover for dalliances.

The early nickelodeon films, however, seemed suited to audiences of the neighborhoods, and in the early years movies were made in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, in neighborhoods not so far from the people whose stories they sometimes told. From its Brooklyn studios, the Biograph Company starred its "Biograph Girl" Florence Lawrence in *Romance of a Jewess* (1908), the story of the heroine's preference for a poor Jewish bookkeeper over the wealthier, although still Jewish, candidate procured by a matchmaker. However, by 1913, *Unto the Third Generation* found Lawrence as yet another young Jewish woman struggling with her marriage choice, the pull between the sanctioned and the unsanctioned,²² but this time an interfaith one, consistent with a broader audience.

Despite these examples, film scholars note that the early film companies did not frequently address the lives of their immigrant or poorest audiences,²³ and when they did address their lives, it was not in sympathetic ways. Rather like the rube acts of vaudeville, early short subjects ridiculed country bumpkins who did not understand city life. In *Another Job for the Undertaker* (1901), a bumpkin ignored, or could not read, a sign that warns tenants not to blow out the gas jet (as you would a candle) and is gassed to death for his lack of knowledge of

modern life.²⁴ In 1902, in *They Found a Leak*, new arrivals search for a gas leak with a lighted candle and are blown up. In *Hot Mutton Pies* (1902), a Chinese character is chased by offended customers when his mutton pies turn out to be composed of cat meat, combining the popular chase motif with notions of racial behavior. Moreover, as Noel Burch observes, in comparison with French film, the U.S. films in the primitive period up to 1908 “represented an irritating ugliness,” flat, crude, and impoverished, not so different from the life of many of their audiences.²⁵

Early movies were hardly promoting radical change, but in their nickelodeon setting, they still gave pause to the nation’s moral governors, who saw in darkened theaters not so much the opportunity for hard-working young people to enjoy themselves as much as the opportunity for sexual misbehavior. There were legitimate health concerns in the early nonventilated theaters (and accompanying smells did not bode well for the attraction of an upscale audience). And in their belief that the nickelodeons could only be a lower-class activity, Progressive reformers saw movie theater sites as opportunity for the recruitment of young women into prostitution rings. Film was also coming into criticism for its appeal to the naughty side—skirts blowing on windy city streets had been a favorite ploy of the early episodic films. Naughtiness in film also faced more difficulties than it did in vaudeville. The vaudevillian could nuance his or her act one audience at a time, but film was permanent, any breach there for all to see repeatedly and unequivocally. And finally, there was the realization that young men and women were most interested in the social interaction in going to the movies, a site where, as Desiree J. Garcia writes, they “could exercise a degree of cultural expression.”²⁶

Going to the movie as social interaction was a long-lasting tradition in theaters courting black audiences who, as described by Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, took over neighborhood theaters as a public space, roamed the aisles, greeted friends, and refused to give primary attention to what was on screen or the accompanying stage show.²⁷ Ethel Waters said such an audience “did whatever they pleased while you were killing yourself on stage.” But if the performer was good enough, “They’d scream, stop, and applaud until the whole building shook.”²⁸ For early audiences of movies, the movie was less important than the amateur nights, the vaudeville acts, the songs, and the freedom to express noisy opinions, active participation rather than immersion into what was on the screen.

For a bundle of reasons, then, there was concern in some quarters that the nickelodeon did not provide sufficient lessons in proper behavior. In vaudeville, working-class audiences, high in the galleries, had been schooled to contain their wildest enthusiasm from examples set by the audience in the more

expensive seating below. No such constraint controlled the working-class audiences in nickelodeons. Moreover, in a period when working-class alignments were generally feared, the working-class movie audience was composed of the least favored of the immigrants, Irish, Jewish and Italian groups, some already prominent in labor and in the dreaded socialist and anarchist movements. Anti-film forces came together to oppose nickelodeons *en masse*. It is significant that the first major attack on film, in New York in 1907, was carried out not by the confiscation of film but by the closing of nickelodeon theaters.²⁹

Caught between Progressive reformers wanting film to serve uplift purposes and official concerns that lower-class people should not congregate together too easily, a new course for movies was clearly the road ahead. As in vaudeville, gentrification opened the way for movie audiences whose middle-class members could set standards of behavior. Secondly, the development of editing techniques that emphasized story lines and cinematography that dramatized the personal ensured that the movie experience would be a private affair. Even in the grandest of epics, movie audiences were most worried about whether Lillian Gish would escape the impending predicament, fall in love with the right person, or otherwise go on to lead a happy life after the film was over.

The Rise of Narrative Film

In 1903, concerns about the nickelodeon gave rise to the National Board of Censorship. Municipalities also claimed for their police the right to oversee the movies in their cities, including the lobby posters in the theaters. In its campaign to make movies acceptable to the broader audience, the trade press supported such moves. The *World* warned that lobby posters should not be so lurid as to offend “the trade of the upper classes.”³⁰ One lobby poster that was the focus of police action was regarded as “offensive to the police and disgusting to all clean-minded persons.”³¹ Neither early movie moguls nor the trade press challenged censorship activities but considered them necessary to attract the desired audience. The shift to middle-class audiences was particularly welcomed by the immigrant entrepreneurs, who sought their own respected place in American life. As Neal Gabler writes of the movie magnate Adolph Zukor, “Changing the tone and status of movies was a more direct route to the higher echelons of legitimate, genteel America—which Zukor had always regarded as his rightful place.”³²

Not incidentally, however, the 1907 financial panic had driven the immigrants from even this cheap amusement, making the need for a wider base more necessary. In making theaters more appealing to more people, silence and other viewing proprieties were encouraged by directives from the screen. The

introduction of musical accompaniment also helped quiet audience chatter and led the audience through the plot. For some films, a live narrator was added. As a proponent of the technique, the trade paper *The Moving Picture World* advised that an on-site narrator could direct “wild, irregular and uncontrollable” audience response to become “the spokesman for the particular crowd of human beings that make up his audience.”³³

Theaters began their move from the cheap neighborhoods of the nickel-odeons to palaces that eventually rivaled those of vaudeville houses. The trade press provided ongoing examples of possible architectural decoration. Respectable women were encouraged to include a matinee as part of their shopping afternoon, a practice already promoted by vaudeville. In the role of a quasi-police force, watchful and uniformed ushers patrolled the aisles. But in the end, it would be the picture that made the difference. Even in its thrust to appeal to the middle class, plots were to be easily accessible “without too much mental effort,”³⁴ much like the advice given to would-be songwriters. This was an interesting imperative at a time when middle-class audiences read the monthly quarterlies that routinely covered arts, world culture, and history; the same audiences who supported traveling Shakespearean plays and symphonies, whose newspaper readership made U.S. readership the highest in the world, and a generation who built prairie schools and established major universities open to all. However, the business-oriented film exhibitors sought to appeal to the middle class on an assumed respectability and did not encourage attempts to stretch film in terms of the medium’s ability.

The push to storytelling was also accompanied by an industry crusade to make films on American themes, in some part to compete with French films whose major production company, Pathé Frères, dominated American film distribution before 1908.³⁵ Naturalistic storytelling grounded in realistic *American* detail seemed one way to emphasize authenticity (although it did not stop Pathé from making Westerns). Movies on American themes told in naturalistic ways could only suggest that American values were the counter to the gossamer notions of the French—an American canard from colonial times—tangible, measurable, and democratic. Such American themes were offered up as universal, without ethnic, race, or class differences. Carl Laemmle even named his studio “Universal,” as if to denote that his films would introduce overarching themes that could knit all together. The film studio Columbia similarly chose to designate itself by way of an updated national symbol of female purity. Miriam Hansen writes that making films to represent a generalized universal had the consequence of serving “to mask the institutional suppression of working-class behavior and experience.”³⁶

Movie theaters certainly suppressed assumed working-class behavior by their supervision of behavior and in films by characterizing the working class in stereotypical ways, generally as brutish, alcoholic, and stupid. But such stereotypes and others were already familiar to readers of Western and sentimental fiction. Early filmmakers made fewer demands on their audiences because they utilized established symbol, common understandings, and popular memory as part of their storytelling arsenal. The cough early in *Camille*, or indeed any sentimental play, forewarns the audience that *Camille* is not likely to survive the three acts; the introduction of a sickly child in sentimental fiction gave notice to a coming plot turn about innocence and a better life in the hereafter; Western heroes as taciturn was the convention that signaled the hero drew his strength from inward sources (with implications that talkative men are less manly, even homosexual). These conventions provided a shortcut to telling the story and referenced (what were presented as) shared beliefs and would appear over and over again in American film. Film emphasized the tropes of appearance: tall men as more virtuous than short men; small women as vulnerable; blonde hair was an indication of openheartedness; and dark hair (in women) a sign of the secret and untrustworthy. Early film surely repeated presentations of the suffragette as the man hater, the child as innocent victim, the drunk as evil (and working class), and the poor widow as vulnerable. Early works demanded that a female in distress be rescued by an attractive young man and the orphan child by a warmhearted, preferably rich young woman.

Edwin S. Porter, director of *The Great Train Robbery*, is responsible for anchoring in film the convention of the shot in the back as the act of the unredeemable. In the film, the robbers stop the train and make its passengers disembark. When one passenger (played by G. M. Anderson, later “Bronco Billy”) objects, a robber shoots the passenger in the back. He falls dead in front of his horrified copassengers. The scene transforms the film from a common cowboy story to one that is suddenly serious and demands a certain plot trajectory. The trope has been standard in American visual culture since that time, as in the television series *The Sopranos*, in which the character who most seemed on the brink of reinventing himself, Vito, the gay mobster, returns to his true colors when he shoots a man in the back after a small accident on a rural road. It is not a surprise that Vito is killed by his mobster compatriots, ostensibly because of his gay behavior, but hardly a death that can be mourned by the audience given the out-of-bounds nature of the previous shooting.

For audiences, the use of these conventions informed them of the plot trajectory quickly and without unnecessary plot machinations—the technique that had been useful for authors in the nineteenth-century story papers, which had to conclude their complicated plots in an assigned word length. Middle-class

audiences who may not have been so familiar with the conventions, had to learn them, as the working class had to learn about middle-class expectations. The trade press, however, complained about the similarity of plots that the conventions encouraged (while also demanding happy endings and uplifting morals). Like vaudeville performers, filmmakers also found ways to make the conventions hold meaning, depending on the viewer.

G. M. Anderson, the director and star of more than a hundred Bronco Billy Westerns, did not see himself making art for the ages. Still, while his partner was in Chicago and ran their film-production company, Essanay, Anderson and his tiny film crew traveled to the Colorado Rockies in order to set his films in an authentic landscape. Again, the emphasis was on verisimilitude: “Some of the Eastern companies try to use the Adirondacks,” according to Anderson in a piece appearing in the *Denver Post* during the making of *The Heart of a Cowboy*, “but they don’t get the effect that the Rockies give.”³⁷

Yet even in this most defined of genres, Bronco Billy movies did not exist in a closed world of cowboy myth, and Anderson’s interest in authenticity went beyond the Rocky Mountains. *The Heart of a Cowboy* revolves on an action in which a young girl unthinkingly gives a photograph of herself (specifically defined in the script as a “Kodak”) to “Bad Steve,” the picture’s villain. Moreover, she had inscribed the picture. The hero is made to wonder at the young woman’s real nature. Fortunately, honest explanations turn out to be sufficient, and all ends well.

It hardly takes much reading between the lines to note how the simple plot could reverberate in the time. More modest than the train in *The Great Train Robbery*, the appearance of a snapshot camera in the middle of a Western landscape is a reminder that the film is not so much about capturing a mythic past as the negotiation of past and present. For the young women who comprised Bronco Billy’s fan base, the dilemma of a modern heroine who still must not pass herself around too freely is clear. Even Bronco Billy may have doubts about the purity of the fairer sex. And from our own perspective, the film is still open to more interpretations, altogether a hefty load for a film shot in an afternoon or two.

William S. Hart, the great cowboy star and director after Anderson, is recognized for increasing realism in the Western film by way of more elaborate production values, even as he upped the level of formulaic sentiment: bad men were reformed by the love of a good woman or the admiration of a child; cowboys were attached to their horses; a good man could be identified by the way he cherished his sister; and the West was the cradle of values. Encased in high production values, Hart films in this mode were popular but not so interesting. But by 1916, *Hell’s Hinges* is considered a classic as its hero cleans up a corrupt town by burning

it down.³⁸ These were evangelical themes of purity at a time when America was being dragged into the corruption of a European war. But it is noteworthy that the metaphor was connected to the destruction of a town that had all the appearances of a real town. Present-day critics see the symbolic action, but audiences at the time saw the terror of burning buildings (when fires were common) and the potential loss of lives and possessions. Whether audiences also saw the burning buildings as a reflection of a puritanical cleansing is not so clear, but surely they understood loss, fear, and the vulnerability of everyday life.

By that year, big pictures aimed at the middle-class audiences were a major part of film fare. Triangle Films was formed in 1915 precisely to appeal to genteel tastes by a “reflowering of the story telling arts”³⁹ in uniting D. W. Griffith, Thomas Ince, and Mack Sennett’s Keystone Film Company. Given the three powerhouses, the plan was to increase admission to \$2, a hefty price increase. But audiences, middle class or not, were not willing to pay the big admission, and it was the Keystone productions and Douglas Fairbanks’s acrobatic masculinity that kept the company afloat. The studio had failed to take its own advice, movies that would be “made for the masses with appeal to the classes.”⁴⁰ The company seemed unaware that the storytelling art, at least in film, was not as simple as serving a single, perceived class interest and underestimated the barrier of high admission. Film, in any case, was increasingly becoming an enclosed, privatized experience in which class values were incidental.

Absorption

A member of a film audience was not a “visitor” to a movie, as one critic had it, sitting on the sidelines with a critical eye, but rather expected to be taken up into the film. “We the spectators are not part of the picture, nor is there supposed to be a camera there making a moving photograph of the scene,” the trade-press critic Frank Woods described it.⁴¹ Unlike some of his compatriots at the *World*, Woods frequently criticized editing and filming techniques when action was shot only in a directly frontal way, as if playing to theater audiences. Movies, which had begun as mini documentaries of life on city streets, came to deny the acknowledgement of an audience at all.

There could be no breaking the illusion, and the famous shot when the bandit aims directly at the camera in the closing frame of *The Great Train Robbery* was not repeated in other films. All the emphasis on the details of realistic depiction was aimed at establishing a private world that the audience had happened upon. Film stories, as Rollin Summers wrote in 1908, “must be unfolded bit by bit, without explanation, from a prologue or lecture.” The dialogue screens should not give away too much lest there be a “substantial loss of illusion.”⁴²

This demand for audiences to take whole the film as it was presented meant the audience was to believe not only what was on the screen but also what was beyond the screen. When a cowboy came galloping into a frame, the audience was expected to understand that there was another part of the landscape (the “latent,” as critics call it), that was part of the story, even though it was not shown. The audience was directed to supply the absent parts in order to make sense of the movie as it was shown—an engagement that helped movies have a personal hold.

Absorption in film stories took a leap forward when filmmakers gave in to public pressure and began naming their stars. Anderson and Hart had become named stars because they were entrepreneurs and directors rather than simply actors and had the power to promote themselves on their own terms. In the first decade of the century, film actors did not get credited by name, but frequently appearing players had become stars anyway (“The Vitagraph Girl”). Seeking an edge over his competitors, Laemmle of Universal Studios was the first to name his stars, and as fandom took hold, pictures were promoted on the basis of their stars. By 1911, Stuart Blackton began *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, which promoted the films made by the Edison trust licensees, but by 1915, *Photoplay* was well established and fan magazines were on their way.⁴³

Increasingly, audiences seemed unable to appreciate that film actors were performers. Because of the strength of the narrative film, film performers were supposed to be the kinds of people they represented in their films (another aspect of the “latent” in which audiences had been trained). Such expectations served to straitjacket many talented film actors. Audiences resisted Pickford and many other stars in any kind of role other than what had made them famous. This meant that Pickford, clearly growing older, still played child parts, a demand of realism that audiences did not mind overlooking because Pickford herself had become a trope, a collection of assumptions that audiences had brought with them to any of her films before the first frame appeared. Carrying their star personas from one story to another, the stars became the framework of the film experience for the fan and part of the storytelling apparatus.

The advancing art of cinematography helped in the making of stars. Films moved away from filming actors in full figure in favor of the medium and close-up shot. In theatrical performance, the close-up view of the entertainer was limited to those members of the audience who could afford the seats close to the stage. Audience members in the less-expensive seats in the back of the theater and in the balcony saw actors on the stage in diminishing sizes, making it a privilege of those in the more expensive seats to see close up.

But in film, every member of the audience had equal access to the star when the camera moved in. Here, looking up in the darkness, audiences experienced

a face in the proportions they had only experienced in life in the most intimate setting—as a child looking into the face of a parent, the face of a lover, or perhaps in the toe-to-toe challenge of a threat—all situations representing primal emotions. Driven by every filmic artifice to surrender their critical distance, ruled by theater protocols that disallowed any connection with other audience members, and now dominated by facial images of stars who had adopted a naturalistic acting style that did not seem to be “acting” at all, who could not be drawn into a special relationship? Vachel Lindsay, a poet of the era who was a great admirer of films, found no film more compelling than “the intimate motion picture.” Such pictures, he considered, drew their strength from the sense of enclosure, walled off from larger concerns. “We in the audience are privileged characters. Generally attending the show in bunches of two or three, we are members of the household on the screen.”⁴⁴

More and more—comedies again the exception—movie watching was an individual experience. Song leaders had been useful in vaudeville theaters, drumming up the crowd into shared responses, but in movies audiences did not want on-site narrators distancing them from what was on the screen. Absorbed in the story and its characters, American movies—although anchored in the most realistic detail of any of the popular arts—nonetheless provided filmgoers a kind of out-of-body experience, one in which they surrendered their will to the choices of the camera. Progressive reformers noted that movies were encapsulating, viewing that as an unhealthy passivity. Mary Heaton Vorse observed an immigrant audience: “Outside, the iron city roared; before the door of the show, the pushcart vendors bargained and trafficked with customers. Who in that audience remembered it? They had found the door of escape. For the moment they were in the depths of the forest following the loves of Yellow Wing and Dick.”⁴⁵

Racial Barriers

Interestingly, the movie Vorse chooses to discuss was a story of an interracial romance. Romance stories were the most obvious expression of the emerging freedom to cross barriers of race and class, a permission that was encouraged by the magic carpet of the roaming camera. Sessue Hayakawa was a highly paid star of the silent era (and transitioned into talkies), who transcended Asian stereotypes in his roles. More directly addressing race, D. W. Griffith’s *Broken Blossoms* (1919) turned on the tentative romance, albeit doomed, between an Asian man (played by the non-Asian Richard Barthelmess) and a young white woman (Lillian Gish). But one boundary remained largely uncrossed. Early films occasionally included a black character in the usual roles of servant, which

nonetheless provided work for a few black film actors. *The Nigger* (Fox 1915) turned to the theme of what has been called the “tragic mulatto.” In this exposition, a governor of a state discovers he carries a drop or two of blood from a distant black relative and must resign himself to leaving politics. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1918) was yet another iteration of the familiar story. More typically, there were many short films that simply reaffirmed racist views that now seemed proved by a camera that was up close and personal: *Wooing and Wedding of a Coon* (1905), *The Masher* (1907), *Rastus in Zululand* (1910).⁴⁶

In the early era, one film company, the white-owned Norman Company, provided films for black audiences that used black actors for scripts written for white performance. In 1916, one of the era’s black film actors, Noble Johnson, along with his brother George, founded the Lincoln Motion Picture Company. The company produced a handful of films aimed at African American audiences and sought to reflect African American life until Noble Johnson gave up the helm in 1920. By that time, Oscar Micheaux had begun another film production company, which produced *The Homesteader* in 1918 and concluded its run in 1948 with *The Betrayal*, forty-one films in all, carrying out his themes of uplift and rise to the middle classes by way of moderation and a middle way.⁴⁷

Absorption and Action

Nonblack audiences had been found to be pliable to industry direction. The well-established advertising profession—perhaps the most pervasive influence of all—had long understood motivations that pushed individual consumers to purchase one by one. But this form of mass behavior was not the same as mass behavior excited by a religious service, a large sporting event, a mass march, or even the common enjoyment experienced by a vaudeville audience. On those occasions, audience reaction was strengthened and excited by the knowledge that the person in the next seat was participating in the same response. But “mass,” as the description was to apply to film and later broadcast, was simply a way of notating that many individuals came to hear similar messages at more or less the same time, not to distinguish how they experienced them. The parasocial relationship of the individual with a media product—film, book, television and often recorded music—is one that best exists in isolation, as if to maintain the fantasy, rather than in a traditional large-group setting. In the storytelling mode that American film came to embrace, the experience was a private one.

An individualized response to movies suggests that movies are not so likely to move audiences to mass responses. Propaganda movies in World War I would certainly seek to do this, although it is not so clear that pro-war films were any more effective than any of the propaganda vehicles at the time. It is notable

that the nation's most racist film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), did not evince a wave of terror toward black Americans. This is not to say that *The Birth of a Nation* did not further embed racist attitudes in white Americans that would later result in detrimental actions—a wave of terror against black Americans did occur in 1919 after World War I. But in its time the film did not lead to white mass reaction toward blacks that one might expect from a powerful film on a tinderbox subject and opposed by the NAACP in a public campaign.

The NAACP campaign against the film sought to have the film banned by means of the country's substantial censorship apparatus, but failed on most counts. Pennsylvania was one exception, its new state censorship board demanding changes before the film could be shown.⁴⁸ But most audiences and reviewers saw the film as an accurate portrayal of its period, and the NAACP, changing its tactic, warned that the movie would promote riots. But that certainly did not occur among white audiences, and it was only in Boston that a disruptive demonstration, led by the firebrand William Monroe Trotter, gave any indication of possible turmoil from African Americans and their white supporters. That African Americans in general did not object was likely because most may not have seen the film due to its admission price and its distribution pattern to theaters drawing white upscale audiences. While the NAACP mounted a national campaign, in the end the organization wondered if the effort had been worthwhile. What the campaign had done was to give additional publicity to the already heavily promoted picture and set it on the path to its great profitability. Griffiths was subsequently pursued as a filmmaker because *The Birth of a Nation* had made so much money.⁴⁹ Moreover, Griffiths charged the NAACP campaign maligned his free speech rights, spurring him to make his next movie on the subject, *Intolerance*. The NAACP, in cooperation with Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Institution and many others, mounted an expensive film response to *The Birth of a Nation* called *Birth of a Race* (1918), directed by Johnson, who could not rescue the film from its multiple influences, and the film was poorly received in all quarters.

Scholars today do not consider mass media products by themselves sufficient to provoke audiences to immediate action. After decades of research on the influence of television violence, for example, researchers concluded that the main impact of such televised violence was to add to general cultural notions of fear of "mean streets."⁵⁰ This kind of impact is not inconsiderable, and in some ways more dangerous as prejudices are removed from their immediate levers to permeate into national culture. But what that perspective suggests in the context of *The Birth of a Nation* is the power of a film story to negate any immediate call to action. Griffith, in fact, had at hand a massive arsenal of familiar tropes, none more powerful than white American attitudes to black

male sexuality vis-à-vis white female virginity. In addition, the film is set in the historic sweep of the Civil War, was among the most spectacular of films to date, and instigated new and exciting film techniques. But despite all that, it is the demand of the plot that keeps the film in a private world of a spectator. As the white family is threatened by the newly freed slaves (much like the pioneer family keeping off an Indian attack), the cavalry, now in the flying costumes of the Ku Klux Klan, come galloping full force to the rescue. Order is restored by the birth of a supposed new nation, one in which black Americans have once again been subordinated, and the film ends in a triumphant parade celebrating white domination.

If Griffith's purpose in the film was to rouse his white audiences to street action, he might have been more successful if the plot had called for the death of the family as threatened by the black troops in the penultimate scenes. But as the Ku Klux Klan rides to the rescue, capes flying, hooves pounding, the film story gave the preferred ending for an audience encapsulated by the plot and attached to its characters. In the private world of film viewing, the problem had been solved. In any case, without a sense of themselves as a body, an audience uprising would have been unlikely.

We may consider that individualized response to a mass media message was early film's greatest discovery in shaping the narrative of the medium. For the entrepreneur, the dominant force in U.S. film, individualized response was only important in that enough individuals, however they read the film, came to the movie theater. Like vaudeville, even genre films could be stuffed with messages, sometimes simply by the casting of a particular star who could certainly counter the authorship of director or writer. But surely the reception of individualized messages in the controlled environment of film viewing was not one to create common bonding. While creative artists utilized the ability of even the most standard of American film types to carry diverse and even subversive meanings, such individualized response set at ease any fears that an American film would bring its audience to its feet in a single body. No film audience ever stormed the Bastille.

CHAPTER 5

Censorship, Class, and Culture

You are going far away
But remember what I say,
When you are in the city's giddy whirl
From temptations, crimes and follies
Villains, taxicabs and trolleys.
Oh,—Heaven will protect the working girl.

—“Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl,”
Edgar Smith, lyrics, A. Baldwin Sloane, music

It is in the interest of social progress itself, that hard-won liberties must be restrained by the demonstrable needs of society.

—Jane Addams, in Christopher Lasch, ed., *The Social Thought of Jane Addams*

The development of the popular arts in the first part of the century had been all about negotiating entrepreneurial ambitions vis-à-vis the will of talent and the constrictions of society. Entrepreneurial ambition had largely succeeded because it had driven the will of the talent underground, into subversion and code, while accommodating demands of reformers. However, reformers, once in the chicken house of popular entertainment, were not so easily dislodged. Even at a time when vaudeville had been more or less accepted, Progressive reformers cast eyes across the rest of the entertainment landscape and found much to worry them. The worry was most attached to perceptions of women, their protection, their proprietary, and their roles, and few cultural products in the period could avoid the impact.

From polite vaudeville to films that took on lofty themes, popular culture had joined other business enterprises of the day in marketing to the female

consumer. Such marketing took advantage of the nineteenth century elevation of women to near sainthood. American women had not been gloried so much since the nation's founding. The marbleized female form so popular in public buildings represented all manner of desired attributes. Politicians gave ongoing homage to the American woman and the home that she represented. Newspapers and magazines—supported by the new home products of the industrialized age—sought her eye by crediting her intelligence as the home's major decision maker. From the rhetoric of the public place to the marketplace of day-to-day life, American women were represented as the powerful center of the family and its moral universe, to be protected from political hurly-burly, the unsavory world of making a living, and the lurking dangers of sexual improprieties. The heroine of Robert Grant's 1900 novel *Unleavened Bread* proclaims, "To be an American woman meant to be something finer, cleverer, stronger and purer than any other daughter of Eve."¹

This desire to maintain women's position as the nation's moral center conflicted with new ideas of sexual freedom. In 1906, Elsie Clews published *The Family*, which, in outlining sexual practices throughout the world, came to be associated with (and excoriated for in the sensational newspapers) her belief that cohabitation without marriage could be beneficial to women.² The artistic community was at the forefront of the call for sexual freedom, Isadora Duncan, Mabel Dodge, Margaret Sanger, and the Greenwich Village bohemians viewing sexual expression as one of the ways to combat the Puritan legacy. But the call for sexual freedom put its advocates at odds not only with the conservative members of society, across classes, but also with the Progressive reformers who saw the sexual exploitation of women and girls as one of the grievous wrongs of the time. As much as the courtroom, cultural products served as the territory where these views were disputed.

In actual fact, of course, women were not protected—not in the workplace, not in the marriage contract, not in access to education or opportunity. But the myth that the nation's real responsibility in protecting women was in maintaining the myth of her special place was strong and considered worthy of the effort to maintain it at a time when some Americans viewed the nation's womanhood unhealthily in the process of change. Influences were multiple, coming from streams of immigrants whose female members, the other daughters of Eve, were not considered so pedestal worthy, from the New Woman, the young assertive women of the time who fought for the vote, and even from the reforming woman, who had taken her power of moral judgment to the larger world as "moral housekeepers," campaigning against the liquor industry, for one, which threatened male prerogatives. Moreover, always hovering not far below the surface of white American anxiety was the perceived danger of black sexuality vis-à-vis white American women. The issue could not be ignored when the black heavyweight boxer Jack

Johnson was seen in the company of white women. Publicity about Johnson's dalliance with a white woman has been credited with the passage of the 1910 "White Slave Trafficker Act," known since as the Mann Act, which prohibits travel across state lines for "immoral purposes." The white slave act, with its Johnson impetus, marked an unhappy cohabitation of two, nonnecessarily agreeing streams: the Progressive reformers who sought to protect endangered young women and those who assumed protection was needed because of the assumed primitive nature of lower-class and outsider Americans.

Undergirded by the nation's deep-seated fear of female susceptibility to black male sexuality, the bottom line of maintaining control of perceived societal outsiders seemed to rest on issues of sexual propriety. The nation's cities and states turned to the control of vice by commissions that defined it primarily as sexual transgression by the underclass. Progressive reformers on the commissions were most concerned with vice in terms of prostitution as an avenue for the young women they were committed to protect. Organizations such as the New York Committee on Amusement and Vacation Resources for Working Girls offered clean-living alternatives to the popular culture that was feared as the first step to moral decline. Jane Addams deplored that there was no recreation in a city other than the commercial—"vice deliberately disguised as pleasure."³ Addams considered popular music particular damaging. "The trivial and obscene words, the meaningless and flippant airs run through the heads of hundreds of young people for hours at a time while they are engaged in monotonous factory work. We totally ignore that ancient connection between music and morals which was so long insisted upon by philosophers as well as poets."⁴ The Illinois Vice Commission considered the abolition of ragtime dancing.⁵ Indeed, popular entertainments, operating in a ruthless city setting that preyed on the vulnerable, set the stage for, in Addams's delicate phrase, the most "ancient evil," that is, prostitution.⁶

Vice, Vigilance, and Vigor: Anthony Comstock

The most powerful protector of sexual propriety, however, was not a Progressive at all, but Anthony Comstock, a child of New England and a product of the Civil War. His mother died when he was a child and his older brother died at the Battle of Gettysburg. Comstock served for two years in the Union army, where he was appalled by the depravity of army life. From 1865, when he was discharged, to his death in 1915, he viewed the rift of the nation in terms of the failure of the government to uphold national moral values. Gaining early support from benefactors, Comstock headed up the committee he formed, the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, which lobbied for stringent laws to supervise untrammelled sexual and other unwholesome behavior. In 1873,

Comstock won his most important battle when the U.S. Congress prohibited the mailing of obscene material through the U.S. Post Office, a provision that served to take his antiobscenity campaign to the nation and, indeed, came to be the authority under which even political speech was controlled in World War I. Comstock was also appointed, for \$1 a year, special agent of the U.S. Post Office, a position he held until his death. From that power base and from support from an amalgam of wealthy backers as well as members of the working class, his impact on American life and culture was significant.

By the dawn of the new century, Comstock had already enjoyed power for nearly thirty years. He had a special place for vice as sexual impropriety, pursuing and imprisoning at various times, the era's "free love" advocates, Victorian Woodhull, Ezra Heywood, and D. M. Bennett. The Woodhull scandal, involving the downfall of the renowned preacher Henry Ward Beecher, established Comstock's efforts to regulate, as Nicola Beisel writes, "the sexual side of woman's liberation, particularly her right to control her reproduction, to refuse intercourse with her husband, and to express her sexuality outside of marriage."⁷ Comstock pursued his goals relentlessly. In 1878, in an undercover operation, he brought to trial the aging abortionist Madame Restell.⁸ In 1902, in another campaign, Ida C. Craddock, "High Priestess of the Church of Yoga," slashed her wrists and inhaled gas on the day of sentencing for circulating books and pamphlets "explaining her peculiar beliefs, built up from a conglomeration of Oriental religions."⁹ Margaret Sanger fled the country rather than face charges of indecency prompted by the mailing of birth control information. Comstock closed down houses of prostitution and gaming halls, and his efforts increasingly turned to cultural products.

In 1887, Comstock famously raided a gallery that was exhibiting copies of French art. Comstock particularly looked askance at replication, which he interpreted as a way to multiply offense in proportion to the enlargement of the human gaze. Twenty years later he struggled out of his sickbed for his 3,000th arrest, the proprietor of a photograph gallery.¹⁰ A painting in a museum drew few viewers, but once reproduced, Comstock regarded its dangers carried outward. In 1913, he called for a dealer to remove a copy of Paul Chabas's prize-winning "September Morn" from his window (as he put it, "Too little morning and too much maid").¹¹ He found crime reporting of the sensational newspapers despicable because reportage was shared by a large audience. There was something inherently wrong with the mass gaze, he believed, a sense that desecration occurs when a view is shared indiscriminately. He famously defended the beauty of the female form by saying a nude girl in her room was one thing, but "if a lascivious eye looks through the keyhole, then it is wrong for her to be stripped of her clothing."¹² Comstock was equally suspicious of public and private spaces, seeing, as Alyssa Picard notes, the potential for good and

evil coexisting in public and private spheres.¹³ He was suspicious of the many-roomed Victorian homes with their opportunity for the practice of secret vices. Indeed, Comstock insisted that it was necessary to patrol the middle-class venues of theatrical amusements as much as the lower-class entertainments of the dance halls and nickelodeons.

Comstock was not a man of compromise. He had no tolerance for any behavior that did not comport with the values that he was committed to uphold. Like the Puritan Sam Adams, he operated on the principle that virtue demanded unceasing vigilance, and when vice was discovered, it was to be wrenched from its root without restraint. He cared little for the ridicule that was heaped on him in 1906 when he swept into the New York Art Students League to seize its magazine because it included nude pictures. He was always undeterred, knocked down stairs more than once by resisting vice mongers. He had the fortitude, the commitment, and single-mindedness of William Lloyd Garrison proclaiming slavery was the sin and stain on the national honor. In short, Comstock was more than a representation of leftover prudery from the Victorian age; his impulse was rooted in the earlier history of the nation that made his ferocity unswerving.

The vigor with which he pursued his ends also challenged the feminization of culture. Comstock, along with other male reformers of the time, particularly the clergy, took supervision of vice into male prerogative, an action that asserted that women were too delicate for the task when vice as untrammelled sexuality was serious enough to be considered the nation's most dangerous internal enemy. With male reformers at the helm, vice was not petty crime nor indiscretion but rather the tip of larger evils that demanded the muscularity of male leadership. Absolute in his opinions, physically unafraid, and never loathe to step into the dens of the worst iniquities, the soft and rotund Anthony Comstock was nonetheless a middle-class male hero, claiming territory for his gender out from under the legion of women reformers.

Middle Class

On several specific issues, Comstock was supported by the middle class in some regard because his defense of virtue had an anti-immigrant focus. At a time when nativist feelings ran high, Comstock's attack on vice and the immigrant districts of its practice provided some comfort that Comstock was holding at bay the immigrant values threatening to infiltrate a class that was intent on maintaining itself as distinct.

The American middle class was surely coming into its own in the first part of the century. Indeed, the urge to professionalize, to group according to like interests (a million members in the General Federation of Women's Clubs alone); to

relocate to the suburbs; to send their children to the new state universities; to read specific publications and to deride others; to want respectability and organization for sport; and to organize, classify and schedule whatever it touched, were all activities proclaiming middle-class status. Attention turned to cultural products, but less in the Comstock style of exorcism than in establishing moderate boundaries.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) established a Department for the Promotion of Purity in Literature and Art at the end of the nineteenth century. By that time, the organization had long held up the damaged home as its central trope in its battle against liquor. Illustrations of abandoned mothers and children and stories of the same were routinely part of American periodical literature encouraged by the WCTU. But in the new century, WCTU patrolled its own vineyard, first partnering with Thomas Edison in producing early silent films aimed at middle-class audiences. By 1908, the WCTU was promoting a "gospel of pictures," making available inexpensive reproductions of famous paintings. As the WCTU put it, "Art brings into the home a refining and elevating influence that molds characters, and the demand for good pictures in the home is one of the delightful phases of modern culture."¹⁴ Offering reproductions of accepted masterpieces suggests the approval of reproductions for a middle-class home, giving over the ownership of original art to the elites while distancing the middle-class home from the sentimental magazine art "suitable for framing." The middle class seemed not so interested in aping the well-to-do, but to have belief in their own judgments when it came to art and culture.

The middle class, indeed, had responded affirmatively to the marketing of popular culture to their perceived taste and shaped "polite" vaudeville, excised of unacceptable language, and "polite gaiety," the musical comedy form that rejected both high-class opera and concert saloon vaudeville. This was a broad audience, as Michael Newberry notes, mostly urban, prosperous with a "feeling of its own identity and taste,"¹⁵ not so eager to bind themselves to the standards of purity alone in choosing their cultural products. For this audience, Comstockery was too broad a brush. The *New York Times* seemed to reflect a nuance of irritation with arch references to "Comstock at It Again."¹⁶

Comstock, in fact, clashed with Progressives, even the reformers who sought to protect the working girls. Part of the reform package was an acknowledgment of the sexual double standard, and Progressive women sought protection for women in marriage and divorce, and some were proposing legalized abortion. Women who wanted to change notions of gender provided fodder for silent film comedies, usually by portraying the men in their lives as forced into female roles. But clearly middle-class audiences were undergoing their own kind of

double consciousness, balancing their desire for independence and the desire to monitor others, a “split focus,” as Michael Leja calls it. “Such viewers guardedly or covertly engaged mass culture, while simultaneously they watched anxiously as their social inferiors more openly enacted amusement.”¹⁷

As in vaudeville, sexual innuendo had always been the crux of middle-class rejection of popular entertainment even as it accounted for some of its fascination. Yet there could be no charge that popular culture alone was introducing the subject. Sexuality was on the public agenda in several ways: in magazine popularizations of work by psychologists Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud, in the reaction to Parsons’s book *The Family*, in public health concerns about sexually transmitted disease, in Johnson’s open relationship with a white woman, and by reformers who argued that young women went into prostitution because they could not find jobs to support themselves. Nonetheless, sexuality was most in the public sphere because of the “white slave” fear. From the introduction of the theme in a 1907 magazine article, the nation was in the grip of fear that young female immigrants were being regularly recruited for the sex trade by other members of their group.¹⁸ The interest followed a period when plays about prostitution and “fallen women” were the subject of fascination for the New York stage.

The fact that the established classes were attending such plays made no difference to Anthony Comstock, who included their venues in his unceasing war on the products of culture even if it meant challenging middle-class judgments. The urbane middle class responded in ways that maintained some control over their own decisions. But it was not a clear victory by any means.

The War on Theater

The most famous of the fallen-women plays was *Camille*, whose title role of decline and death had been played by the major actresses of the day. But when considering the French play *Zaza* for U.S. production in 1899, David Belasco changed the story of a love affair of a French prostitute to one of a lower-class woman whose motive is love and who is represented sympathetically. Moreover, in the Belasco version, *Zaza* perceives the error of her ways, but rather than dying, she renounces sexual freedom and “rises from wanton to moral woman.”¹⁹ The play was well received, critics applauding the character’s return to virtue. For the middle-class audience, the play reified class values that the lower classes were more likely to have sexual dalliance than themselves and the corollary that virtue (that is, control) was the entry key into the middle-class life. But, rather optimistically, the play suggested that to err did not damn the unfortunate woman forever, and gave some indications of a growing worldliness.

Belasco's success with *Zaza* did not help Clyde Fitch with the play *Sapho*, which prompted a New York obscenity trial despite its approval by theatergoers. The role of Sapho was played by Olga Nethersole, known for her sensual portrayal of women and famous for the long and lingering "Nethersole Kiss."²⁰ She was also the play's producer, and it was at her request that Fitch, the most successful of commercial American playwrights of the time, adapted Alphonse Daudet's novel to the stage. The plot turns on the affair between the experienced Sapho, who has taken on the name "Fanny" to hide her previous life that had produced a child, and a country boy with promise. The first act ends with a famous scene—memorably replayed in the film *Gone with the Wind*—wherein the young man carries Fanny upstairs to bed. In the second act, however, the lover discovers Fanny's former life and storms out. Fanny fails in an effort to poison herself; fortunately so, for about that time the child's real father returns to assume his duties. In order to gain a measure of respectability for her child, Fanny accepts his offer of marriage, although her heart is broken. But she has redeemed herself by putting motherhood first, finally.

Even with this nod to redemption, the plot was contrary to the accepted formula. Sapho is the deceiver and the seducer, her sexuality exists even after child-bearing, and she does not regret her affair, but mourns its end. And unlike the actress who had played *Zaza* by calling upon mother imagery, Nethersole played Sapho with body language of seething sexuality, a factor that no doubt contributed to her arrest by New York's vice commission on an obscenity charge. The actress came to trial accompanied by an explosion of public attention both to the sexual nature of the play and to Nethersole herself. Whether the plot of the play was moral or not took a backseat to an "obsessive" discussion by male commentators about the revealing nature of her trial clothing.²¹ The testimony seemed less about moral standards than regulation of the female body. After two days of trial, Nethersole was acquitted to a cheering courtroom and welcomed back to the stage by more huzzahs and applause from the woman-dominated audience, the "Sapho-crazed women," as the *World* newspaper headlined it.²² But the defeat of the charge was less a permanent success than a warning that audiences, at least Broadway audiences, were not to be arbiters of cultural products.

His inability to close down *Sapho* put Comstock in his warrior mode when George Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was set for Broadway in 1905.²³ Its plot was well known from its British troubles. Mrs. Warren is the owner of a high-class bordello whose profits have paid for her daughter's Cambridge university education. After initial shock at discovering the source of the family's support, the daughter comes to adopt the economic explanation that prostitution is not a lapse in morals but exists because it is the only choice for poor women.

Comstock shot off a warning letter and promised arrests. The actor/producer Richard Daly objected. A *cause célèbre* ensued, one in which Shaw, from his London base, publicly excoriated Comstock: “Comstock’s reputation grows with every blackguard he imprisons. A man in that position generally ends by seizing respectable citizens by the collar, raising the cry of blackguardism against them, and throwing them into prison.”²⁴ Daly agreed to make cuts, and the New York Police Commissioner William McAdoo sat in the first-night audience, script in hand, to make sure they were followed. At the end of the third act, Daly appeared in front of a sympathetic crowd. “If public opinion forces this theatre to close and this play is to be withdrawn it will be a sad commentary indeed upon twentieth century so-called civilization and our enlightened new country.”²⁵

The speech impressed the audience but not Commissioner McAdoo, who ordered the play closed. McAdoo observed the play did not draw the “usual first night audience at a New York theatre. Most of these people came in their own carriages and it looked like an opera first night.” He concluded the audience’s acceptance of the play did not seem a good test of overall acceptability. “The dog in this instance is rather high bred, and the ordinary run of dog may have different ideas.”²⁶ It was an astute observation, suggesting politicians were aware of their supporters—not the men and women who could afford to go to the theater regularly, but the day-to-day men and women who did not. The nickel-odeons were able to stay open in New York thanks to a mayor sympathetic to working-class audiences.²⁷ Nonetheless, as in *Sapho*, the court did not uphold the ban. The play went on to success on tour, in some part because the lead actress, Mary Shaw, positioned the play as a social document and a “woman’s play” in her talks at women’s clubs during the tour.

Comstock was fighting an uphill battle with theatrical productions. Percy MacKaye’s comedy *Anti-Matrimony* arrived at the Garrick Theatre in 1910 without a fuss, even though the play raised the idea of unmarried men and women living together. Finally, in 1913 Comstock met his match in the form of the nation’s founding public relations “counsel” (as he styled himself), Edward L. Bernays.

Bernays was asked by the actor and manager Richard Bennett to find a way for the production of a French play about venereal disease, *Damaged Goods*. The play had been turned down by multiple theater owners because of the subject, even though the disease was a scourge of the time and often debilitating to women infected by their husbands. The play turned on such an occasion, although the woman in question sets herself on a path of revenge by infecting as many other men as possible, a good-woman-gone-bad theme writ large.

Bernays’s campaign garnered quick and favorable attention.²⁸ Calling on the Progressive reform impulses of the upper-middle class, Bernays positioned

the play as a public-service vehicle. Setting up a phony organization under the magazine *Medical Review of Reviews*, Bernays sold \$2 memberships that allowed purchasers to participate in the only activity of the “Sociological Fund”—that is, attendance at a private performance of the play. Bernays was able to garner the interest of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a purity advocate, who sent invitations to his own list of antiprostitution activists. The play was now presented as important to the eugenics movement, another call to the times that was based on anti-immigrant feeling. The names of the well known who had accepted the invitation were published. Although New York’s Mayor Gaynor grumbled that it was highly implausible for woman to go on a revenge spree as described, the play was presented in two private performances without a hitch. Bennett himself became something of a reform hero as the play was invited for paid presentations around the nation. And the play eventually had a successful New York commercial run. After the success of the *Traffic in Souls*, which set the tone for purported social documentary films, *Damaged Goods* was made into a film with Bennett in yet another reprise. Meantime, Bernays’s career was made as he moved on to represent many theatrical campaigns.²⁹

Bernays’s Sociological Fund actually became a real organization that numbered well-known Progressives in its leadership. Following in the steps of *Damaged Goods*, the fund sponsored a new play, *The Guilty Man*, to promote reform legislation that would allow all children to bear the name of their fathers regardless of the child’s birth status; most remarkable for its time, the fund sought to legalize abortion. Less prompted by reform instincts, however, the survival and success of *Damaged Goods* led to the commercial presentation of works that all turned on sexuality, although in a do-gooder frame—*The Lure*, *The Traffic*, *The Fight*, *The Battle*, and *The House of Bondage*.

Clearly, Comstock’s role in theatrical censorship was about over. In 1914, he filed a complaint against a scene in the play *The Beautiful Adventure*, but its producer, the well-known Charles Frohman, responded by announcing that he would restrain himself from countersuing for slander.³⁰ Comstock died in 1915, a figure of fun but still fighting censorship battles. In 1914, Europe already at war, Comstock instigated a federal charge of indecency based on the mailing of a novel that returned to the theme of the downfall of a working girl. The courtroom was packed with the “literati,” who had long despised Comstock and were delighted when the publisher was acquitted.³¹ But his overall record of censorship was significant: the arrest of 3,700 people and the burning of more than 50 tons of books, nearly 17,000 photographic plates, and numberless pictures. His impact upon American entertainment was long lived. It drew adherents who continued his campaigns, including the Catholic Church, later primarily influential in the adoption of a motion picture code, already in the

making in 1909 when censors decided audiences needed moral guidance in the movies they watched.

Film and Industry Accommodation

As we know, the early nickelodeons had caught the eye of reformers as a meeting place for lower-class couples, more dangerous than the dance halls because darkness was purported to be a cover for sexual misbehavior—to say nothing of the health and fire hazards the theaters presented. But since early films had continuous showings, including those on Sundays, a New York church campaign to prohibit Sunday entertainments served to issue a warning to theater owners. In 1907, all of New York's vaudeville, opera, and concert halls were shut down for two weeks in a test case. It was the fear that movie house licenses would be revoked on a similar basis that instigated the formation of the Moving Picture Exhibitors Association (MPEA), which, by political maneuvering, avoided the inclusion of a similar ban for films.

While the freedom from the blue laws bolstered film exhibition, it also invited increased attention from reformers. Most dangerous to the early film exhibitors were charges that movie houses were recruiting places for white slave prostitution rings.³² This was not the hysterical concern that it might seem to modern eyes, and the phrase “white slavery” was unconsciously used by reformers and the press up to World War I. Moreover, although movies had avoided the 1907 Sunday prohibition on showings, the continuing Progressive and religious uproar led to a brief shutdown of 150 movie houses in 1908 by order of New York Mayor George McClellan as well as the establishing of the National Board of Censorship in 1909.³³

For some Progressive reformers, films offered unparalleled opportunity for education, as voiced by John Collier, author of one 1908 investigation: “Here is a new social force, perhaps the beginning of a true theatre of the people, and an instrument whose power can only be realized when social workers begin to use it.”³⁴ Collier looked for cooperation from the rapidly bureaucratizing movie business, now including the MPEA and the Motion Picture Patents Company, the group Edison set up to patrol his interests. What would need to go would be the erotic and voyeuristic fantasies of street life—glimpses of undergarments from skirts billowing in the wind; the “slumming” comedies that equaled voyeuristic excursions into the low life; the crime films that could lead to bad examples, and the translation of cheap ten-cent cowboy fiction into film.

But these were often the kind of movies that the young working poor liked to see. Writing in 1909, Addams—although often critical of films—was not unaware of their pull: “‘Going to the show’ for thousands of young people

in every industrial city is the only possible road to the realms of mystery and romance; the theatre is the only place where they can satisfy that craving for a conception of life higher than that which the actual world offers them.” The movies, she concluded were “a veritable house of dreams.” Addams, like Collier, thought movies could be used for uplift, broadly conceived beyond simply “educational films.” In 1907 she tried showing movies at her Chicago settlement house and supported appropriate movies as a recreational outlet in which the city should be involved.³⁵ The Progressive journalist Mary Heaton Vorse was similarly sympathetic with the role movies played in the lives of the poor. “It is a door of escape, for a few cents, from the realities of life. It is drama, and it is travel, and it is even beauty, all in one.”³⁶

Indeed, the pull of movies to early audiences could only enhance reformers’ beliefs that movies were powerful enough to change lives—a power, interestingly, not accorded vaudeville. In film terms, however, the pupil of the eyes was regarded as a passive receiver when accosted by film images that seemed real. As the WCTU put it, “The vividness of impression is important. What seems to [*sic*] real and life-like will be remembered longer because it is more convincing.”³⁷ The head of the New York branch of a Florence Crittendon Mission, that is, a place for unmarried pregnant women, considered film dangerously influential, especially Westerns: “Hardly a week passes that some enterprising boys are not arrested as runaways, having started out to capture and annihilate the wild Indians with the somewhat inadequate equipment of two dollars and forty cents and a rusty revolver . . . these same children have been known to tie younger and weaker comrades to the stake and light bonfires, which have so injured the victims that several deaths are on the record.”³⁸

Given the assumption of the power of movies, Progressives supported some kind of moral censorship of film, as Vorse put it, “because a great amusement of the people ought to be kept clean and sweet.”³⁹

John Collier of the People’s Institute best represented this position, and it was not surprising that the newly formed exhibitors’ association, seeking some protections for the industry, asked Collier to organize a board of censorship for films shown in New York City. But Collier was no ruthless Comstockian, believing in a limited role for the government for an industry that met the definitions of a public service. In its first meeting in 1909, the Committee on Censorship condemned 400 feet of film out of 1,800 feet viewed, considered a modest start at the time, although the excised footage represented almost a quarter of the total. Nor would the board ban movies on the basis that a child might see something best appreciated by an adult. From the beginning, Collier sought to establish a reputation for reasonableness that would promote the organization of a national board. The new film producers group assented, and

by June a national board was announced, the National Board of Censors (NBC) funded by exhibitors and producers. As Daniel Czitrom describes it, “By 1914 the NBC claimed to have reviewed 95 percent of the total film output in the United States. Mayors, police chiefs, civic groups, and local censoring committees from all over the country subscribed to the board’s weekly bulletin.”⁴⁰ The press was generally approving. “The moral tone of the pictures now exhibited has been greatly benefited by the movement started in New York,” *The Century* magazine happily remarked in 1913, “known as the National Board of Censors.”⁴¹

To ensure reform approval, the film industry followed the example of commercial theater, turning to white slavery in a quasi-documentary mode that would still be an audience pleaser. The themes of the Rockefeller report and the popular understandings of prostitution were encapsulated in the film *Traffic in Souls*, released by Carl Laemmle’s Independent Motion Picture Company, always searching for new ways to be ahead of the Edison Trust.

The story is concerned with two lower-middle-class sisters from a modest but not tenement family who work in a candy store (notably, not the factories manned by immigrants). The younger sister is upbraided for lateness to work, suggesting from the later perspective of the plot, that she already embodies the susceptibilities that would lead to her downfall. The need of supervision is provided by her older sister, Mary Barton, a name recalling the founder of the Red Cross, Clara Barton. It is Mary whose watchful gaze identifies the kidnapper and whose expertise will later provide the information to the police. (Clearly pleasing the exhibitors, the kidnapping does not occur in a movie theater.) On the one hand, Barton is the supervising Progressive female who must look out for the less prepared, and at the same time she is the family who must turn to the authorities for help, much as an immigrant family might find itself unable to handle a wayward child. However, Progressive notions are turned on their ear when the evildoer of the piece is found to be the man in charge of a Progressive-style purity league. From his offices young girls are bought and sold like commodities. From his second-floor perch, the whoremaster, respectable to the world outside, electronically surveys his brothel empire. Notably, Mary gathers evidence by use of a wiretap contraption, reminding us that technology is not just about industrializing workers, but can be society’s friend. But it is the police who will finally complete the rescue, returning Mary to her boundaries.

The multiple meanings brought forth by the class delineations of the characters are further complicated by a contrasting style of crosscutting—the whoremaster portrayed in delicate scenes with his daughter contrasted to his observation of the kidnapped women, which can reflect the simple contrast of one class with another to intimidations of incestuous longings behind class

trappings. What is interesting is that *Traffic in Souls* was not simply an attachment to middle-class morality. Characters and plot provided multifarious and polysemous interpretations for its audience, including marked suspicion of moral guardians.

More than thirty thousand people saw the film in its opening week. Within a month it was playing twenty-eight theaters in New York. Its success was reflected in a cautious optimism in the Progressive press. Two editors from *Outlook* magazine reviewed the film, noting that it had obvious falsifications but in general thought the film would be useful as a teaching tool in settings that could be supervised—that essential Progressive requirement.⁴² Still, the review set off a small storm of protests—charges that the genre in general encouraged hysteria, that men were not punished for their roles as procurers or customer, and that “borderline women who have little active mentality” made the problem all the more difficult.⁴³ But the quasi-social documentary feature film genre was established and set off a flurry of similar films. On the face of it, reformers had won their battle to set movies along the high road, but the rush to social documentary movies served movie makers in practical ways: keeping reformers at bay while introducing sexual material that could not get introduced in other ways. Popular culture audiences were skilled in finding their own meanings, whatever the formal framing.

The Institutional Bias

When Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* was published in 1902 it may have easily brought on the Comstock ire because books were necessarily distributed through the mail. It did not, largely because its publisher, Doubleday and Co., immediately distanced itself from the book and, in fact, tried to smother its publication. The book had been accepted by Frank Norris, the naturalistic writer, when he was serving as editor for Doubleday at a time when the firm was considered one of the most forward-looking book publishers. But when Nelson Doubleday read the manuscript he tried to remand the decision. The book was only published because Dreiser held Doubleday to the contract Norris had authorized. However, it was published in limited numbers, not sent out for review, and was thought to have been put to death until Dreiser was able to resurrect and republish the book in 1907, when its story aroused common repugnance from those who believed literature should be a guide to moral behavior, avoid economic themes, and uphold women’s innate superiority.

The story has to do with a lower-middle-class young woman who leaves her hometown, tellingly named “Columbia,” for New York City. She can only live with her sister as long as she can pay her rent, sisterhood having its limitations.

Carrie does not find work that can support her. Discouraged and without resources, Carrie picks up on an offer to become the mistress of a traveling salesman, for whom she keeps house and presumably provides sexual relations, although there is no mention of sexual intimacy in the whole book. Subsequently, Carrie agrees to a similar relationship with a new man who promises more. Upon his failure to provide, she utilizes her discovery that she has slight talent for the stage, and the book ends when she appears to be launched on a minor stage career that allows her to be self-supporting. It is her second male companion who is abandoned and dies in poverty, as might be predicted from the coffinlike reverberation of his name, “Hurstwood.”

Far from the nineteenth century’s popular fiction, the book is anything but melodramatic. Carrie does not shed a tear throughout her tribulations. She seems removed from any struggle over transgression and makes no protestations of love to provide a rationale for her sexual impropriety. In fact, she is the most ordinary of women when stripped of the pretenses of the time. Dreiser does not poke into her brain or emotions and readers, like the audiences in the book, only see any liveliness when she is on stage

Dreiser had based the plot on the lives of his sisters. Born in a large, poverty-stricken family, Paul Dresser, Dreiser’s older brother (who adopted Dresser as his stage name) and Dreiser had found success in popular culture. Dresser was a performer and a successful songwriter; Dreiser worked for newspapers then established a career as a major magazine editor. But his sisters survived much the same way as Carrie, by means of quasi-prostitution in which they attached themselves to men who could support them. Although Progressive reformers often drew attention to the issue that low female wages encouraged prostitution, Carrie’s semirespectability put attention on a less-spoken theme that marriage was a bartered affair.

The *Sister Carrie* controversy clearly impacted upon another novel that was being written at the same time. This was *Susan Lenox Her Fall and Rise* by David Graham Phillips, the muckraking journalist and novelist (shot to death in 1911 by a deranged man). However, *Susan Lenox* makes *Sister Carrie* look subtle. In a two-volume, nine-hundred-page opus, Phillips takes Susan from her illegitimate birth, her forced marriage, a love affair, a descent into day-to-day street prostitution, her “rise” by way of her role as a high-end mistress to a former pimp who puts Susan at his side to help in his own respectability campaign—all by the age of twenty-two, when the novel ends. Like Carrie, Susan’s ultimate rise is by way of theatrical opportunity—clearly a theme that women’s survival depends on her willingness and expertness at performing roles that are thrust upon her. What really saves Susan, however, is a recognition that she must be cognitive about her life, and rather than repeat the endless pieties that are

available for women, she must think “like a man,” using what she has had hand for her own advancement. What she has at hand is the primary currency in the marketplace: youth, beauty, and fashion, all of which she must nurture and use as her launching pad. “The successful women won their success by disposing of their persons to advantage—by getting the favor of some man of ability . . . There was no other way open to her . . . She must not evade that fact; she must accept it.”⁴⁴

Susan Lenox had been accepted for publication at the height of the white slavery epidemic, but its publication was constantly deferred by its publishers which “feared that its frankness might be misunderstood,” as the *The Bookman* put it.⁴⁵ It was not until 1931 that Phillips’s widow was able to get it published as a book, although by that time its prewar setting dated the work.

Dreiser and Phillips broke the mold by refusing to sentimentalize sexual motivations. We might consider that the censorship was not about direct sexual references, but the authors’ refusal to be reticent about the role of sexuality outside of romantic love. While sexuality would increasingly play a part in American popular culture, it was in a framing of love and romance. But American courts, including the one of public opinion, considered sexuality in any other frame pornography, and book publishers self-censored their works until mid-century when challenges reversed court opinion. In the time, however, only masters of fiction were able to integrate the issue of sexuality in ways that could keep their books on the shelf. Edith Wharton’s *Age of Innocence* (1921) turns on the sexual desire of the protagonist for someone who is not his wife, desire suppressed by the economic barter that defined higher-class marriage. Cather’s protagonist in *Lost Lady* (1923) has to succumb to the status of mistress to a despicable neighbor in order to support herself. But such themes had to be integrated carefully. An Olga Nethersole school of fiction was not to flourish, and readers, like film audiences, were expected to read between the lines.

The resonance of white slavery fears held sway for some years. White slavery continued to be a dependable topic for the sensational press, but its permeation into middle-class sensibility was clear in the acceptance of the statue *White Slavery* for the 1913 Armory Show. Here, a traditionally sculpted alabaster nude seems to be literally on a slave block, restrained by a figure who may be African American and who is bartering for her sale.⁴⁶

The Final Frontier

Ministers regularly denounced the new novelty dances that accompanied popular music as the first step to damnation and prostitution. Dance halls were considered as much incubators of evil as the nickelodeons, and similarly seduc-

ing immigrant audiences. The conservative vaudeville managers kept the dance censors at bay by permitting only “skirt” dancing—that is, dances accompanied by such a bustle of flapping skirts that limbs were exposed for the shortest of seconds. Loie Fuller turned skirt dancing into art that took her on world tours with extravaganzas of pyrotechnics that made audiences gasp. They were not so much dances as Coney Island on stage.

The pressure for freedom of bodily movement pushed up from the bottom, but it was resolutely resisted from the top. Ballet—structured and known—was the acceptable cultural marker for the elite, while anything less indicated insidious influences of the lower sorts. But it was not the lower sorts that broke the boundaries of acceptable dance. The board of the Metropolitan Opera closed Richard Strauss’s *Salome* after one performance, objecting to Oscar Wilde’s libretto, “The Dance of the Seven Veils.” The dance was to represent the seduction that led to the beheading of John the Baptist, surely a graphic illustration of the power of the female body let loose. Wilde himself, imprisoned in Great Britain for breaking sodomy laws in 1895, was already a suspect author who seemed to be pushing boundaries into the unspeakable. The moderate Progressive magazine *Outlook* said the dance could not be easily described, enough that it was “impossible for any Occidental woman to look at it.”⁴⁷ Regardless of the censure, or perhaps because of it, “Salome” became a featured dance for Maud Allen and Aida Overton Walker, who each performed it in concert settings to emphasize the dance as high culture and avoid censure. But in Asbury Park, New Jersey, an alderman served notice on Mme. La Millas, a French dancer, that she would be arrested if she attempted to repeat her Salome, considered “rather risqué for Asbury Park.” Mme. La Millas complied, packing away her flimsy yellow-beaded dress, putting on shoes and stockings, and performing a modest Viennese dance in its stead.⁴⁸

By the time of the Salome dancers, Isadora Duncan was already dancing in bare feet, with bare legs, and even allowing the outlines of her torso to be seen by way of the cling of her diaphanous tunics, all ostensibly necessary because of her self-billing a “classical dancer.” Despite all the travails caused by the intersection of sex and culture, Duncan was a skilled negotiator in finding a route for the introduction of an American modernist sensibility. The middle class was to be its route.

CHAPTER 6

Isadora Duncan and the Spirit of Modernism

We feel in Isadora's dances something immortal, eternal, like Greek beauty.

—Gaspard Etscher, “The Renaissance of the Dance,” in *Forum*

Body am I, and soul . . . I go not your way, ye despiser of the body! Ye are not bridges for me to Superman.

—Frederich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

When Isadora Duncan had just concluded a 1903 London performance, the actress Ellen Terry leapt to her feet and turned to the audience, exclaiming, “Do you understand this is the most incomparably beautiful dancing in the world? Do you appreciate what this woman is doing for you—bringing back the lost beauty of the old world of art?”¹

Critics in the United States and in Europe greeted Isadora Duncan's performances with reviews that were often as ecstatic as Terry's outburst, and, like Terry, connected her to the rediscovery of the ancient world. In actual fact, Duncan was not the archaeologist of forms gone before but, as we acknowledge now, the principal founder of American modern dance. Duncan introduced the art that may be considered the nation's most important contribution to the world of modernism.

At a time when makers of popular culture were finding ways to accommodate changes in the nation by way of song, dance, and parody, Duncan was one of the artists whom we now called modern. While popular culture sought to mediate the anxiety brought by change, Duncan and the modern school saw the passing of old ways as opportunity for new directions. Following European leads, American

explorations in fiction, art, theater, and poetry were well under way by the first part of the century. Modern theater eschewed formulaic plots and sets that imitated living room furnishings for evocative settings and subject matter that sought to explore some essential truth. Fiction and poetry found new subject matter and introduced new forms, all from individual perspectives.

Modernism, indeed, rejected Victorianism and embraced the new for what the moderns viewed as the necessity of breaking boundaries for the discovery of essential truths. Barriers were to come down in this early period, when artists sought to integrate what their society had kept apart. “Put simply,” writes Daniel Joseph Singal, “the quintessential aim of Modernists has been to reconnect all that the Victorian moral dichotomy tore asunder—to integrate once more the human and the animal, the civilized and the savage, and to heal the sharp divisions that the nineteenth century had established in areas such as class, race, and gender.”²

Into this ferment Isadora Duncan claimed a new place for dance—heroic, compelling, and sometimes life changing for the audiences who were lucky enough to see her. “Perhaps but two or three other hours of my life have been as important to me as that in which I first saw her,”³ one of her great admirers wrote in 1911. She was “physician to the spirit,” wrote another.⁴ For Floyd Dell, no sentimentalist, “One must have *seen* Isadora Duncan to die happy.”⁵

In Duncan’s view, the European model of ballet was filled with “unnatural contortions.” Duncan sought what she called a natural movement that was in harmony, as she put it, with “the motion of the universe.”⁶ All natural occurrences, waves, animals, plants, winds, had their own rhythms. As much as Marcel Duchamp’s modernist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase*, Duncan’s dance movements followed one on the other, always readying for the next. Movement was attached to the past and the future. And while she took nature as her example as much as any American transcendentalist, she also found power in the trunk of her body, which she called her “motor.”⁷ Like the ocean wave metaphor of her dance philosophy, Duncan could take the American past and connect to the new by her energy, her connections with the intellectual and popular currents of the age, and her search to unite all in an organic whole.

Duncan is sometimes considered a transitional figure, a Romantic because of a florid rhetoric that looked back to the fulsome Victorian style, her idealization of nature, and her billing as a “Greek” or “classic” dancer meant to appeal to middle-class notions of Greek life. Not all dance scholars have been kind. Lincoln Kirstein, the cofounder of the New York City Ballet, thought Duncan had introduced a form of narcissism into dance, the “curse of Isadora,” promoting the idea that dance was all about the self-expression of the moment rather than an art form that took professional training from others in the field.⁸

Surely Duncan regarded herself as larger than life and promoted herself as such. Counter to the Greenwich Village bohemians of the time, who believed in community and cross-disciplinary influences, Duncan enlarged the role of the individual, helping encourage an understanding of modernism as art that valued individual innovation over all else. Still, she often occupied contradictory terrain. Like all modernists, she rejected Victorian beliefs and behaviors, yet she still danced to the great Romantic music of the Western tradition. She adopted the Nietzschean view that only the foolish believed in God, yet she was firmly committed to the proclamation that ideals of beauty and truth existed and could be captured in art. Casting herself, as Kirstein puts it, “in the liberating role of a Stature of Possibility,”⁹ she was as firmly entrenched in the Progressive optimism that living a unified life could be achieved. Yet for all her belief in the individual springs that gave rise to art, she attached herself to the Greek rage of the time, a tool that was pragmatic in the development of an art of dance in which she was its premiere expressionist.

The Greek Ideal

Americans had long yearned to be the Athens of the New World. Cities and towns in the early republic claimed the name, and public buildings could not be constructed without an array of Doric columns and friezes that sometimes, as in Philadelphia (the “Athens of America”) were just pasted on Gothic fronts. “Minerva” and “Mercury” were common names for early newspapers; slaves were given classic names; and students studied Greek and Roman history to better understand military strategy. Columbia, the symbol of American womanhood, was both draped and helmeted in visual culture, in admiration of the ancient world that was equally sane and strong. Not surprisingly, American founders Benjamin Franklin and George Washington were encapsulated in marble togas in their early sculptural renderings, while the image of Julius Caesar, the undeniable representative of strength, was stamped on stove fronts.¹⁰ The study of Greek and Latin was part of every curriculum, including offerings in the emerging public high schools.¹¹

After the Civil War, this early admiration of the ancient world as formidable had moved to an admiration of the Hellenic world for its higher arts. John Dewey credited Greece for “initiating intellectual life in Europe.”¹² Scholars lauded the Greek world for its participatory democracy, for its emphasis on art and culture as marks of civilization, and for its assurances that ideals of truth and beauty could be fulfilled. A flurry of professional journals appeared.¹³ Although bemoaning the falloff in Greek language learning, it was noted that English translations of classic works “pour from the press in a steady stream.”¹⁴

Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century Greek references were at every turn. American museums produced exhibitions of the ancient, encouraging private collections and helping fuel a lively illegal trade in Greek antiquities.¹⁵ Classic plays were embraced by college drama departments because they presented “dynamic, dramatic action of universal interest,”¹⁶ while reformers turned to classic plays for social uplift for immigrant audiences.¹⁷ The new interest in classic plays prompted changes in stagecraft. The Greek chorus, Greek architecture, the use of masks, the paucity of scenery, all became influences in the new modern theater in the set designs of Gordon Craig, Kenneth Macgowan, the Chicago Little Theatre, and eventually, the Provincetown Players.

By the new century, an imagined Greek life was incorporated into American middlebrow culture. Professor John P. Mahaffy, author of half a dozen books on Greek life, did not eschew *The Youth's Companion* and *Outlook* as forums for popular discussion. Greek life became a topic for lyceum and lectures.¹⁸ Women took on Greek culture in their study clubs. In one of the books intended for a popular audience, another Greek scholar compared the Greek style of dress to the modern one: “The actual dress of the Greeks was planned as much with a view to beauty as for use; its scheme was charmingly simple, and it scarcely varied from century to century,” according to Professor Percy Gardner, who clearly regarded an unchanging mode of dress preferable to the existing “degrading tyranny of fashion.”¹⁹

The prominence of the Greek example was nowhere better illustrated than by the Loeb Classical Library. Beginning in 1912, the series aimed to publish all extant Latin and Greek works. Its inaugural year saw the publication of fifteen volumes, including works by Cicero, Terence, St. Augustine, Euripedes, and Sophocles. Like the later Book of the Month Club, the Loeb Classical Library was marketed to a middlebrow audience who believed in self-education across broad cultural lines. Each volume included the original text opposite its English translation, all set in small, neat volumes aimed to fit in a pocket, reminders that self-education could never be put aside. The series was remarkably successful, setting out the ancient world as one to emulate.²⁰ Even in the postwar period, the love of Greek life lingered: “When we speak of the Greek influence,” one writer in the monthlies noted, “we are talking about the ideals of beauty, forms of expression, a mode of living, an attitude toward life, a type of civilization.”²¹

In admiration of the lost world of civilization, plaster gods and goddesses could be found in foyer niches and garden grottoes, intended to give some indication that their owners were people of taste and culture. Such statuary was also one of the few ways that Victorians had the opportunity to see a representation of the body partially unclothed because it illustrated the Greek ideal of

physical beauty. The acceptance of Greek emphasis on physicality could only draw attention to the desirability of well-proportioned American bodies, the necessity of exercise to get them that way, and the freedom of movement that was expected to be the reward. Dress reformers pointed out that the Grecian way was to let the body operate unencumbered by constrictive clothes. Physical education classes promoted exercise for women in gym clothes that vaguely resembled Greek-style tunics. Sports for women in the forms of archery, tennis, and badminton found women using their limbs in ways that had not been seen publicly before, all on the example of the Greeks. The Greek ideal of physical beauty also contributed to the success of the Delsartian school, one of Duncan's direct influences. The school originated as a system of acting that sought to connect emotion to representation, as Marie Lloyd's popular English music hall number put it, "Every little movement has a meaning of its own / ev'ry tho't and feeling by some position can be shown." The method of acting was taken into silent film, where it slipped into eye rolling and declamatory gesture, but its philosophy also developed into exercise that sought to integrate unrestricted clothing and natural movement. Delsartian teachers conducted physical health classes among the well-to-do and the upper-middle classes, all of which paved the way for Duncan to use those same circles when she introduced dance on principles that took the Greek world as their rationale.

Altogether, the admiration of the Greek world comported nicely with a number of middle-class ideas. Secure and frozen in their city-states, the Greek world was a society seemingly untouched by needs to assimilate, much less to acknowledge its slave base. City department stores were something like city-states, everything safe and secure and under one roof. Small-town America often envisioned itself as the U.S. equivalent to city-states. Percy MacKaye, who introduced the concept of the Greek chorus at the 1893 World's Fair, became known for his elaborate city pageants, participant spectacles that could involve thousands of citizens from any one of America's city republics. Moreover, the Greek ideal of beauty had much in common with Anglo Saxon notions of the same: tall, slim, proportioned, not so different from the much-admired and incessantly reproduced Gibson Girl. Finally, the role of Greek heroes resonated in a culture that valued individualism, a mode that was to overwhelm the communitarian impulse of artists in the early years of the century.

California shared in the Greek mania. No matter the hurly-burly past of the gold rush or the ascension of Los Angeles and San Francisco in wealth and power, Californians also looked to the ancient world of the Mediterranean, whose climate, coast line, and Aegean blue sky it most resembled. In 1899, the Greek scholar Benjamin Ide Wheeler was selected president of the University of California at Berkeley. Wheeler was not simply a classics scholar who could

bring prestige to the West, but also a popularizer of the Greek ideal, as when he served as a judge in 1896 for the first modern Olympic Games. Like other educators and professionals of the age, Wheeler welcomed the spread of the Hellenic word by way of the popular press. His book on Alexander the Great was first published in serial form in *Century Magazine*. There seemed no doubt that he considered the Greek world useful to the present time. In 1895, his Harvard lecture sketched Greek life as if it were the antithesis of Victorianism: Greeks had no need of the “ecclesiastical machine” of organized religion. Greeks sought religion that was “liberating” and “cleansing,” rather than be told what they “*should* believe.” But it was “the rise of Dionysos worship that was the most important single phenomenon in the history of Greek religion.” Dionysos infused “new life into dead formalism.” It was a “religion of enthusiasm.”²² The publication of the lecture as a small book in the same year as his investiture prompted gentle speculation that the University of California’s science curriculum would have to make room for “Greek antiquities of thought and life.”²³ And indeed that was the case. As president of the university, Wheeler considered students the democratic citizens of a university republic and thus deserving of a vote in determining their education. By 1903 the campus had its new Greek-style amphitheater. In the 1960s it had the Free Speech Movement.

Born in San Francisco, Isadora Duncan seemed to have inhaled the spirits of Dionysos and Apollo from the waves of the ocean that were always to be her artistic life model. But we know that when her family—the four Duncan children and her mother—moved to Oakland after the parents’ divorce, Duncan was in an area not so far from the Berkeley campus that had its own intellectual ferment and a geography that could only have informed her later insistence on the importance of line in nature. The Oakland of the time, a city of ten thousand, was a place of fruit lands and farms set among the Oakland hills, brown in the summer and brilliant green in the winter. This landscape of undulating skyline in a climate that was more fecund than fearsome could hardly have escaped the Duncan sensibility as she was forming a dance philosophy.

Even as a child in poverty, Duncan had one direct link to the intellectual ferment of the time in the form of Ina Coolbrith, the librarian of the Oakland Free Library who, as Duncan described her, was “wonderful and beautiful” and seemed “pleased when she [Duncan] asked for important books.”²⁴ Coolbrith was already a successful poet, part of the editorial circle of *Overland* magazine, and recognized for her influence on significant artists. Bret Hart was one, Jack London was to call her his “literary mother,” and about the same time as she was checking out significant books to the young Duncan, Coolbrith was mentoring another Oakland youngster, “Gertie” Stein.

Duncan inculcated the Greek ideals into her dance philosophy in ways that also comported with other lessons of her childhood that were both idealistic and rude. No matter if food was scarce and lodging unreliable, Duncan's mother exposed Duncan and her brothers and sister to the Western classical tradition in music and literature in her belief that art and beauty trumped ordinary concerns. Chopin and Brahms reverberated on the parlor piano, and the reading hour included Shakespeare and Keats no matter how bare the larder. Idealistic notions were at the center of family life, a statement that it was culture that was the essential delineator of class. Meantime, the transcendent role of art in overcoming the travails of the every day were paired with Mary Duncan's other, less-transcendent lessons: distrust of men, marriage, and evils of a capitalist society. The family's up-and-down fortunes, spending money when it was at hand without a thought for the future, became a life habit for Duncan, although robed in the Dionysian, and then Nietzschean, philosophy of living each day fully.

Duncan's growing up had provided her with many of the influences of the time, which had led to her distaste for the forms of dance available, including classical ballet, vaudeville, and theatrical performances. She had been disillusioned with the restrictions of fairy roles in her tours with Augustin Daly, which had led her to adopt the tunic and become a "classic dancer," as the sub-genre was known. Given the role of art in family life, it was not surprising that Duncan's dance philosophy was early influenced by the Grecian rage in which the "Apollonian" or spiritual force was paired with the energetic "Dionysian" force of baser instincts—concepts that were widely understood by the middle-class readers of quarterly magazines that had so often devoted its pages to Greek art and ideals.

As a result of the wide understanding of Grecian ideals, Duncan found her early audiences in a women's circuit of living-room presentations in which her classic dance not only removed dance from its unsavory connections with vaudeville and ideas of flesh for sale, it also framed dance as a representation of Grecian civilized values vis-à-vis the primitive and the vulgar. So successful was Duncan in embodying the admired Grecian values, that in communities where new dances to popular songs were regularly denounced, Duncan was socially sanctioned to use her limbs freely. Considering the set of prohibitions on women's appearance, the fact that she could dance in form-fitting diaphanous costumes speaks to the power the Greek ideal in American culture as well as the power of the women's sphere of the private home. The acceptance of Duncan in such homes provided the imprimatur that dance, like opera and symphonic music, was deserving of elite class status.

Ann Daly suggests Duncan's family's fall from middle-class financial security gave Duncan her understanding of the connections between class and taste.

“Denied the illusion of meritocracy that inheres in a comfortable middle-class upbringing, Duncan became a remarkable master of the signs and emblems of dominant taste, and she used that knowledge to gain distinction for her art.”²⁵ The betwixt-and-between state of her childhood gave her an outsider status, freeing her both from Progressive reform demands of meritocracy, as well as from the moorings, except for practical matters of audiences and support, of upper-class notions of behavior.

In 1899, at the age of twenty-two, Duncan, her mother, and her three siblings had relocated to England, where Isadora and her brother Raymond, who would adopt a literal Greek dress for his lifetime, lay on the floor of the British museum to study the dancers on the Greek vases that Lord Elgin had removed, with the prerogative of the Englishman, from their original sites. Traveling to France, she made her mark in Paris by appealing to the well-to-do and was soon part of the artistic circles. In Berlin, her “classic dancing” was now accompanied by an articulated philosophy. By the time she was in Berlin, Duncan herself regarded her art not as simply a recreation of classic dancing in the Greek model but instead as an expression encompassing philosophy of Frederick Nietzsche

The Philosophy

In the popular mind, Nietzsche is often associated with Nazism as the representative of “superman.” But in his time Nietzsche was revolutionary—breaking the stranglehold of organized religion and belief in God for an emphasis on integrating idealistic and bacchanalian notions into a single whole. But Nietzsche was undoubtedly fixed on the exceptional individual, the creative genius who is infused with what he saw as a superhuman power that represents the will of life itself.²⁶ For artists and performers, this Nietzschean admiration of the exceptional promoted the acceptance of individualism, even narcissism, over community influences. It also called for sharp differences between leaders and followers and encouraged Duncan in her demands of her supporters.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, published in the United States in 1898, was out of the original order of composition. But this was the work that most influenced American Nietzscheans, including Duncan, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Eugene O’Neill, and H. L. Mencken. Mencken published the first U.S. analytical work on Nietzsche in 1908.²⁷ It is not so clear when Duncan first read Nietzsche, possibly *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was one of the books put into her hands by the redoubtable Coolbrith. But from early in her career to the end of her life, a marked-up copy of it took its place next to Walt Whitman on her bedside table.

Zarathustra is an account of a Socratic-like wise man who appears from his mountaintop cave to issue homilies, in a kind of biblical language in the

English translation, to nonbelievers below. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a series of statements, not an argued philosophy, and whether it is a culmination of his philosophical works or not can be debated. Nonetheless, Zarathustra restates Nietzsche's earlier argued proposition that God does not exist, and it is up to the individual, freed from the alienation of body and mind promoted by organized religion, to set himself on the travels that lead to "overman" status. The overman, sometimes translated as the higher man or superman, was not the individual who had slavishly given himself over to the conventional virtues, but the individual who had the will to ignore the everyday pieties and conventions. As Manfred Pütz writes, the masses (in Nietzsche's term, "the herd") were of interest to the superior man in just three ways: "as inferior copies of great men; as an object of resistance to great men, and, finally, as the tools of great men."²⁸ Men on the road to overman status were warned to stay clear of women's cloying desire for pregnancy, their only desire. "Thou goest to women? Do not forget thy whip!" Nietzsche warned.²⁹ Once the tentacles of women had been avoided and conventions ignored, the overman was in a position to teach and gain acolytes to reaffirm his power.

In the first American discussions of Nietzsche, the Social Darwinians and conservatives generally applauded a philosophy that found democracy conforming to the mediocre standards of "the masses." Not surprisingly, the reform-minded Progressives found the philosophy anathema. "If the ethics of Nietzsche were accepted today," wrote Paul Carus, editor of the philosophical magazine, *The Monist*, "passions would have full sway, lust, robbery, jealousy and revenge would increase and death in all forms of wild outburst would reap a richer harvest than he ever did in the days of prehistorical savage life."³⁰ Nietzsche did indeed raise passions and helped move discussion into genteel culture fairly quickly, although understood primarily by its polarities and its catch phrases of "higher man" and "superman." As George Middleton put it in 1911, "Superman" came "trippingly to the tongue." "Superman was a platitude of conversation, people can even spell his [Nietzsche's] name."³¹

Duncan's adoption of a philosophy that had no role for women other than the recreation for warriors suggests the power of her self-construction that was not to be restricted even by the Nietzschean model. But clearly she was attracted by the philosophy that had resulted from Nietzsche's background in the classics. His first book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, is his examination of Greek theater and its use of Apollonian and Dionysian forces that seek artistic unity. Nietzsche's reformulation of the Grecian impulse reworked a familiar frame that Duncan early integrated into her dance philosophy. The hierarchy from herd to higher man also fit with Duncan's already-established proclivities. Duncan was no democrat. She found popular entertainments vulgar and her

philosophy of dance, despite its emphasis on the discovery of natural rhythms, was not to be confused with the primitive. She told the members of the Berlin Press Club in her 1903 address that primitive man was a place to start, not to resurrect. “We must try to create beautiful movements significant of cultural man.”³² The remark echoed Zarathustra’s homily: “They have something whereof they are proud. What do they call it, that which maketh them proud? Education, they call it; it distinguisheth them from the goatherds.”³³

As Daly notes, Duncan’s view of America was as “an elite, white, Europeanized monolith without a hint of the social, racial, and economic diversity that immigration and the northern immigration had intensified by the 1910s.”³⁴ Notions of the uncomprehending herd likely provided her some comfort for a dance form that was the object of ridicule. When she responded with a racial epithet to an unappreciative Argentinean audience, she undoubtedly had the herd in mind. Moreover, to see herself in some version of a superman could only have resolved a childhood history in which the family’s lofty notions of art did not keep landlords from demanding rent.

The philosophy also made sense given Duncan’s overweening sense of self that she had exhibited from an early age. Her confidence was such that it was less than a leap to regard herself as the model for the superman or higher man, accepting its role as oracle, and demanding appropriate responses. In concrete terms this meant that her role of grand teacher led to the establishment of schools for promising young children, although without much thought to the families from which they were plucked, and leaving the day-to-day responsibilities of shelter and schooling to her sister and to the older disciples. She expected to be served by those around her, acolytes and lovers, lived well, refusing to take a second-class coach even when she was in extreme financial straits. She often behaved autocratically and absolutely—the Nietzsche call for hardness perhaps. The loss of her children, one in childbirth and two by drowning in a runaway car, devastated her but did not defeat her. She was, indeed, her own law. She lived a passionate sexual life, one lover following the other, experimented with lesbian affairs, bore three children out of wedlock, consumed alcohol and good food in abundance, and frequented the European nightspots where she could indulge her love for the tango—altogether true to the god Dionysos, as outlined by the Nietzsche imperative, and the embrace of the new, the modernist credo.

As her philosophy of dance evolved, the rippling Duncan hands, the arc of the Duncan arms, the stretch and positioning of the Duncan neck, all came to be yearnings of the Apollonian vision, while the trunk, the legs, the feet were the representation of Dionysian baser passions. It was a philosophy that provided Duncan with the framework that broke down the American interpretations that the female body as temptress or comic.

Dance and the Body

From her earliest days, Duncan was faced with the problem of establishing the body as a legitimate form for artistic expression at a time when female display of the body was considered immoral. She surely heard about the Metropolitan Opera's rejection of the Straus opera on the basis of Salome's "Dance of the Seven Veils," and she likely followed news of the Olga Nethersole scandal. Moreover, display of the female body in any venue was complicated by performance, when display of the body necessarily carried the charge for entertainment, which connected dance to its ultimate degradation, prostitution. Duncan said that she did not believe that audiences should pay to see her perform, and she often performed for friends as if to impress there could be no doubt that dancing was not about sexual display or procurement.

The implications of dancing for compensation were further complicated for Duncan because of her own ideas of money. She was raised to decry its importance; she suffered as a child because of its lack; and as an adult she lived lavishly, whatever her income, in the view that the Dionysos of her being needed to be served. Throughout her life, she borrowed from former lovers and forgiving friends. The constant struggle for money clearly resurrected the familiar chaos of her childhood, while her disdain for money grubbing fit with her view of herself as a leader and teacher and above such concerns. But money was an issue until the day she died, and she was never to resolve the conflict of dancing for money and dancing for eternity.

Public suspicion of dance was also fueled by its connection to African Americans, whose musicality, as everyone acknowledged, included a facility with dance. But for many white Americans that facility for dance was largely thought to exist because of African American's close relationship to primitive emotions—sexuality, emotionality, and physicality in general. For the most rigid of white Americans, dance as an expression of the body was tantamount to surrendering civilizing influences. As they had opposed nickelodeons, some reformers opposed dance halls, which attracted working-class youths and, by the 1910s, were part of a national "dance madness."³⁵ Dance halls, generally located next to the saloons that sponsored them, added new fears that dance halls were places of procurement for white slavery. Dancing, like the movies, could only set the stage for moral depravity. To one reformer "spieling," a fast-paced parody of the waltz, "particularly cause[d] sexual excitement."³⁶

Vaudeville limited dance to the form of skirt dancing, brought to its apotheosis by Loie Fuller, who combined skirt dancing—actually yards and yards of rippling and billowing silk that she could sweep around at will—with elaborate stage and lighting techniques that resulted in performances remembered in terms of light rather than dance. She was "The Fairy of Light" and "The Painter

with Light” and so reflected the kinetic energy of the age that Toulouse-Lautrec used her for a model for a lithograph. Dance historians see her as precursor of modern dancing because she was less interested in mechanistically matching steps to the beat than in bringing the elements of her movement, the costume, the stage set, and lights in what she called “a harmonious impression, trying to express the spirit of the music. I try to follow the musical waves in the movements of the body and the colors.”³⁷

Ruth St. Denis, once a vaudevillian, adapted the exotic to circumvent the prejudices limiting white female dance, choosing Egyptian and “Hindoo” motifs that were already popular in commercial settings, from the grand movie palaces to cigarette advertising. Like Fuller, St. Denis was in tune with the age of the spectacular. Unlike the spare blue curtains of Duncan’s performance, St. Denis utilized elaborate sets that might have come from the one of the historically themed movies. However, she and her partner Ted Shawn had no expectation that their audiences would also support their school but instead raised funds by periodic vaudeville tours. The dancers in their company were sometimes appalled by their compromises on such tours, but the company, Denishawn, was the incubator for Martha Graham and many others and came to be of greater influence on American dance than Duncan’s various school experiments. Despite their exoticism on stage, St. Denis and Shawn lived exemplary public lives, remarkably without a whiff of scandal despite Shawn’s homosexuality. And Shawn’s athleticism surely set the stage for males in dance.

Aida Overton Walker was also one of the precursors to modern dance by performing “Salome” at a time when its performance challenged respectability. The choice was interesting. Walker had been the star of the Williams and Walker productions, known for her expertise in the cakewalk that she later taught privately to white women clients. Her ambitions, however, were to go beyond the limitations of the shows that always had to keep white expectations in mind. Her decision to perform “Salome” in a spare concert setting, the presentation that Maud Allen and others had found to be the best way to resolve its ribald reputation, claimed for Walker a space in high culture. More modestly costumed than Allen, Walker seemed also to be making a place for African American women in dance that was not prescribed by comic or exaggerated sexual frames, but did not deny sexuality either.

The Spiritual Search for Truth

The Grecian ideal, comporting as it did with bourgeoisie values, served Duncan as an entryway to present dance in America. But once she was established in Europe, she sought to distant herself from defining herself as a “classic” dancer.

On her American tour in 1917, she told the *San Francisco Examiner*, “It would be wrong to call my art Greek. People have supposed I copied the postures and gestures of Greek statues and Etruscan urns. But it seems to me my art is more universal.” On the large canvass on which she saw herself, she echoed Zarathustra: “I aim to speak the language of humanity not the dialect of folk.”³⁸

As the Greek ideal had allowed Duncan to remove dance from overtones of flesh for sale, Duncan’s view of herself as a speaker for humanity similarly removed commercial considerations from her performance. Duncan chose to present her dance by way of concert halls, with only simple, high curtains as a stage setting, a simplicity that distanced her dance from the ostensible flash of commercial entertainment. But even in the concert hall setting, admission was necessarily charged and led to Duncan’s decision early in her career to dance for causes, with the expectation that she would receive remuneration as part of the fund-raising effort (which did not always happen). After she became famous, her tours were put in the service of raising money for her schools, underscored when she regularly asked for additional contributions in curtain-call speeches. When these curtain-call speeches were expanded to political statements, the dance performance was once again put in the frame of the larger cause.

Dance and cause came together in 1915 when Duncan rallied U.S. support for France in World War I by dancing to the music of the “La Marseillaise” at the Metropolitan Opera House. The death of Duncan’s children in 1913 could not have been far from the consciousness of the audience, and Duncan herself was not far removed from the loss of a third child whose birth and quick death occurred on the chaotic day France announced its entry into the war. By all accounts the performance was a *tour de force*. She had once again rescued a declining career in which critics were noting that her dancing, apparently to accommodate increasing weight, seemed less about movement than a series of statuesque poses. But the photograph by Arnold Genthe two years later captured the grandeur of the most famous pose from the dance. The arms of the mature Duncan are outstretched in a wide v-shape, which is emphasized by the cylindrical robe close to her trunk and which serves as pedestal. Her hands are curved ready to clasp, her neck at a slight angle serving as another but imperfect pedestal for her uplifted and yearning expression. One bare foot, the bone of the primary toe slightly bent as if from a badly fitting shoe, is firm on the floor. She is both anchored and reaching.

The persistent public memory of Duncan is that of her death in 1927. The scenario is well known: settling into Nice in a new studio, the Duncan eye had come to rest on a pretty young man who worked in (what else?) “The Helvetica Garage.” Duncan was close to penniless, waiting for the publication of her autobiography and relying on her best friend, Mary Desti, to write postdated checks

for survival. The young man arrived to take Duncan for a spin in the sports car (although not the Bugatti of legend), in the belief she was interested in its purchase. In a gesture that can easily be imagined, Duncan seated herself next to the young man, tossing about her shoulders the large, hand-painted shawl that had been a present from Desti. "I am going to Glory," she announced in French to Desti and to Paris Singer, a former lover and father of a child. The fringe dripped over the low door. Desti stepped forward with a cry of warning. In the same instant, the young man started the car. The dangling fringe instantly engrossed in its spokes, and Duncan's neck, predicted in its angle in the Gentle photograph, was snapped, her body pulled out of its seat, and her face pressed against the side of the car.

Her funeral cortege could not take a direct route through Paris because of an already-scheduled parade honoring World War I veterans. As it wound its way through secondary streets of the city that had long honored her, Parisian crowds gathered in acknowledgment. In the United States, her acknowledgement had come in fits and starts, as the modernist ideas she had claimed so boldly had made their way through the secondary streets of another metropolis.

CHAPTER 7

Cultural Communities and Cultural Consequences

City of Ambition

—Title to photograph of New York skyline, Alfred Stieglitz, 1910

In a not unusual occurrence, the painter and lithographer Andrew Dasburg dropped in at New York's McDowell Club one afternoon in 1913 and fell into conversation with a young man by the name of John Reed, who invited Dasburg to a Mabel Dodge "Evening." That evening, and in subsequent ones, Dasburg was to make enduring friendships with both Reed and Dodge and many other artists and writers.¹ Not only were Dodge's Evenings the place where artists came to know one another, pubs and restaurants, art galleries and bookstores, and clubs and causes; they also provided ways for the newly arrived artists to enter larger artistic communities. Friends and supporters were found, opportunities offered, and influences flowed across disciplines.

The word of the age was, indeed, "fluidity," when the rejection of the layers of Victorian accoutrements was replaced by the search for the simple, the spiritual, and the defining principles that crossed all works. For artists of the modernist sensibility, openness to new friends was another expression, as Daniel Joseph Singal writes, of the obligation "to open oneself to the world, and perfect one's ability to experience."² In such an era of permeability and passage, who was to be shunned when the word might be carried by the most humble? And who was to be judged as valued or not? Altogether, it may have been the best time to be an artist in America, when men and women arriving in the nation's cities with manuscripts and sketchbooks were embraced by the philosophy of the age.

The role of the attic room is the most persistent of all ideas in the production of culture—the artist laboring alone until the great work is completed, at

which point the work is accepted and gloried. Most famously, Virginia Woolf promoted the notion in her essay, "A Room of Her Own," a call for women to stand fast for their own independent artistic lives. But the essay is often interpreted quite literally, as if the removal of an artist to a quiet place is the prime instigator of artistic creation. But as we know, Woolf herself operated at the busy center of a family and artistic center known as the Bloomsbury Set.

In this time of flow, and perhaps because of it, artists flourished best in defined communities. They were communities surrounding certain publications, for example, *Arts and Decoration*, *Camera Work*, *Poetry*, *The Masses*, *The Bohemian*, *The Egoist*, *The Mask*, *Modern Art*, and others. Certainly communities often clustered in certain regions, such as New York's Greenwich Village, Provincetown, Massachusetts, or in painterly communities, as in Ogunquik, Maine; Carmel, California; and Taos, New Mexico. And there were the communities based on other commonalities: black performers shared influences and opportunities in the New York offices of the Williams and Walker entertainment agency, around the later society orchestra business of James Reese Europe, and the theatrical club, the Frogs; Jewish movie moguls, sometimes related by marriage and sharing common roots, established professional social organizations and early joined together to fight the Edison Trust and for their common good.

On a smaller scale, cultural communities emerged informally—from friendship circles, from saloons, from reform organizations, from marriage and family, and often crossed into other circles. Art and politics surely could mix. Anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman entertained political activists and artists in their Greenwich Village home, serving guests of whatever persuasion hearty beefsteak dinners. John Reed, as an activist and journalist, moved easily among both artistic and reform communities. Artists, indeed, often sought to unite politics and art—*The Masses* magazine was committed to a socialist position, and its editors and illustrators integrated the new realism into the magazine. Just about everyone was in favor of the International Workers of the World, the famous Wobblies, and under its sponsorship, Reed and Dodge (falling in love in the process) mounted the Paterson Strike Pageant that sought to publicize the strike of the Paterson, New Jersey, silk workers by way of a theatrical spectacle using the striking workers as its cast. Women painters mounted a show to support suffrage activities, and women in the arts in general participated in birth-control campaigns, supported strikes and equity in labor practices, and most other Progressive movements. Greenwich Village's Liberal Club, the progenitor of so many cultural works, took up the bastion of free speech in its struggle with the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice over the banning of Theodore Dreiser's *The Genius*, fought for issues of sexual

freedom, and split over the issues of African American membership. Altogether, the resulting ever-enlarging circles fostered creativity, served practical ends in publication, performance, and exhibit, established power blocs, and provided sustenance and encouragement to artists in bad times.

Less sanguine, cultural communities could also work to close off the artist from the world he or she purportedly sought to represent, encourage replication rather than fertilization, and even be prejudicial to ideas that did not comport with prevailing notions. In the self-help mold, cultural communities could lose the generous impulse of their origination and become simply strategies for success, the forerunner of today's "networking."

Greenwich Village

The archetype of the geographically inspired cultural community is Greenwich Village, New York's arts neighborhood that is now part of the nation's cultural myth. Early in the century, Greenwich Village provided cheap living, job opportunities, and sufficient *communitas* to draw artists to its environs, a purpose it would serve for the next half century. Clearly and unequivocally, it is noted that cultural communities existed in all of the nation's cities: Chicago had its own renaissance and cultural communities circling Harriet Monroe and *Poetry* magazine, the Chicago Art Institute, the Chicago Little Theatre, and the political and arts circles represented by Carl Sandburg as a young socialist. San Francisco had its Bohemian Club and the literary circle around Ina Coolbrith. Philadelphia was the center for American illustration, the newspaper home for the realistic painters of "The Eight," and institutions such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of Art. Davenport, Iowa, produced the novelist Susan Glaspell, theater entrepreneur George Cram Cook, journalist and photographer Carl Van Vecten, and the poet Arthur Davison Ficke. American artists also clustered in cultural communities overseas, certainly in London but notably in Paris and Florence, which provided conduits for European modern art to America. That said, no city provided as many opportunity for the artists whose works came to dominate and influence American culture than did the New York neighborhood of Greenwich Village.³

One of the characteristics of the American artists from the period was that so many of them did not come from wealth. One practical reason men and women with artistic ambitions flooded into New York was the opportunity of working in related fields provided by America's golden age of magazines and newspapers. Willa Cather, Floyd Dell, and Theodore Dreiser were magazine editors; Djuna Barnes, one of the first female reporters on *The Sun*; Neith Boyce, one of the first women copy editors on *The Commercial Advertiser*. Artists Walter Kuhn,

Joseph Stella, Jerome Myers, and Marjorie Organ worked respectively as a cartoonist for humor magazines, an illustrator for reform quarterlies, an artist for the *New York Tribune*, and a newspaper comic artist. Modernist painter Arthur Dove was a commercial artist and fashion illustrator for *Scribner's* magazine at a time when magazines were bursting with illustrations. For the artists, such work venues paid the bills and could be the newcomer's first cultural community, providing gossip of the city and occasionally leading to other opportunities. Lateral connections could be useful. Pitts Duffield, who was Boyce's co-worker on the *Commercial Advertiser* (the place where she also met her future husband, the connected Hutchins Hapgood), later became her publisher.⁴

This flood of artists to New York to take jobs in aligned fields promoted regularity in their work ethic. Artists approached their artistic output with the same professional demeanor and discipline that had been nurtured in their day jobs. Art as a dilettante practiced by the well-to-do was rejected by the new breed of artists who, for all their friendship circles and their explorations across disciplines, increasingly reflected the wider world of professionalism. The move to the city centers was an artist's first statement that he or she was committed to "making it." Writing in the late 1950s, the critic Van Wyck Brooks was surprised that a writer he was reviewing called Illinois his home. "Thirty years ago this writer would never have stayed in the town where he was born, he would have escaped somehow to Paris or to Greenwich Village. I know this, for I was a publisher's reader and read a novel every day in which some young man or woman did so."⁵

Physical proximity afforded by the neighborhood helped in the cross-fertilization of ideas and could open doors. The muckraker Lincoln Steffens got a writing job for Jack Reed, who happened to live above him in a Washington Square rooming house.⁶ In 1906, Jerome Myers found a \$7 a month room at 232 West Fourteenth Street, a neighborhood filled with artists, including John Sloan, who became a family friend, and another artist, Edward Kramer. When the art dealer William MacBeth came by to look at Kramer's work, Kramer generously took him over to see Myers, thus "opening to me the professional gates of art." "I had become a Macbeth man," Myers wrote, "In his gallery, my photo hung with the photos of celebrities. There I could meet well-known artists in an atmosphere of renown, for William MacBeth was then one of the very few dealers to stand up bravely for American art."⁷

Myers's experience speaks affirmatively to the popular memory that the Village promoted a generous aesthetic—unlike the family circles and narrow communities from which so many artists had emerged. The Nietzschean admirer Theodore Dreiser was most obsessed about his own success in the world, but during his period in the Village he helped establish the careers of several fellow

literary artists, including Sherwood Anderson and Edgar McMasters. Young men and women who crossed the continent to study at New York's Art Students League, the Pratt Institute, the National Academy of Design, or the Cooper Union School of Art not only found the opportunity to study with major figures in the art world but also could be introduced to the larger artistic community from the student stage. Even the native New Yorker Alfred Kreymborg, one of the experimental playwrights connected to the Provincetown Players, had to make the journey to Greenwich Village. Dropping in at Washington Square Book Shop on the famous MacDougal Alley, its proprietors, the Boni brothers, invited him to the Liberal Club where he joined other Village denizens to form the Washington Square Players. The Bonis later underwrote Kreyemborg's literary magazine, *The Glebe*.⁸

No artist better reflected the generous nature of the Village *communitas* of the prewar years than Alfred Stieglitz, whose "291 Gallery" on Fifth Avenue was the hub of the Photo Secessionist movement, believing photography was as much a fine art as painting. Stieglitz was a rare man, devoted to mentoring other artists as he developed his own work. But it was also in "291's" role as a physical space that the gallery was important, providing a social place for artists to meet and for artists to meet patrons. "At '291' I met people who became the friends of a lifetime," Dodge recalled. "There we gathered over and over again, drawn and held together by the apparent purity of Stieglitz's intention."⁹

The handful of art galleries devoted to emerging modern art was similarly important in developing community—and, indeed, their scarcity necessarily drew the modern art community together. The MacBeth Gallery was the first gallery to show exclusively American art and mounted the 1908 realist show by what is now the famous "Eight"—the group of painters who found in the every day the subjects for their art. The Madison Gallery, operated by the philanthropist and artist Clara Davidge and also mounting modern exhibits, became a center for the organizers of the Association of American Painters and Sculptors as they planned the 1913 Armory Show.¹⁰ The Whitney Studio Club, People's Art Gallery, and the Daniel Gallery were all open to "walk-ins" and provided notions of the trends of art for artists and their patrons. Like "291" these public places served as introductions to the cultural communities that would not only come to influence artistic production but introduce artistic works to the larger world.

No barrier to entry into the artistic world was lower than bars and pubs whose cost of entry was the price of a beer. McSorley's Old Ale House on New York's Seventh Street was the Algonquin Round Table of its time. Male only until 1970, McSorley's was a working man's bar that attracted painters and literary types, mythologized in drawings by John Sloan and remembered affectionately

by Stuart Davis. “They never washed a mug,” he recalled years later. “That was part of the ritual—you were never allowed to wash a mug. It wasn’t proper for drinking if you did.”¹¹ Hutchins Hapgood met regularly at two favorite saloons, the Working Girls’ Home on Eighth Street and Sixth, and the Golden Swan, generally known as the “Hell Hole” at Fourth and Sixth avenues. Unlike McSorley’s, the Hell Hole allowed women patrons, and it was here that another newcomer to the Village, Agnes Bolton, met Eugene O’Neill, whom she was to marry. Members of the Liberal Club on MacDougal Street were likely to step next door to eat at the famous Polly Holliday’s restaurant, whose chef and Holliday’s lover was the anarchist Hippolyte Havel, ready to serve politics with his hash. When Polly’s moved to Washington Square, “Christine’s,” another female restaurateur who had no aversion to naming a restaurant after herself, drew the theater crowd from the Provincetown Players that had naturally enough chosen McDougal Street for its city location. The old Breevort Hotel was long a place of meetings for artists and memorialized so by Charles Demuth in watercolor, as McSorley’s had been memorialized by Joan Sloan.

Not so recognized at the time was how the role of the informal network of the bars and the availability of cocaine in the first years of the century increased alcoholism and drug use. Both served as bolstering agents for the shy and tentative, and, indeed, were excused as somewhat necessary to experience life in all its varieties, in admiration of the Dionysian spirit. But the impact on the individual lives of the artists was not to be known immediately and undoubtedly foreshortened and forestalled numberless artistic careers.

Patrons and Salons

Even with the mentoring that was available in the spirit of the age, American moderns were faced with practical difficulties: a dearth of benefactors and patrons and a lack of distribution venues. But some of the wealth of the Gilded Age did indeed find its way into support of the arts and established cultural communities around the benefactors. The almost-forgotten Jeannette M. Thurber founded and devoted her life and wealth to the National Conservatory of Music that made formal musical training available to African American composers.¹² But it was in the art world that patrons were most apparent. The Symbolist painter Arthur B. Davis found benefactors in the typewriter tycoon Henry Harper Benedict, as well as Lizzie P. Bliss, and Benjamin Altman, the latter financing his first trip to Europe. Later, established himself and well married, Davis collected modern art, advised wealthy collectors, and used his connections to help finance the Armory Show. However, women patrons—one of the acceptable roles for wealthy women at the time—were of particular help

in supporting modern art. Clara Davidge, like Mabel Dodge Luhan, inherited wealth, and established a social circle related to the gallery she opened in 1909 devoted to contemporary American art. Like Stieglitz, who was son of a wealthy industrialist, artists from wealthy backgrounds or married to wealth were generous to other artists. After her marriage, Agnes Meyer helped finance several painters and became a backer of Stieglitz's gallery. Sarah Sears, wife of the mail-order store founder, a recognized and successful painter in the period and a Village denizen, supported modern art by building her own collection. Mary Sullivan, an instructor at the Pratt Institute before her marriage to a wealthy attorney, was one of the founders of New York's Museum of Modern Art and was a substantial collector of modern art herself. Katherine Dreier, also an artist, impacted collections of art and was the driving force behind the organization of the Society of Independent Artists. Perhaps the most influential art patron of all was Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, a sculptor who worked from her own studio in Greenwich Village that eventually became the gallery the Whitney Studio. She was a backer of many arts organizations, traveling art shows, and arts publications, purchased artworks before they were fashionable, and often provided direct support to individual artists.¹³

After becoming great enthusiasts for modern art following the 1913 Armory Show, the wealthy Walter and Mary Louise Arensberg established an important arts circle by way of lavish entertainments from which emerged such modern developments as New York Dada and "The Others" poets. The Arensbergs became important collectors and held the largest collection of work by Marcel Duchamps.¹⁴ Presently being recognized is the circle around the artist Florine Stettheimer and her two sisters, who regularly entertained an influential group of modernist intellectuals.¹⁵ The most popularly known collectors of all, however, were not in the United States, but in Paris, the salon hosted by brother and sister, Leo and Gertrude Stein. As early as 1905, the Steins had acquired a gallery of modern art so impressive that both art patrons and artists from the United States regularly came to view the works and to be introduced, on occasion, to the modernist masters—Matisse, Picasso, or Cezanne—who were part of the Steins's circle. Gertrude took the lead in the salon after her brother, in 1907, rejected Picasso's turn to cubism. Gertrude remained committed to Picasso and modernist painters, and her circle later famously enlarged to include writers Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Stein remained important in providing avenues of introduction to modernist thought, although, unlike many of the great female patrons, she never demonstrated any particular interest in mentoring women artists or writers.

The salon that best represented the early optimism and openness of the Village before World War I was conducted by Mabel Dodge, who arrived in New

York from Florence as a wealthy young matron in touch with Europe's latest artistic currents. She settled on what was considered the "genteel" side of Greenwich Village, at 23 Fifth Avenue, wherein she became involved in the artistic and political ferment at her doorstep primarily, as she put it, for "participation," a way to ward off her periodic depressions. In the years from 1911 to 1912, Dodge opened up her house two or three times a week to what she simply called "Evenings," but it was soon designated a "salon" by the press. Still, it was a peculiarly American version of a salon, needing no special reputation for repartee, political influence, or achievement to gain entry, although its habitués were still not as free of prejudices of the age as they thought they were.

Artists, reformers, and revolutionaries came together in Dodge's four, bright-white rooms—themselves a rejection of the decorative motif of the Victorian era—occasions in which "Big" Bill Haywood of the International Workers of the World, Lincoln Steffens, or Walter Lippman might discuss their points of view followed by an appreciated midnight supper. Van Vechten, already an arts critic at the *New York Times*, met Gertrude Stein through the Dodge connection and became Stein's longtime advocate thanks to an atmosphere in which the well-known and the lesser-known rubbed shoulders. "All sorts of guests came to Mabel Dodge's salons," Lincoln Steffens wrote, "poor and rich, labor skates, scabs, strikers and unemployed, painters, musicians, reporters, editors, swells; it was the only successful salon I have ever seen in America. By which I meant that there was conversation and that the conversation developed usually out of some one theme and stayed on the floor."¹⁶

From our own perspective, the salon was not open to all, as when Carl Van Vechten invited two black performers from Harlem. Dodge had no place in her modernist pantheon for the pair. "I sat that night, amongst a number of disparate people while an appalling Negress danced before us in white stockings and black buttoned boots. The man strummed a banjo and sang an embarrassing song while she cavorted. They both leered and rolled their suggestive eyes and made me feel first hot and then cold, for I never had been so near this kind of thing before."¹⁷ Despite new opportunity for black popular song composers and the recognition that "Negro art" was the progenitor of modern art, opportunities for African Americans did not come by way of the white cultural communities that opened doors so welcomingly to the new white artists flocking to cities.

As in other areas, Village bohemians were not able to put aside the prejudices of the age when it came to Jews. Despite success in commercial venues of vaudeville, early film, and popular song, Jewish artists had their own set of barriers to overcome in the fine arts. The Village's ethnic diversity included few Jews, although the Liberal Club, according to one account, "had its quota

of Jews—Westernized, sophisticated, cosmopolitan—Jews by origin not by interest.”¹⁸ The allowance for assimilated Jews was met by Stieglitz, who was able to move easily in non-Jewish circles in part because his German-Jewish ancestry was considered more acceptable than that of the new Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, Stieglitz became a conduit for other Jewish artists, mentoring Walkowitz, who was one of New York’s recent Jewish immigrants. At his death Walkowitz left much of his art to Israel, suggesting his Jewish roots were not incidental to him, although they were not a subject of discussion in the period any more than were those of Man Ray or Mina Loy, both of whom rejected birth names in the modernist pantheon of reinvention.

However, unlike black artists, Jewish and homosexual artists could move across various cultural circles such as Mabel Dodge’s Evenings, if their differences were understated. Dodge’s evenings soon became part of cultural lore, to be envied by those who were not there but could be read about as it became worthy of newspaper attention. “Every *live* topics, movement, and interest of the day has been discussed at her house,” according to a newspaper account,¹⁹ already establishing the myth of the Village and the self-consciousness of its inhabitants.

And while salon is too fancy a word, there were also regular gatherings of artistic friends. William and Edith Glackens opened their home to friends and acquaintance regularly. William Zorach and Marguerite Thompson Zorach, although quite penniless themselves, still hosted a group of writers and artist, particularly poets. “They would all meet at our place to discuss poetry, and what could be done with it,” as Zorach described the group. “They would plan little magazines and publicity and places to get poetry published. We would all read poems and discuss them.”²⁰

Sexual Partnerships

Such venues promoted ways for men and women to meet outside of what had been the usual middle-class venues of family and organized fête. When the artist Edith Klinck decided she wanted to meet her neighbor and artist Jerome Myers, she simply arrived at his doorstep and rang the bell.²¹ For the youthful culture of the Village, in a period that rejected Victorian prudery, the new freedom could lead to early sexual partnering. This did not necessarily change male-female power relationships. A male network of writers and artists clustered around the socialist magazine *The Masses*, for example, in some part because women at the magazine were considered likely to be open to sexual partnering. And the new openness led to chronic infidelities in “modern” couples.²²

For Progressive artists, Victorians ideas of marriage were considered not only constraining and hierarchal but also antithetical to sensual pleasure, an emphasis that was being introduced by the British psychologist Havelock Ellis and promoted by one of his early supporters and lovers, Margaret Sanger. Sanger, now remembered as a political activist who recommended birth control as an economic tool for family well being, earlier reflected the time's emphasis on sensuality. She was, according to Luhan, "an advocate of the flesh." Sanger "taught us the way to a heightening of pleasure and of prolonging it, and the delimiting of it to the sexual zones, the spreading out and sexualizing of the whole body until it should become sensitive and alive throughout and complete."²³ Both Sanger and Luhan lived lusty sexual lives, generally outside of marriage; and certainly open marriages were practiced by Floyd Dell, Max Eastman, Theodore Dreiser, George Cram "Jig" Cook, and many other modernists whose search for oneness did not include monogamous relationships.

From the perspective of cultural development, however, sexual openness did not change the dominant trajectory of modernism, Gertrude Stein and Georgia O'Keeffe notwithstanding, primarily as a record of male achievement. Indeed, in some interpretations modernism was a counter to the mass entertainment of the time and the role of women who had become its main supporters.²⁴ In any case, modernist men had no problem patronizing all-male clubs and, indeed, undoubtedly found some protection in their rooms from a cultural world dominated by commercial pandering to what were considered women's values.

In concrete terms, open sexual relationships between unmarried couples could extend artistic circles of acquaintances. Male artists could benefit when taken up by powerful women—Davidge helped launch the careers of several of her artists and lovers; Dodge was helpful in the career of her lover Maurice Sterne. Some female artists—Louise Bryant of the Provincetown Players is one example—could find a momentary launching pad from the beds of the famous, in Bryant's case, John Reed and Eugene O'Neill.

Women artists married to male artists also could benefit from extended circles. Several married female artists were accepted for exhibit to the 1913 Armory Show, and that may have made the difference. "My husband and I held joint exhibits for many years," Thompson recalled. "We were a team, and dealers were not afraid of me."²⁵ As a result, Thompson found exhibition space more frequently than many other female painters and was a prolific painter until the birth of her children, when she took up decorative embroidery, in part to help support the family. Klinck took up hat design in the 1930s for the same reason.

Most female artists married to male artists were less famous than their husbands, in part because they chose to make their own careers the lesser ones. Helen Farr Sloan, once a student at the Art Students League, devoted much of

her life to the preservation of John Sloan's legacy.²⁶ Neith Boyce's career essentially ended in 1923, a victim of the pressure of a large family and a difficult husband. It is not surprising that the most famous female artist who emerged from the period, Georgia O'Keeffe, who had lived with and then married Alfred Stieglitz, achieved enduring fame when she left the New York circle so dominated by Stieglitz to make her independent way in New Mexico. Still, two-career marriages were common in artistic and journalistic circles of the time,²⁷ and their stresses were common enough for Rachel Crothers to use the motif for her 1912 Broadway play in which the female artist must choose the responsibilities of motherhood over artistic challenge: "I've seen the crowd looking up—I've heard people say 'A woman did that!' and my heart almost burst with pride—not so much that I had done it but for all women And then the door opened, and Millicent [the daughter] came in. There isn't any choice, Tom—she's part of my body—part of my soul."²⁸ The struggle between traditional pulls and new demands was not easy to negotiate in any field. The artist Anna Lea Merritt, writing in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1900, noted that "the chief obstacle to a woman's success is that she can never have a wife."²⁹ The role of helpmate for the iconic women who did emerge from this period—Maude Adams, Ethel Barrymore, Mary Pickford, Mae West, Lillian Gish, Fanny Brice—rarely came from male companions or husbands but from strong, assuring mothers.

Female Circles

Despite the optimism of the New Woman in changing social mores, barriers to women remained significant. Most organizations were defined by gender as were the informal avenues to cultural connections. McSorley's saloon did not allow women in the door until 1970 (when it was marked for special attention by activist feminists of the time). Also off limits was the Grapevine Tavern at Eleventh Street and Sixth Avenue, a gathering place for successful actors and artists. When the tavern passed from the scene in 1915, its former proprietor blamed its demise on the new policy of serving women. "Never in my career have I sold a drink to a woman. No women were allowed in the place."³⁰

Women sought the benefits of male-only cultural communities and established female versions. The Colony Club was established on Madison Avenue in 1905 in imitation of the era's gentleman's clubs. Less grand, the luncheon club Heterodoxy included a roster of members crossing the artistic and feminist community—Mabel Dodge, Susan Glaspell, Crystal Eastman, Inez Milholland, Ida Rauh, and Henrietta Rodman. Women also grouped according to professional interests, none more active than the legion of professionally trained women painters emerging from the art schools, which had begun to accept

limited numbers of female students (although barred altogether from anatomy lectures).³¹ The “best woman artist” began to be attached to art shows that permitted females to exhibit. In 1909, Jane Peterson mounted a rare, for a woman, solo exhibit, although by then she was considered the nation’s leading woman painter.³² Stieglitz did not offer his space to many women, and to O’Keeffe only after Walkowitz advised, “I think, with woman suffrage and all, I think it would be a good idea to have a woman on the walls.”³³

Some of the opportunities for women artists were made available by wealthy women patrons. Whitney Studio Club exhibited female artists alongside male artists and mounted one-woman shows for Edith Dimock and Malvina Hoffman. Mrs. Potter Palmer—the same Mrs. Palmer who had helped launch the career of Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., in Chicago—was both subject and collector of works by Mary Cassatt. But most Philadelphia matrons commissioned works from Cecilia Beaux, whose family was known and preferred over Cassatt for the society trade.

By the second decade, women artists became increasingly aggressive and self-reliant, using the accepted role of female organizing to promote their own work.³⁴ In 1914, the Women’s Arts Club of New York evolved into the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, which mounted its own shows and promoted female artists in newspaper announcements. Newspapers cooperated, and “works of women painters and sculptors” became regularly reviewed. By 1914, a newspaper reviewer noted, “At the MacDowell Club is an exhibition of the work of twelve women painters, but why mention it! The work is the thing.”³⁵ The unsigned review was likely written by the *Times’s* art critic Elizabeth Luther Carey, no enthusiast for modern art but who provided an important conduit for news of the work of women artists. By 1916, the apartheid of “works of women artists” had been dropped, although not the efforts by women artists to get attention to their works. Carey noted with admiration, “The artists are hustlers.”³⁶ As female reporters on society pages had made a place for coverage of the suffrage movement, Carey similarly made a place in the art pages for women artists.

Cultural Community and Aesthetic Influence

The ultimate question of the role of cultural communities in a nation’s art, however, is how the strategies and opportunities afforded by cultural communities impact upon aesthetic production. The influence of cultural communities is of particular interest when one examines marginalized groups.

The cultural communities constructed by immigrant, ethnic and racial groups were particularly challenged in finding strategies for access into the mainstream. As we know, the access for African American songwriters sometimes came at

the expense of distortion, either to accommodate the marketplace or to insert messages of subversion. In either case, artistic works from marginalized groups carried an additional level of negotiation that informed the content as much as any other influence.

Not so recognized at the time was the homosexual arts community. How homosexual artists operate in mainstream culture is not an idle one in determining the construction of a nation's art. In Great Britain, for example, Hugh (Binkie) Beaumont was a powerful theatrical producer in the West End in the 1930s, and his preference for homosexual directors and performers was important in the rise of Noel Coward and the ascendance of what has been called "a distinctive atmosphere" in British theater.³⁷ The atmosphere played a role in British film and permeated into popular British culture of the 1930s and 1940s, where, removed from its homosexual mooring, it influenced middle-class notions of sophistication. In another discussion, Michel Foucault views the work of homosexual artists as characterized by an emphasis on yearning and memory, which he connects to the influence of their sexual lifestyle.³⁸ In what may be an illustration of Foucault's point, Kim Marra suggests that playwright Clyde Fitch's unremitting portrayal of powerful women provided a way to "express and contain his transgressive desires."³⁹

Homosexual artists in the time took much inspiration from the black clubs that were open to homosexuals. Kevin J. Mumford has identified clubs in New York and Chicago where marginalized cultures met, calling them "interzones."⁴⁰ Van Vechten likely came to his early appreciation of Harlem culture through the interzone clubs. His diary records a visit in 1913 when, capping a drunken evening, Van Vecten got his journalistic friends Lincoln Steffens and Hutchins Hapgood to go to an African American show, "which turned out to be wonderful."⁴¹ It was Van Vecten who got Dodge to invite the two Harlem entertainers to one of her evenings—although as performers, not guests. Like Vecten, the modernist homosexual artist Charles Demuth traveled to Harlem for the interzone clubs. Club life became subject matter for Demuth's 1916 painting *Negro Jazz Band*, which portrayed a white, female vocalist and an African American band—breaking several boundaries at the time. Demuth similarly painted Bert Savoy, a transvestite entertainer, another fixture of the black-and-tan clubs.

In this alignment of two marginalized groups, homosexual artists also found in black subjects an opportunity to code their own interest. In an atmosphere that was still far from welcoming, even in Greenwich Village circles, it is clear that homosexual subject matter was appearing in artistic worlds, although in the coded ways that had meaning in the homosexual community.

On the face of it, lesbian women had an easier time in the public sphere. "Boston marriages" were a late-nineteenth-century arrangement in which

women companions lived together with sexual implications generally ignored as such pairings were considered an economical and companionate arrangement for unmarried women. The acceptance of this tradition made it easier for the establishment of lesbian relationships, and scholars are now differentiating—not so easy when private lives were kept private—between the companionate Boston marriages and female-female relationships that included sexual intimacy. It is clear, for example, that the suffrage activist and biographer Katharine Anthony lived with the social worker Elizabeth Irwin in a lesbian relationship that was known to their circle.⁴² Willa Cather made her home in Greenwich Village with the advertising executive Edith Lewis. The most successful magazine editor of the time, Gertrude Battles Lane, similarly shared her life with a female partner, as did the journalist and *Masses* contributor Helen Hull. The most successful female playwright of the time Rachel Crothers lived in an unannounced female partnership almost buried from the outside world. The actress Maude Adams lived sequentially with two female companions, each to their death.

With notable exceptions, female-female relationships tended to be circumpect, and any intimate letters were likely destroyed at the death of a partner (as in Cather's case). Secrecy was also necessary for women who indulged in same-sex experimentation. Sanger, Dodge, and Duncan each had same-sex affairs. Dodge was frank about her many affairs with men, but not those with women. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Vincent" in college, was pressured to become "at least bisexual" when she moved into the Village community. During her time with the Provincetown Players, the artist William Zorach remembers her as not a very good actress "except in life."⁴³ Heterosexuality was her best role as she moved into the Twenties as the voice of the definitely heterosexual flapper. The writer Mercedes de Acosta, whose affair with Isadora Duncan was known in some circles, subdued her ways in her four-year affair with the actress Eva Le Gallienne, while mantles of secrecy accompanied her later conquests, including Tallulah Bankhead and Greta Garbo, in more conservative times. Nonetheless, as Alice B. Toklas observed, "Say what you will about Mercedes de Acosta, she's had the most important women in the twentieth century."⁴⁴

The protections available to women homosexuals under the guise of Boston marriage and the acceptance of close female friendships in the period were not available to men, especially at a time when the receding American frontier, the rise of men in white collar jobs, and the omnipresence of women turned to identification of maleness along the strenuous lines that had been called for by President Theodore Roosevelt. The self-consciousness of American maleness was most impacted by the 1895 British sodomy trial of Oscar Wilde. The cultural aestheticism that Wilde represented—"the cult of the purple rose" as

it was called at Harvard—had been tolerated and perhaps even flourished at a time when homosexual behavior was not even in the consciousness of most American heterosexuals. However, the cross-Atlantic publicity of the trial ended the naiveté and put its mark on the dandified male as the homosexual signifier. Sensational newspapers found new fodder in crusades against “degenerate resorts” and “fairy underground salons.”⁴⁵ As George Chauncey writes, gay clubs and gay male activity were well known to New York’s vice squads by the turn of the century and increasingly became the focus of middle-class visitors bent on “slumming” in the working-class areas where they existed. But early press and vice squad reports characterized gay male life in terms of effeminacy, “fairy” culture in the term of the time, especially for the middle-class adventurers who visited the most notorious of the gay clubs.

The male homosexual as effeminate was given the imprimatur of the new field of psychology. Psychologist Richard von Krafft-Ebbing and his follower, Havelock Ellis, described homosexual in terms of “inversion,” the belief that homosexual men and women sought to be the opposite gender. In a time when male sensitivity was increasingly viewed as a marker for homosexuality, it is not surprising that the modernist male poets—Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, and Robert Frost—distanced themselves from flowery styles, separating themselves not just from Victorian female-dominated poesy, but any suspicions of their own inclinations.

Numbers of male homosexual artists were also eager to reject the effete. We can conclude that it was a reflection of the new emphasis on male physicality as well as a reaction against the dandified that led Demuth to introduce strongly sensual rather than dandified homoerotic themes into his paintings, as his 1918 work *Turkish Bath Scene with Self-Portrait*.⁴⁶ The challenge to the effete expanded into the wider realm when homosexual illustrators took up the theme, although in coded ways. J. C. Leyendecker produced multiple covers for popular magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post* favoring muscled men. His homosexual sensibility seems clear in the World War I posters filled with phallic symbols, as in one where a young Boy Scout hands up a sword to an exceptionally strong-jawed Miss Liberty.⁴⁷ Similarly, the illustrations of Howard Chandler Christy honored friendships between men in which sexual desire—to our modern eyes—seems obvious. The rifle in a Christy book illustration rests across the lap of the younger military man in a kind of metaphoric readiness.⁴⁸

Like heterosexual men, homosexuals embraced physicality in some ways to separate themselves from a world dominated by female values. In a 1905 cover for the *Post*, Leyendecker’s young courting man holds the scaly paw of a young woman whose demure face peeps out from the body of a dragon.⁴⁹ Considered witty at the time, it now seems a horrifying image and would seem to represent

the terror of women's symbolic power. Charles Dana Gibson captured the essence of that power in the ubiquitous image of the Gibson Girl that appeared on any printable surface, magazines to china. The Gibson Girl represented the New Woman of the age, supposedly free and adventuresome. But in many of Gibson's illustrations, the Gibson Girl plays with miniature men—dangling them from strings or buffing them about like mice by a large and imperious cat. Gibson provided a Gibson male to be her companion and look-alike, a homoerotic homage to his good friend, the peacock reporter Richard Harding Davis. Like the girl, the Gibson Man demonstrated a clean Aryan profile, upright posture, and a definite lack of desire when paired with the girl.⁵⁰

The image of the Gibson Man outlasted the girl thanks to the new icon of the Arrow Collar Man. Leyendecker introduced the Arrow Collar Man in 1915, when the Gibson Girl was fading. Only insiders knew its model was Leyendecker's longtime lover, Charles Beach. The Arrow Collar Man has no companion, and, indeed, his permanent singleness—given the nature of the product he is advertising—helps account for his status as an icon of single male attractiveness. Cole Porter, the master of the homoerotic pun, references the Arrow Collar Man in his early song, "You're the Top," a title which was also a coded reference to male sexual behavior. It is one of the ironies of the period that what appear to be the iconic images of heterosexual female and male attractiveness were shaped by homoerotic codes.

It was less easy to code for the homosexual artists who were most comfortable with the fairy aesthetic. Mardsen Hartley, for example, whose flamboyant dress marked him, in Dodge's own code, as a "spinsterman," turned to modernist expression. "Portrait of a German Officer," his homage to his dead lover who was killed early in World War I, was so coded it was viewed as pro-German.⁵¹ Van Vechten's 1916 novel, *Peter Whiffle*, was probably only understood by homosexual readers who understood Vechten's codes while the complexity of Djuna Barnes's later fiction may be related not so much to coding devices as to her own discomfort.

The Frohman-Marbury Circle

One cultural community of the time served a homosexual community and also impacted upon mainstream culture. Charles Frohman, one of the era's major theatrical producers, and Elisabeth Marbury, the nation's premiere international agent, were both homosexuals. Frohman's partner and co-producer was Charles Dillingham (dashing enough to be loaned out as escort to Frohman stars such as Ethel Barrymore). Although the nature of the relationship was not publicly spelled out, Frohman and Dillingham were often seen

together in business and social circles, and it was known that they owned a country house together. Marbury herself was a devoted forty-year partner of Elsie de Wolfe, who is now recognized as the nation's first professional interior decorator.⁵² Frohman, the son of a cigar maker, and Marbury, the daughter of a socially prominent New York family, were part of a theatrical subculture that advanced the careers and protected the well-being of its member. As described by Marie Dressler, "Elisabeth Marbury was for a generation the centre of what was perhaps the most powerful artistic group in America. Her drawing-room was our nearest approach to a salon."⁵³ The composition of the "our" of the salon provides one reason why, unlike the Dodge salon, Marbury's salon has gone unremembered.

Frohman was the lynchpin of the circle. After his unexpected death (on the *Lusitania*), Marbury praised him effusively. He was the "soul of honor," "his word was literally as good as his bond," and he "never forgot a friend, and he never betrayed a trust." He was, she said, her "best customer," purchasing plays produced by the European and U.S. playwrights whom she represented.⁵⁴

It was a significant connection and accounted for Marbury's success as an agent. Frohman was a founder of the Theatrical Syndicate, which controlled American commercial theaters as much as the Vaudeville Managers Association owned and operated vaudeville. Additionally, Frohman owned controlling interest in forty-one lavish theaters, employed a workforce of ten thousand, and at the time of his death was launched on the same trajectory in London.⁵⁵ He was called, kindly, "the Napoleon of Managers." Less kind words were attached to him by the managers of the small houses the syndicate put out of business, by the actors and actresses who opposed him, and certainly by the Progressive muckraker journalists who, among other complaints, did not think much of his taste: "It is the English playmakers who have cause to be grateful to Charles Frohman and the syndicate. He buys their commonplace stuff, their tawdry adaptations from the French, their witless, soulless, snobbish, botched work, and pays a big price for it."⁵⁶

Marbury's connections to Frohman—publicly signaled by the location of her New York office in his Empire Theatre building—undoubtedly drew her clients, including socialist George Bernard Shaw, whose plays Frohman produced—perhaps an exception to the "witless, soulless, snobbish and botched work" he was charged with importing. But what is of interest here is how the Marbury and Frohman's business was significantly imbedded in their homosexual friendship circle. While each also operated in their own worlds, and certainly in heterosexual ones in the business sphere, the Frohman and Marbury circles intersected repeatedly in ways that expressed shared and expansive beliefs even as it operated in the substrate of the large Frohman empire. Business choices

were prompted in some cases by homosexual social connections. Such choices were not just a matter of giving friends a break, but often introduced alternative or expanded notions into the cultural landscape.

It was Marbury who introduced Fitch to Frohman in 1892 and suggested him for the adaptation of the French play *The Masked Ball* in which Frohman cast Adams. The success of the play launched them all. Fitch was soon writing furiously. In the 1900 to 1901 season, he had four plays running simultaneously, and he was also directing for Frohman and the syndicate.

By the standards of the day, Fitch was an “invert,” called a sissy in his youth because of his expression of fairy culture. But he was not shy about his love of antiques and his home. Rented in 1913 by Owen D. Young, the first chairman of RCA, the “Italianate garden, pool and somewhat pretentious gewgaws” were not embraced by the family, who soon moved.⁵⁷ The overt nature of Fitch’s lifestyle did not deter Frohman or Marbury. Up until his death in 1909 (from appendicitis), Fitch was a constant in their circles, part of Frohman’s group during the writing and production of the plays, and visiting with Marbury and de Wolfe at their home in France during the summer, where he and de Wolfe could indulge in shopping for antiques and his gay and perhaps transvestite interests.⁵⁸

Frohman’s use of his favorite and most financially productive star, the lesbian Maude Adams, allowed her to expand the kinds of parts for women, including those involving cross-dressing, so-called “breeches productions,” in five major plays.⁵⁹ The popular entertainer Elsie Janis was another part of the circle and found work in Frohman productions (with Dillingham as the producer) that challenged the Gibson Girl ideal of young womanhood, as in the hit *The Hoyden*. Like Marbury, Frohman, who was also producer for Oscar Wilde, another Marbury client, stood by Wilde during his trial and its aftermath. (Marbury and de Wolfe purchased a home for Wilde near their own property in France, but Wilde died before occupying it.)

Frohman’s willingness to mount plays that challenged American sexual values was most famously illustrated when he took Shaw’s *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* to Broadway and experienced the wrath of Anthony Comstock. Similarly, Clyde Fitch risked departure from commercial success when he adapted *Sapho* for Olga Nethersole’s production. Fitch specialized in powerful women, and, in *Sapho*, female power in the bedroom. Female power may have been an attractive theme for a man whose appreciation of the decorative arts as well as his transvestite interests put him at odds with the prevailing culture.

Another ambitious young actress and playwright quickly found access to the Marbury circle, the lesbian Rachel Crothers. Marbury was a willing mentor, advising and encouraging her, and finding a producer for Crothers’s first play

(although, oddly, not Frohman), a success that led to a career that stretched into the 1940s.⁶⁰ Crothers was as commercially viable as Fitch but, unlike Fitch, who conducted a freely gay life in his European sojourns, Crothers adopted a quiet style, never publicly acknowledging her lesbian lifestyle and left no correspondence or traces other than circumstantial evidence of the facts of her life. Her plays of social manners were resolutely heterosexual in their conflict of traditional feminine behavior and the pull of the New Woman. But her efforts to be evenhanded, presumably in order to be acceptable to the commercial audience, but perhaps also to disguise her own lifestyle, gave her the reputation of antifeminism.

Although Fitch and Crothers enjoyed mainstream success, the reputations of both playwrights soon vanished from the American arts landscape. Lacking later advocates and not in the Greenwich Village circle of influence, the works of Fitch and Crothers were not to be included in the canon. Nor is Marbury remembered, although her hand is through much of the era's popular culture. She represented England's Vernon and Irene Castle, the great dancing team that became a national phenomenon, and connected them with James Reese Europe, the African American orchestra leader who was essential to their success. Marbury booked them for society events, sent them on tours, and opened a high-end dance hall in which the Castles introduced dances that had emanated from African American circles. The foxtrot, introduced by the Castles from Europe's arrangement, became the nation's most widespread social dance. After World War I, Marbury helped found New York's Princess Theatre, known for its role in developing the "book" that came to characterize the American musical. She produced the first musicals by Cole Porter and Jerome Kern, thus helping establish a musical form that would come to be embraced by homosexual men, and in the process made it a point to pay chorus girls fairly ("small parts players") and to guarantee "they were treated as human beings."⁶¹

In and out of the theater, she pushed for reform, even among her circle of socially elite friends. She helped found the Colony Club (in part to help de Wolfe's career), but she and Anne Morgan (daughter of J. P. Morgan) were instrumental in bringing social issues to the attention of its wealthy female members.⁶² Their salons, both in France and in New York, supported liberal causes, and by the end of her life she was a major player in the Democratic Party.

But she was no modernist. We might consider that outsider cultural communities are not necessarily interested in revolutionary change if their own inclusion can be achieved without it. "The so-called Little Theatre has not been an unmitigated blessing after all," she wrote in her memoir. "To spend an evening on a hard bench, looking at cubist decorations between the acts, need not necessarily mean that a great contribution has been made to the modern stage."⁶³



Bert Williams in performance. LOC Call No. BIOG FILE-Williams, Bert, 1874-1922. Public domain.



Bert Williams in a quiet moment. LOC Call No. LC_B2-4957-8 [P&P]. Public domain.



Poster for the famous vaudevillian shows off her international awards.
LOC-USZCA-5164.



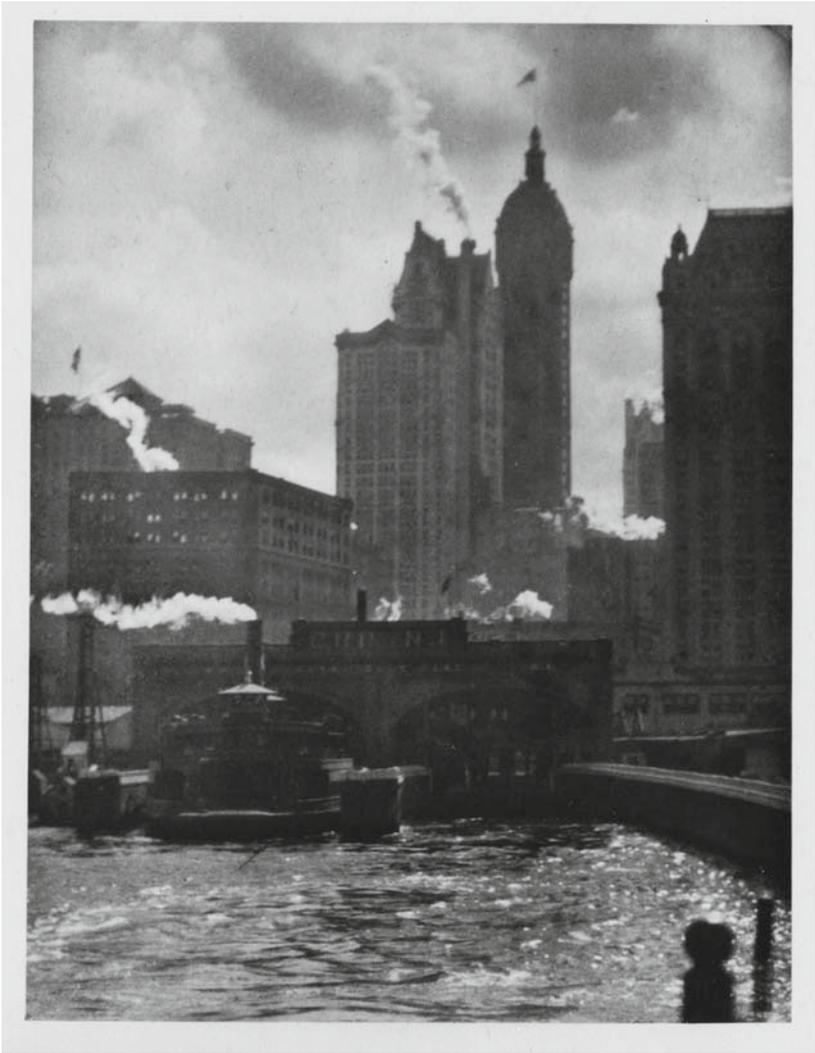
"On the East Side melodrama flaunts its Eternal Lure," by George Hand Wright, for *Harper's Magazine*, January 1919. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division [reproduction number LC-USZ62-90145].



Olga Nethersole's version of *Sapho* by Clyde Fitch. LOC Call No. POS-TH-1900.S26 No. 3 (C size) [P&]. Public domain.



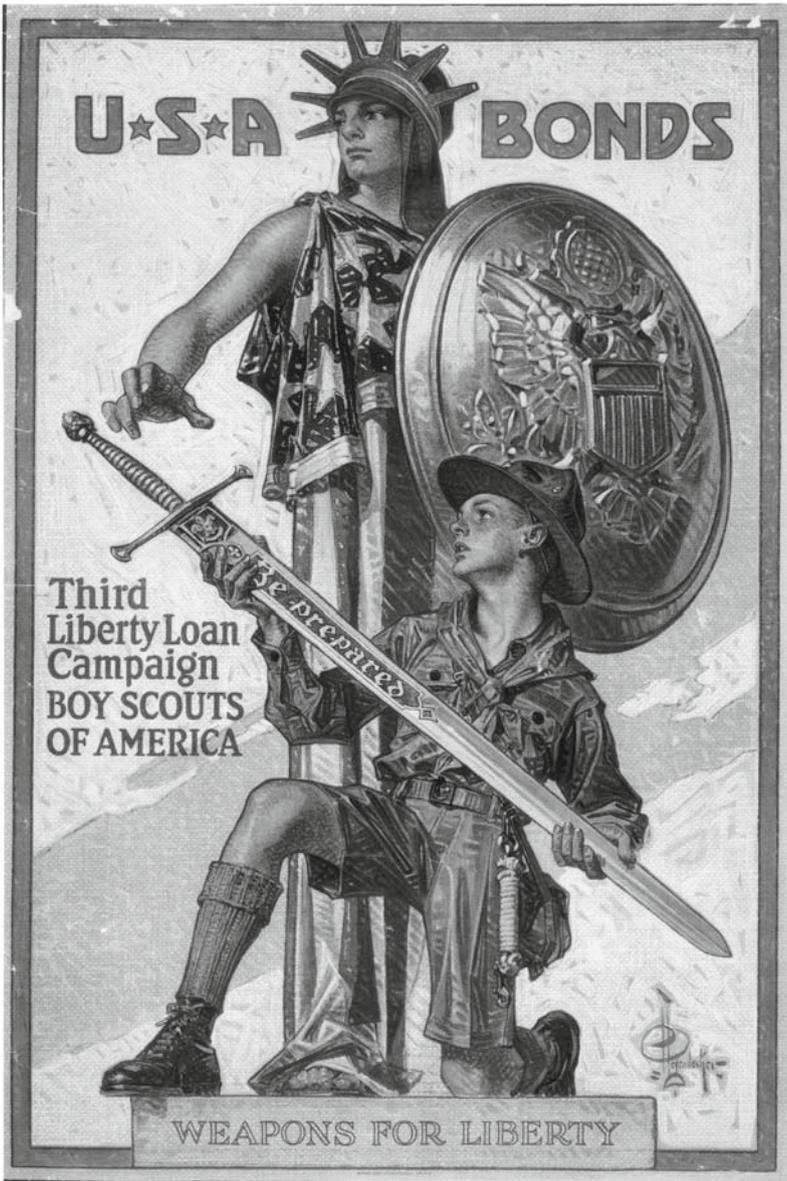
"The White Slave," by Abastenia St. Legee Eberle. One of the American entries into the 1913 Armory Show. Call No. Lot 9632 [P&P] Reproduction No. LC_USC62-93409. Public domain.



"The City of Ambition," by Alfred Stieglitz, 1910. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Gift of Georgia O'Keeffe [reproduction number LC-USZ62-123456].



Isadora Duncan dancing, by Arnold Genthe, taken between 1916–1918. LOC Call No. LC_G4085-0053 [P&P]. Public domain.



Poster for the USA Bonds Third Liberty Loan Campaign by J. C. Leyendecker, 1917. LOC Call No. POS-US.L494 No. 12 (C size) [P&P]. Public domain.



Poster for navy recruitment for wireless experts in World War I. LOC Call No. POS-WWI-US No. 108 (C size) [P&P]. Public domain.



Actors' strike in 1919, crowding Forty-fifth Street in New York. Call No. LOT 10859 item [P&P]. Public domain.

CHAPTER 8

Modern Art Meets Modern Marketing

The Armory Show

America in spite of its newness is determined to be the coming center.

—Walter Kuhn, in Milton W. Brown, “Walt Kuhn’s Armory Show,”
in *Archives of American Art Journal*

If your stomach revolts against this rubbish it is because it is not fit for
human food.

—Kenyon Cox, “The ‘Modern Spirit’ in Art: Some Reflections Inspired
by the Recent International Exhibition,” in *Harper’s Weekly*

“Modern Art to my generation was a spiritual awakening,” the sculptor and painter William Zorach told a 1950s college audience, “a freeing of Art from the idea of copying Nature. We entered into a whole new world of form and color that opened up before us.”¹ The young arts journalist Floyd Dell could attest to that experience when he saw the International Exhibit of Modern Art, the famous Armory Show as it became known, on tour in Chicago. “Post-Impressionism exploded like a bombshell within the minds of everybody who could be said to have minds,” he wrote years later. “For Americans it would not be merely an aesthetic experience, it was an emotional experience which led to a philosophical and moral revaluation of life.”²

But not all Americans shared Dell’s reaction. For many Americans, modern art was not an aesthetic experience and only an emotional bombshell on the basis of the level of ire it raised. The Armory Show, which became the benchmark event for the development of modern art in America, also became the

benchmark that divided ordinary Americans from cultural works that came to be considered “high art,” thought to be only in the purview of the intellectual and the well-to-do. Americans who had accepted change in every part of their day-to-day world were handed cudgels of derision and dismissal by the mass media of the day in order to cordon off modern art, and modernism in general, from either acceptance or exploration for ordinary people.

Indeed, the United States, of any Westernized nation, resisted modern art the most, in part because modern art as it was practiced by European moderns seemed to represent the outer banks of modernism in general. As George Cotkin notes, a process of adaptation had left Victorian values enmeshed rather than overridden in what he called the “reluctant modernism” of the United States.³ From their many treks to the European centers of art, American artists were clearly influenced by modernist use of color, form, and subject matter, but it would not be until the 1950s, with abstract expressionism, that American artists would lead the art world the way the European moderns did in the first part of the century.

Why the United States was slow to accept the modernist pantheon may be explained by the nation’s overall tendency to adapt and absorb revolutionary notions into a middle ground. But why modern art found no immediate general audience may also speak to the role of popular culture in raising expectations that ease of access is the artist’s first responsibility. Complaints about modern art mostly centered on its “incomprehensibility,” especially in what critics considered its most virulent strains of cubism and futurism. Audiences at the 1893 Columbia exhibition had publicly wept while viewing a sentimental painting of leaving home,⁴ but modernists not only ignored imitations of nature, they ignored the storytelling of commonly understood themes in favor of their own interpretations. The critic Royal Cortissoz, as early as 1894, said modern art was most about “personality, self-consciousness and egotism.”⁵ Almost twenty years later, in the Armory Show of 1913, the cry against modernism revolved on the same reason. In all of the vociferous discussion that the show instigated, none was most telling than the complaint that understanding its art took “a private code.”⁶ In a nation whose rhetoric turned on the importance of the individual, modern art was excoriated because it was *too* individual. Unlike vaudeville performers, who played to the audience’s every expectation, modern artists turned away from common understandings in their search for an instigating force.

For modern artists, the superficial was to be shed in the search for the emanating spirit, the “internal necessity” that the Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky called for in his influential 1911 book, *On the Spiritual in Art*. As late as 1923, Robert Henri did not shy from calling his book *The Art Spirit*. “Spirit” was used unselfconsciously by artists of the time. Alfred Stieglitz thought of his studio

embodying a “spirit of 291.” Stieglitz, indeed, would not sell to customers unless he had some belief that the customers had found something innate in the paintings or sculptures.⁷ In this mode of seeking what was essential, the Socratic “ideal,” as Stieglitz described it,⁸ artists followed their own instincts rather than the standards of another time. Modern artists challenged artistic standards of the previous century in terms of subject matter, color, volume, form, and perspective, inhaling from the time not just its European influences but those of the Village community: Freudism, anarchism, and a faith that spiritual truths could be found. Modern artists believed the only way to find authenticity was by stripping away techniques that had only served to maintain false fronts. Pablo Picasso found his inspiration in the African masks that French imperialism had brought back to Paris in the belief that “primitivism,” as it was called, eliminated artificial constraints. But the Italian American Joseph Stella sought to capture the force and energy of American landmarks such as Coney Island in swaths of color and line. Stieglitz had long put his gallery, his work, and his influential magazine *Camera Work* in service to modernism, and in the flurry of press attention to the Armory Show, his words were quoted: “You can make no systematic analysis of this movement, nor can you classify its methods. There are as many methods as there are men. Colors are combined or juxtaposed; masses are rectangular or vague in outlines; there are curves and spirals, and so on, according to each individual’s decision how best to apply his techniques to visualize his conceptions.”⁹

But this shift obviously challenged the art establishment and gave to its members—the artists, the dealers and the most conservative critics—the leadership of the anti-modernist movement. The establishment found willing supporters in ordinary people, men and women who were not picture buyers but found even the idea of modern art disruptive to the common wisdom that provided them support and guidance. Appointing itself the *vox populi*, the mass press came to the fore, reestablishing order along lines of the “common sense” of ordinary people. But this assurance that works of art that did not immediately pass the test of common sense led to beliefs that modernism, as much as opera or ballet, belonged to a higher class. The appreciation of modernism as part of their own cultural life was removed from the choices of ordinary people, who had allowed themselves to be herded into a cultural isolation in fear of losing the comfort of predictability.

The Armory Show

The Armory Show was the event that aimed to introduce America to the modern art already famous in Europe. The show challenged the easily understood themes of art of previous times—the solid nudes anchored the promise of female

fecundity, static landscapes, and wars captured at single, dramatic moments. In contrast, the show's most famous painting, Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, revealed a figure that was hardly static, nor so easy to recognize as female, much less unclothed, and whose descent down a staircase was less the grand entry of the diva than an inexorable and mechanistic forward thrust, as if propelled by the weight of the past until she/he had tumbled face to face to the viewer's very nose—the synthesis of cubism and futurism that could not be ignored.

In what is now considered an iconic event, the show was mounted by independent artists outside of the imprimatur and hegemony of New York's National Academy of Design. For artist-organizers the exhibition was intended as an opportunity to enlarge American sensitivity to the new modern art, whose American practitioners struggled to find exhibition spaces. In the spirit of the age, the location of the exhibition in the commodious hall of New York's Sixty-ninth Street Armory—a reaction against the clubby atmosphere of the art galleries—was conceived as a democratic space. For a modest cost, ordinary people could view the masterpieces of Europe and America, bypassing the judgment of dealers who sought only the well-heeled as customers. Indeed, ordinary people might even begin collecting. Wood-block prints started at \$10. Even the famous *Nude* was just \$324.

The Progressive writer Caroline Caffin had viewed vaudeville as the great collaboration between audience and performer. Similarly, the sculptors and painters of the Armory Show represented the Progressive faith in the judgment of audiences, once rid of the art dealers seeking to promote art as investment. Propelled by this idealism, purchasers at the Armory Show were envisioned as ordinary Americans who would purchase art for the pleasure of their own interactions with the work. No prizes were to be awarded, lest that influence individual choice. These were ideas current in the Village community, and with its faith in the judgment of ordinary people, the Armory Show often seems the flowering of the Progressive Greenwich Village sensibility.

At the same time, it was clear that artists increasingly sought to make a living from art. As in literature, art had passed from an amateur, genteel, and often feminized occupation, to one that required the focus and ambition of full-time attention and its handmaiden, for these nonelite artists, monetary compensation. The need for artists to make money to live on was coming out of the shadows into public discussion. "No profession can be said to be flourishing which is not on a sound money basis," as the British artist John Collier complained in a national magazine.¹⁰ Thus, the Armory Show represented two threads of the time, both idealistic and pragmatic: the Progressive belief in the judgment of ordinary Americans and the increasing consciousness of American artists to find ways to sell their work.

The Struggle for Recognition

In the same year as the Armory Show, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art published a history of itself, noting in its self-congratulatory pages that generous endowments had allowed the museum to expand its holdings in lace and decorative arts and to underwrite an archaeological site in Egypt—the current rage.¹¹ The museum's collection represented American art only on the basis of the early national painters, but modern art not at all. Museums were not alone in their rejection of American art in general. American artists, modern and otherwise, had long struggled to find acceptance in a time when collectors preferred the time-tested European masters for their mansions of the Gilded Age. To find similar homes for work of American artists, William Merritt Chase, guiding light of the Art Students League, hosted “extravaganzas” in his New York studio “each one carefully staged and orchestrated in an effort to impress his visitors,” who were as much as possible the city's social elite.¹² Indeed, many Art Students League activities were aimed at getting attention, from elaborate shows that satirized the pomposity of Victorian art, to the league's increasingly famous annual balls, which eventually moved from homemade costume parties to society events in luxury hotels.

By the end of the first decade of the century, American artists were impatient and considered that mass media might help them find a place for their art. The art show that most represented that possibility was the 1908 MacBeth Gallery exhibition of “The Eight,” that is, an exhibition of eight American realist painters: Robert Henri, Arthur B. Davies, Ernest Lawson, George Luks, Joan Sloan, George Bellows, Everett Shinn, and William Glackens. Like the Armory Show, the exhibition of “The Eight” has come to be a benchmark, marking the rejection of Victorian theatricality and sentimentality in favor of subjects that were ordinary and urban. That the Macbeth exhibition came to become the cultural marker of the time rather than other exhibitions of realist painting that were also occurring was thanks to “The Eight's” leader, Robert Henri, who framed the exhibition in ways that resonated with the press corps. Henri knew the world of the press from his Philadelphia days when he was a member of the Philadelphia Artist-Reporters Group, a cultural community whose membership included the nucleus of “The Eight,” Glackens, Sloan, Shinn, as well as Hugh Breckenridge and the sculptor Charles Grafly. As a worker in the newspaper industry in the new century, Henri knew that to appeal to the press corps it must be in the name of America. As William Innes Homer described the campaign, “Underlying their statements to the press was a distinct note of Americanism in subject matter and in their believed in the progress of art in this country.”¹³ It became widely known that the impetus for the exhibition was the rejection of several realist works by the National Academy of Design.

In press accounts, the rejected artists were thus “men of rebellion,” artists who represented a “secession” in a favor a new “movement,” a comfortable theme for the press, many of whose members Henri included in his circle.¹⁴

Despite the success of “The Eight,” most American artists were still coping with problems of finding space that would lead to sales of art when the art market was dominated by dealers most interested in selling high-priced Old Masters. In one response, the philanthropist and Village habitué Clara Davidge established a gallery in 1909 aimed at selling the work of emerging artists. Unlike Stieglitz, Davidge was less interested in encouraging spiritual connections than in those that connected artists and buyers, utilizing her social and business contacts as an interior decorator.¹⁵ Despite its many shows, the gallery was nonetheless failing by 1911 (to close the following year), and its artists and a few others, twenty-five in all, gathered in its rooms one November evening to form a self-help organization. Arthur B. Davies was selected to head up the new organization, the Association of American Artists and Painters. Davies had contacts with well-to-do clients, who could help underwrite an exhibition, and Davies had been one of the artists of the famous Eight show, with experience in publicity. With its secretary Walt Kuhn in the lead, the organization planned an international exhibit, one to which the best of the European modernists would be invited as a way to help launch American artists of the same sensibility. From the start, it was Kuhn’s ambition that the show would emphasize American painting and sculpture. His correspondence is filled with hope that America would become the new center of modernism. “Davies agrees with me that America is the new soil and that the game is most interesting at home,” he wrote confidently on his European trip.¹⁶ His proposal for the gallery design located American sculpture in the central gallery while reserving the largest gallery, the apex of all other galleries, as the showcase of *American* painters.¹⁷

But as the show took shape, both the national purpose and its bread-and-butter undergirding became secondary to Davies’s educational vision to trace the development of art with European modernism at its apex. “What I did not know,” wrote Jerome Myers, who was on the selection committee that chose Davies, “was Davies’ intense desire to show the modern art of Europe in America.” What Myers feared in this approach was the opportunity for European art to outshine the American contributions: “When I did see the pictures for the first time, my mind was more troubled than my eyes, for Davies had unlocked the door to foreign art, unrestricted and triumphant; more than ever before, our great country had become a colony; more than every before, we had become provincials.”¹⁸

For American artists, the show’s emphasis on European modernist art may have been humbling, but it had larger consequences in how the show was perceived outside the artistic community. While “The Eight’s” success had had

much to do with its representation of American themes, the message in the Armory Show seemed to be about American subservience to the European artists. The nation was in an imperialist mode, impressing itself on the Philippines, in South America, even on the tips of the hemispheres, hardly in the mood to take a secondary place in any field and especially to an art that was already viewed in some circles as decadent. Modern art from European hands provided a ready conduit to tap into long-held American attitudes of European corruption. Moreover, the inaccessibility of the cubist and futuristic works to most American audiences offered only a Hobson's choice between the bitter pill of European superiority, on the one hand, and the even more bitter pill of not knowing why, on the other.

The Art of Publicity

By any standard, the mounting of the International Exhibition of Modern Art was a huge undertaking. Running in New York from February 17, 1913, to March 1, 1913, the show displayed 1,250 paintings, sculptures, and decorative works by more than 300 avant-garde European and American artists. Its success involved working with European dealers in obtaining the best of the European moderns, and their costs and transportation of shipping to New York to be mounted alongside the hardly known American entries. But as mammoth as that undertaking was the publicity campaign that called upon friendship circles, press connections, and a publicity machine undertaken by Davies and Kuhn.

For their part, the organizers not only had the success of "The Eight" for their model but also knowledge of Stieglitz's experience in mounting exhibitions by Rodin, Matisse, and Picasso at his New York gallery, none of which had found commercial success for the artists. But clearly the organizers knew that the spectacular in modern life was about partnering with the media of the time. By the first decade of the twentieth century, publicity techniques had developed new sophistication, well-enough known to have been adopted by reform organizations. In the elaborate and spectacle-filled 1913 suffrage parade in Washington, Alice Paul found that ruffians tormenting the marchers helped build sympathy for the movement. Paul's techniques expanded in the World War I era as jailed suffragists embarked upon hunger strikes. Not surprisingly, when Mabel Dodge and John Reed linked arms with the Wobblies to support the striking silk workers in Paterson, New Jersey, also in 1913, it was conceived as an elaborate pageant. But neither the suffrage parade nor the Paterson pageant was to outdo the Armory Show as the biggest extravaganza of the remarkable year.

The Armory Show was mounted not only at a time of public spectacle, but also at a time when coverage of the arts was included in the nation's journals and

newspapers. Even small papers had their book reviewers and arts critics, and if they could not be full time, the beat was assigned to talented amateurs, such as the young Willa Cather, who reviewed touring shows as a college student in Nebraska. Arts critics in many smaller towns did not have to be trained in the arts they covered. Judgment by these critics was a matter of common sense on a standard that cultural productions were expected to be good for the community and a signs of its civilized life

By today's standards, however, the era is rich in the educated men and a few women who served as arts critics at metropolitan newspapers and monthly magazines. Like the Paris critic, Guillaume Apollinaire, the great promoter of modern art in Europe, they were men who moved in artistic circles: Charles Fitzgerald, art critic for New York's *The Evening Sun*, was part of the friendship circle around "The Eight," particularly Williams Glackens, his drinking companion at the Old Grapevine Tavern (included in Glackens's 1905 painting, *At Mouquin*). Charles H. Caffin, also an art critic for the *Sun*, was an early supporter of Alfred Stieglitz's photography, a contributor to Stieglitz's *Camera Work* magazine, and articulated the Stieglitz vision in his 1901 book, *Photography as a Fine Art*—just the first of his many works on art that sought to educate readers about art. James Gibbons Huneker, another of the *Sun's* reviewers across all seven of the lively arts, was the most brilliant of a brilliant circle of metropolitan critics while Henry McBride was beginning a career as promoter of modernist art at the same newspaper. Charles de Kay wrote copiously for newspapers and the quarterlies and was a promoter of art across disciplines as founder of New York's Author's League and the National Arts Club. Moreover, the Greenwich Village set included many journalists, sympathetic to modernism, Carl Van Vecten, Hutchins Hapgood, and Heywood Hale Broun. Less is known about Elizabeth Luther Carey, an arts critic at the *New York Times* who may have been most connected to the female art circles, but she played a secondary role to Edwin Alden Jewell, who was just beginning his fifty-year career at the *Times*. Altogether it was a group familiar with the development of modern art and often hospitable to its works, and the Armory Show organizers were not unrealistic to expect serious coverage.

No matter the openness of these men to modern art, it would be the established older critics whose negative voices became the loudest, willing to speak out strongly, protective of their position as moral guardians. They were the inheritors of the legacy of the Gilded Age, men, who wielded more power than dealers, patrons, collectors, museums, or artists in determining whose art would be shown. Out of this tradition, Royal Cortissoz at the *New York Herald Tribune*, Frank Jewett Mather, an art professor who wrote for the quality press, and artist/commentator Kenyon Cox, who was at the height of his influence,

provided unambiguous guidance. “Cubists and Futurist are Making Insanity Pay,” Cox was quoted in the *New York Times* banner headline¹⁹ by the newspaper that regularly excoriated the sensational press.

The views of critics who did not embrace the exhibit resonated with readers whose attitudes were formed in the aftermath of the Civil War and who saw the role of art as one of uplift and idealization. Healing, unification, and common principle were to be welcomed, while their opposite, disassembly, was the handmaiden of the chaos that the nation had so recently experienced (and a state of affairs that anarchism, socialism, and unregulated immigration seemed to advance). Indeed, one Cox supporter wrote to the *Times* to express the view that modern art was part of a worldwide movement “to disrupt and degrade, if not to destroy art, but literature and society, too.”²⁰ The fear, as Michael Leja notes, was that of further national fragmentation on the basis that, “Personal fantasies and meanings might replace collective ones.”²¹

The messages from the negative voices were taken up and repeated by members of the sensational and provincial press. Arts coverage had a particular role in the new class of “family” newspapers, which served as guides to the genteel life for its white-collar readers, clerks and teachers who aspired to middle-class status. Arts and culture coverage met the marketing strategy, but only along traditional lines as it sought to serve readers lacking the confidence to strike out in new directions. But no group was more pleased in following the lead of the conservative critics than the sensational press whose “rum-soaked” reporters of the daily grind, men who dismissed college degrees as effete and shooed female reporters into “hencoops” so newsrooms and their spittoons could remain unchallenged, found modern art a good carrier for class issues. In their rumpled suits and stogies and a belief they knew their readers best, these were the men who came to represent the class lines that the organizers could not cross. Unschooling in discussions of modern art, the reporters chose to take their lead from the most conservative of the art critics.

Marketing the Armory Show

As a well-connected symbolist painter of unicorns on dreamy landscapes, Davies was known and appreciated.²² Davies, indeed, is considered the acceptable transitional figure between the realist schools of Robert Henri and the Stieglitz coterie around “291.” Davies seemed to live a life of success and propriety (it was only after his death that it was discovered he had established a second family), and it is tempting to compare the gentlemanly Davies with Kuhn, the scrambler, the boaster, and the deal maker. Kuhn’s art training was sporadic in New York and Paris, although his Parisian training clearly influenced his work.

The strong colors of his painting for the Armory Show, *Morning, 1912*, is considered to reflect Fauvist influences, while his 1914 work *At the Dressing Table 1914* shows the influence of Matisse.

Kuhn's devotion to art was always tempered by his commercial career, an erratic personality, and his admiration of mass culture that began as a child when he spent his summers in the early moviemaking center of Fort Lee, New Jersey. His tendency for promotion emerged when, as owner of a bicycle shop in Brooklyn, he mounted bicycle races at county fairs to help sales. Later, he was an illustrator and cartoonist for humor magazines, *WASP* (in San Francisco), *Life*, *Judge* and *Puck* in New York, then a commercial and theatrical set designer, and later a painter of vaudeville and circus performers. The month before the Armory Show *Life* was selling prints of one of his cartoons—a bird peering through a hole in an outhouse—advertised as “an enjoyable addition to the furnishing of your den.”²³ His commercial interests anchored him less in Greenwich Village than other artists, and his cartoon work suggested he was in touch with the ordinary people that the Armory Show sought to appeal.

Kuhn had major responsibility in choosing and making arrangements for the European art, but he took on publicity with eagerness. He urged advertising, circulars, buttons, and unrelenting publicity releases. “As soon as I have it [the show] thoroughly planned we are going to give it to all the papers and they'll at it. I will retain the exclusive privilege of doing the talking for the press.”²⁴ When he and Davies returned from their European tour, Kuhn immediately started his campaign, writing to Walter Pach, “Today I gave the papers the list of European stuff which we know of definitely. It will be like a bombshell . . . Everyone is electrified when we quote the names.”²⁵ As the opening grew closer, his joy increased. “The Sun & Herald came out today as enclosed . . . We gave an interview to Swift of the Sun for a Sunday article to appear about the first week in Jan. Davies insists that I give all the interviews after this—Young du Bois was in today and tells me all the writers are crazy for stuff—We expect to be busy all day Monday giving interviews.”²⁶

The third member of the triumvirate complemented Kuhn's enthusiasm and Davies's connections. James Gregg was hired for \$1,200 to provide publicity services. For an organization whose members, including Davies and Kuhn, were donating their services, that cost alone indicates how imperative Gregg's role was regarded. Gregg had been closely aligned with the realistic movement since the 1908 show, and he was an art critic for New York's *Herald* (his role as publicist for the Armory Show apparently not a conflict of interest). Like the other critics, Gregg was no hack—born in Dublin, a childhood friend of James Joyce, and a graduate of the University of Ireland and Queen's College. He came to the United

States after newspaper jobs in Ireland. Falling in with the members of the realist school and with Henri as a friend, he became a modernist admirer.²⁷

The Association of American Painters and Sculptors arranged for a special issue of *Arts and Decoration*, a popular arts magazine in which Dodge's famous profile of Gertrude Stein appeared. From early in the planning, however, the three managers were not so interested in preaching to the choir as in finding a general audience. As a man of his time, Kuhn used its tools. "We are doing this according to American methods," he wrote to an artist friend and press contact in Kansas City, "and have already spent a good deal of money advertising . . . Give me an idea of what sort of photographs you can use. I suppose they will not stand for nudes."²⁸ Grandly, he envisioned the show on an international scale with the United States at the epicenter. "America is the new soil," he wrote.²⁹

The campaign included a brand image, a stylized pine tree as a logo intended to reference the American Revolution—although not an easily recognized icon. The pine tree logo was imprinted on everything connected to the exhibit. The logo also appeared on buttons, not so different from political campaigns buttons of the time, and promoted the idea that show was also courting a vote. Posters were spread around Manhattan. A variety of booklets on the various artists were available for sale. Kuhn sent multiple announcements to members of the press across the country.

Meantime, Gregg had placed a piece with *Harper's Weekly* promoting the opening. The *New York American* provided a forum for Alfred Stieglitz's modernist views on art. The prepublicity was not all favorable; also covered were the difficulties over sculpture selections, and anti-modernists were at the ready to find fault. But as Milton W. Brown, the historian of the show, writes, "The attendant publicity only helped build up a head of steam for the final sprint down to the opening."³⁰ It was climaxed with a preview show for the press alone, almost unheard of at the time.

In Brown's view, the publicity generated by the preview was a "glittering success" as even the conservative representatives were forced to recognize the show as an event that had been mounted by the "artistic underdog" against "superhuman odds."³¹ This was an attractive trope to newspaper readers and echoed the American versus European theme of Henri's presentation of "The Eight." But on closer look, the preview publicity from this new strain of professional critics was not in the vein of the booster press but reflected the serious intent of the new professional. Charles Caffin, a supporter of modern art, writing in the *American*, found the show too extravagant in its excessive size, mass advertising, and "circus atmosphere." Arthur Hoeber of the *Globe*, another follower of modern art, provided a penetrating analysis rather than the advocacy position that Kuhn would have appreciated. Guton Borglum, representing the elite *Evening*

Post, saw the exhibit in terms of its influence on American artists. “It can’t help but bring about a widespread awaking.” Indeed, true to their professional status, the Armory Show was larger than its parts, not an opportunity for grandstanding evaluations of particular works. The majority of the New York arts writers were impressed with the show, but the pieces that served their own roles as professional men and prevented the kind of unreserved enthusiasm that might have countered the rhetorical excesses of the anti-modernist critics.³²

In the same moderate tone, Edward Alden Jewell of the *New York Times* saw the show in terms that the American artists had kept themselves free of European decadence.³³ Since this was neither a rave nor a rebuke, the greater authorities at the *Times* chose to publish another piece in its Sunday magazine section, the lavishly illustrated and sensationably headlined interview with the arch-conservative Cox. cubists and futurists, Cox said, were “doing in” the traditions of painting; French dealers wanted to pass wares onto the American market now that Paris was saturated, and, his most pointed charge—modern art was “nothing but an expression of the individual.”³⁴ Individualism was, indeed, a tenet of modernism, but what Cox was identifying was that individualism as celebrated as an American value in other frames, such as the Western hero, was most about individual action upholding community values. But Cox’s views that modernism represented crumbling traditions, French exploitation, and excessive individualism were ideas that struck resonant notes among the teachers and middle-management readers the *Times* was seeking—the men and women who were not so eager to be cast back down the slippery slope they had just ascended.

Moreover, Cox’s statement that modern art “made insanity pay” seemed to unleash the metaphor. Even the highly respected critic Frank Jewett Mather thought the show was “like visiting a lunatic asylum.” Brooklyn’s *Life* exaggerated the metaphor: “blear-eye daubs and phantasmagorias of the insane.”³⁵ A Chicago headline summed up Harriet Monroe’s review, “Art Show Open to Freaks.”³⁶ Both Cortisoz and Cox seemed to revel in punchy, outlandish phrases that encouraged the same from headline writers in the hinterlands.

But it was the unambiguous Cox view that accounted for the increase in crowds after the second week, causing some visitors to go directly to what became the show’s most representative piece, *Nude Descending a Staircase*. By the close of the exhibit, fifty thousand visitors had seen the exhibition. Kuhn, sounding much like the barker of the circus he so admired, was fully sure that his prediction had been fulfilled: “The greatest modern show ever given anywhere one earth.”³⁷ The celebratory atmosphere peaked on the final day of the exhibit as thousands flooded into the armory. Some of them were “the elite,” Myers recalled, but “many not so elite.”³⁸ The *Nude* was reproduced

on the dinner invitation, an acknowledgement of its role both in embodying modern art and gaining attention. By all accounts, the closing dinner was an event in itself, garnering press attention with its snake dance, a drum and bugle corps, many lifted glasses and much self-congratulation.³⁹ Kuhn did not care if critics liked the show or not; the dinner itself was jovially dedicated to “our Friends and Enemies of the Press.” Like the showman he was, all publicity was good publicity.

But all publicity was not good publicity as the show prepared to go on its tour. The views of Cox and Cortisoz were distributed to the broad readership of *Harper's Weekly* and *Century Magazine*. In his *Harper's* piece, Cox selected Marsden Hartley to represent “the total destruction of art” because he had refused to provide any clue to what he was painting—for good reason, as we know. Cox warned, “If your stomach revolts against this rubbish it is because it is not fit for human food.”⁴⁰ To the *Century* readers, he announced a Nietzschean call that great art could not be achieved without a great man. “You cannot have the art without the man, and when you have them then you have the art.”⁴¹ The modernists, all with their own separate views, need not apply. For his part, Cortisoz decried what he saw as the shunning of the long development history of art and its principles in favor of the modernist’s “immeasurable belief in himself.” Their execution was “capricious,” even “childish,” while efforts to explain were, in the catchy phrase, “mumbo jumbo.”⁴²

Both Cox and Cortisoz included the word “illusion” in their magazine titles, and this idea that modernist painting was something of con game was made by Theodore Roosevelt in another of the widely read monthlies, *Outlook*. It was necessary, Roosevelt agreed, that Progressivism meant forward movement, but not to the extent of following, in yet another use of the metaphor, the “lunatic fringe.” Roosevelt was suspicious of motives behind the show, comparing the exhibit to the faked mermaid of P. T. Barnum. Likewise, the occasional gullible “with enough money will buy a Cubist picture, or a picture of a misshapen nude woman, repellent from every standpoint.”⁴³

The *Nude* was hardly repellent to the nation’s humorists. She was “Rude Descending a Staircase (Rush hour at the subway)” in the cartoon by F. Griswold in the *New York Evening Sun*. In Oliver Herford’s witty verse, “Miss Galatea,” a cubist sculpture comes to life, who, after one glance at the Gibson Girl, asks her creator to provide her with the frills that will produce romance.⁴⁴ From the serious quarterly to the humor magazines, modern art was portrayed as a sham: anyone could do it, from the grandmother working on a “cubist” quilt and “Gyp the Futurist,” to the panel title, “Nobody Who Has Been Drinking Is Let In to See This Show.”⁴⁵ In the end, wit, authority, and strongly worded opinion could only sweep away reviews of moderate critics, who could do little but

note that Monet had been ridiculed when his work had been first hung at the National Academy of Design. "People gasped then, as now, and many refused to take the pictures seriously."⁴⁶

Clearly, the humorists had captured the national confusion. How could modern art be "understood" when craft (ostensibly) was not the criteria? How could modern be understood if it referenced meanings only known to the artist? And why display and seek to sell individual assessments as if they were more worthy than others? Was the intention to lock out the audience? Even Roosevelt's piece in the *Outlook* echoed the outsider image: a "layman" looked at modern art. Roosevelt himself was not even clear of the gender of the nude, much less that it was going down stairs. Why name a piece so exactly if its reference was not so clear? And viewers attuned to gender improprieties might have asked why a female would be descending nude down a public space of a staircase anyway. "Titles," writes Joanne Mancini, "provoked special hostility, moreover, not only because they brought home the growing disparity between the visible world and the visual content of modernist painting, but because they suggested that the experience of non-expert views was in itself somehow different from that of modernists."⁴⁷ The popular press was delighted to provide its own naming choices: "a lot of disused golf clubs and bags"; "an assortment of half-made leather saddles"; "an elevated railroad stairway in ruins after an earthquake"; a "pack of brown cards in a nightmare"; an "orderly heap of broken violins"; and "an academic painting of an artichoke."⁴⁸ Julian Street coined the most remembered phrase for the *Nude*, "an explosion in a shingle factory."⁴⁹

This complicated stew was all on display when the show moved to Chicago, a city with a modernist sensibility illustrated by the Chicago Little Theatre, *Poetry Magazine*, and arts criticism as represented by Floyd Dell, later of the Village, who was the young editor of the *Evening Sun's* "Friday Literary Review," and, indeed, even in previous exhibits of the Chicago Institute of Art. However, the show had already been ridiculed by the newspaper's copy editors in its New York opening, it arrived in the middle of a morals crusade (that turned on the confiscation of a reproduction of Paul Chabas's *September Morn*), its welcome by the host institution, the Chicago Institute of Art, was tepid, and a Chicago advocate, Jerome Eddy, seemed most interested in modern art as an investment opportunity. Gregg was the association's representative, but he became a figure of fun, tall and lanky, with arcane explanations of modern art that did not make sense to Chicago's popular press. Moreover, the Armory Show was now almost entirely represented by European modern art, giving credence to intimations that it was a huckstering opportunity promoted by foreigners. Newspapers reveled in gossipy stories about the European masters. Chicago's *Inter-Ocean* critic told readers lurid tales of Gauguin and Van Gogh's lives that seemed to make

sense of the view that neither had “learned to paint.” Other reporters charged the artists with so many moral failings that arrest seemed imminent. Cubist notions of female form notwithstanding, cultural custodians found the exhibit lewd, prompting audiences to expect French postcard art writ large. Institute professors brought classes to the exhibition to lecture against modern art, an arts organization mounted a satire, and demonstrating art students were so angry that police had to be called in to calm them down.⁵⁰

Gregg tried to make the most of the controversy by the publication of a small pamphlet called *For and Against*, a title that could only emphasize a thumbs-up, thumbs-down approach and fostered a Jacksonian atmosphere in which Chicago attendees thought their sole purpose was to come to a strongly held opinion. That sense of purpose served to promote an attendance of 188,000. The attendance did not materially affect sales of the works, although the remaining paintings by Duchamps were purchased by Eddy for investment, and by the Chicago modernist painter Manierre Dawson in admiration. Kuhn, so ecstatic at the New York opening, predicted that the Chicago show would make little difference in the art world. Kahn complained to his wife, “The so-called intelligent class here are a lot of self advertisers and ignoramuses.”⁵¹

In Boston, the original purpose of the show—to exhibit American art—simply disappeared. Gregg wrote it was a matter of space there was no room for American art. Critics could make no sense of Matisse. Cubism was, deliberately it seemed, “playing a game of mystification.”⁵² Bostonians did not want to be tricked, did not want the influence of the “primitive” to be regarded as an improvement on the civilized, and did not want an ordered world put askance by European artists whose personal failings had been well publicized.

In the final accounting, sales at the Armory Show were a mixed bag. The Metropolitan Museum, prompted by an advocate rather than a change in policy, purchased Cezanne’s *The Poorhouse on the Hill* for \$6,700, a substantial amount, while *Nude Descending a Staircase* was sold for its asking price, \$324, sight unseen, to a San Francisco antique dealer. But the recognized masters, Matisse, Van Gogh and Gauguin, priced higher, did not do so well, nor did the higher-priced American entries.

Nonetheless, the legacy of the Armory Show was enormous. Thanks to the Armory Show, the reputations of the French masters were extended to new elite markets in the United States but not, in general, to the socially credible buyer of Progressive dreams. Instead, the Armory Show served as the first step that came to define modern art as high culture, purchased by museums in their role as cultural custodians, and by wealthy collectors whose beneficiaries found them to be solid investment vehicles. Primarily as a result of the Armory show, modern art emerged into popular stereotype as impenetrable and self indulgent, not a

part of a recognizable modern world but representing a hard-edged intellectual world that was too difficult for most audiences to enter. Along with symphonic music and opera, modern art became a signifier of high culture characterized crudely in the mass media of the day alongside the fat lady opera singer, the high-hatted toff dozing at the symphony, and the puzzlement of the ordinary person when faced with abstract art—as in a 1913 *Century* cartoon⁵³—a motif that was resurrected by the U.S. Post Office with the issue of its commemorative stamp honoring the fiftieth anniversary of the Armory Show in which a puzzled couple, as in the earlier cartoon, stand in front of the *Nude*.

Such lines of demarcation had some use in a commercial setting, opening the door for the marketing of modern art along “high” class lines. The magazines, notably *Vanity Fair*, which sought readers who defined themselves outside of popular media, introduced modern art as a marker of its audience demographic. Frank Crowninshield, the magazine’s publisher, was a genuine admirer and collector of modern art; nonetheless, the choice of *Vanity Fair* to support modern art and not, for example, the middlebrow *Saturday Evening Post*, was an assurance to gallery owners that modern art would not be diminished by too broad an appeal. Since modern art was not in the popular culture, museums began collections of American modern art as part of their dedication to uplift, but emphasized the distance between its audiences and art by doing so. In its greatest irony, the Armory Show reasserted fine art as hierarchal and hastened its commodification.

Since its time, the Armory Show has been regarded a major event in American art history that encouraged galleries devoted to modern art and to modern American art. Clearly, the show did impact upon American artists, but it was not until midcentury, with the introduction of abstract expressionism, that the United States supplanted Europe as the center of international art. Nonetheless, because of World War I and the difficulty of obtaining the favored European paintings, American galleries turned to American painters “with the result,” according to one contemporary, “that many good men, heretofore unknown, have to come to the fore and made sales.”⁵⁴ The influence of African masks on the work of Picasso and other modernists led to an exhibit of African masks at the Stieglitz’s Little Gallery in 1914, an acknowledgment not only of their influence on modern art but also as art in themselves. In 1916, *Forum* magazine sponsored its own exhibition of American modern art “to turn public attention for the moment from European art, and to concentrate it on the really excellent work of our native artists.”⁵⁵ *The Forum*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Century* began to discuss modern art on a regular basis. The little magazines carried the modernist torch for modern art, as it did for literature and poetry. Meantime, the art patron Dr. John Weichsel established the People’s Art Guild in New York not

only to support artists but also to develop an educated audience. But as late as 1917, *Bookman* could not put “American” and “modernism” in the same breath. “American Painting Versus Modernism” seemed to suggest the two were naturally combative.⁵⁶

The immediate recognition of artistry at the Armory Show seemed particularly experienced by the well-to-do, including Lillian P. Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, wealthy women whose interest and patronage of modern art led to the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929. Frank Crowninshield marked his interest in French modern art as sparked by the show. The attorney John Quinn, who had long worked on behalf of artists, was so overcome by the show that he forgot to go home. Quinn assembled one of the nation’s great art collections as did Walter Arensberg, who missed the show but quickly purchased the *Nude* from the San Francisco owner and became a patron of Duchamp in America.

Although well-meaning Progressives were willing to struggle with the acceptance of modern art,⁵⁷ those who hoped the show would expand general American taste were disappointed. Charles Caffin’s 1914 book *How to Understand Modern Art* continued the Progressive mode of education. But ordinary viewers, used to simple up-or-down evaluations, were not so interested in having to study how to look at art. Quickly discernible craft and competence had always been the purview of the popular audiences—a dance was executed, a note was struck, a laugh evinced. No wonder that swirling underneath the ridicule of cartoons and humor magazines was the anger of outsider angst at “not getting it,” lurking suspicions of fakery, and a loud voice to cover the discomfort.

Modern art moved into the popular culture in terms of fashion and home decoration. John Wanamaker devoted one of his store windows to “cubist gowns” during the exhibition, and department stores would be promoters of art in the next decade. But modern art as cultural work did not benefit from this commercial embrace. Gimbels department store failed in its efforts to mount another Armory-like show. Modern art for the popular audience most reflected the view of the cartoonists.

Why the Armory Show failed to spark an enthusiastic response from its nonelite viewers may have no absolute answer—but accountable is the lead established by the mass media, which, as much as vaudeville or popular film, found in modern art opportunity to press easily understood messages. These were ideas of American inferiority vis-à-vis European culture, American superior morality, and a sense that American audiences were being fooled when the two came together. This was hardly a comfortable place, but popular media, which routinely raises uncomfortable specters, can also offer solutions. In the case of the Armory Show, the press provided some resolution by complimenting

Americans on their innate ability to make common-sense judgments and thus affirmed comfortable prejudices. The serious art critics urged examination but could not compete with the simple pro-or-con view of popular media.

It was, of course, the artists themselves, by way of the show's publicity, who opened the Pandora's box of mass media coverage that so confused modernism's entry into American cultural life. One might consider that when Max Weber's work was accepted by the small Newark Museum in Newark, Delaware, before the show opened, it might have offered a slower but surer path for modernism's acceptance in the United States. But the landscape had changed after the Armory Show. "It is hard for us to get the truth in regard to modern art," a writer in one of the respectable quarterlies sighed in June 1913. "The day of the great painters is for the moment over. The day of the advertisers, the popular magazines, the journalists, the promoters, the puffers, the art dealers has come in."⁵⁸

CHAPTER 9

Unambiguous Ambition

Eugene O’Neill and the Provincetown Players

All his life he knew what interested him, and he felt that interest without regard for what mattered to others.

—Stephen H. Black, *Eugene O’Neill Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*

My soul is a submarine
My aspirations are torpedoes.

—Eugene O’Neill, *The Masses*

The opening of Eugene O’Neill’s play *Emperor Jones* on November 1, 1920, met any standards for opening-night success. “The Provincetown Players have done it again”; “he is the best of American playwrights”; “It reinforced the impression that for strength and originality he has no rival among the American writers for the stage.”¹

The play opened at the Playwrights’ Theatre, the Greenwich Village location of the Provincetown Players. Its audience had to suffer through seven intervals, sit on hard seats, and endure clumsy scene changes. But the result, as the *New York Call* critic wrote, was one of “giving hundreds the most thrilling evening of their theatrical lives . . . People squat on their coats on the hard and not immaculate floors, or sit cheerfully on radiators, or stand patiently for two hours.”²

The play’s immediate success meant that the tiny box office faced a demand of a thousand new subscribers. The play moved to a larger theater, added matinees, and finally moved to a commercial theater and went on the road for another two years. It ran for more than 100 performances in its Greenwich Village setting and 204 performances in its commercial setting—both remarkable.

Audiences, which had resisted modern art five years before, came to acclaim and mark *The Emperor Jones* as a masterpiece from a young man who was designated as the nation's promise. The play was revived in the Players' summer playhouse in 1924 and again in 1926, when it was performed by the original star, the African American actor Charles A. Gilpin. It was adapted to film in 1934 with Paul Robeson in the title role and presented as an opera in the same year. In London it was another success. In 1945, it was performed as a U.S. radio play; and the play has been preserved as a recording and on video. It is still presented in the United States in ways that speak to its modernist nature.³

By all accounts, *The Emperor Jones* represented America's theatrical coming of age. As Travis Bogard writes, "It demonstrated conclusively that there was an untouched world of theatre yet to be explored in America."⁴ It also demonstrated that American theater at its highest level could be appreciated by a general American theater audience. At a time when commercial theater was in thrall to slight plays in naturalistic settings, *The Emperor Jones* introduced its great American themes of guilt, rapacity, and memory by means of a powerful theatricality in which the most ordinary of men, an American Pullman porter, could become a tragic hero. It is one of O'Neill's early explorations of his themes of loss and mourning. The lead character, Brutus Jones, is turned out by the Caribbean nation over which he has made himself "emperor." In episodic scenes, Jones tries to escape his pursuers, represented by the relentless beat of tom-toms, and his personal and American racial past. As he is stripped of his Western accoutrements in his race through the jungle, Jones must also face the history of the auction block—the final subjugation from kingly power. Once considered to have racist overtones, Glenda James's review of a present-day production described the play as "perhaps the first play to depict the Middle Passage." Brutus Jones, she writes, "carries the burden of black oppression within him, ghosts he can't exorcise. He is O'Neill's Macbeth, a man of promise and valor who is killed by the silver bullets that represent his greed and ambition."⁵

The play also proved the faith of the Provincetown Players in nurturing a young playwright at considerable cost in the construction of a plaster cyclorama for the production. But while the play inaugurated O'Neill's nationally recognized career, *The Emperor Jones* marked the demise of the Players. "No wonder we fell, with 'The Emperor Jones,' into the trap that seemed a garden of flowers but whose steel teeth never unclosed on us once we had fallen," wrote Edna Kenton, a member of the Players' executive committee. The commercial success of the play did not reinvigorate the group to continue to seek out and produce more of America's new playwrights. "Values had shifted overnight, astonishingly. To go uptown with our first success was higher honor than to stay downtown with our experiments . . . We had ceased to be one thing purely; we began

just there to be divided in purpose, mixed in motive.”⁶ The group broke apart, factional and envious, exposing the limits of a cultural community in a nation where the hovering shadow is success in the marketplace. O’Neill, even in the flush of his first success, sought moneymaking possibilities. “Isn’t it a damn shame,” he wrote to his agent Richard Madden, “that ‘The Emperor Jones’ with all the fuss it created, cannot be turned into an income raising proposition somewhere, somehow!”⁷ Given O’Neill’s drive for success, it is surprising that the least-explored of all the grand themes of *Emperor Jones* is one of ambition. Who could blame Emperor Jones for actualizing his opportunities?

As a young artist with his major work before him, O’Neill never had any confusion about his twin goals for worldly success and artistic achievement. Like Isadora Duncan, a fellow Nietzschean, his own belief in his art led him to seek acolytes who could help him achieve his vision. Unlike Duncan, he had no disaffection with money or disinclination to turn from the kinds of aggressive career decisions that made his place in his time and fixed his legacy. It is not to dispute O’Neill’s place in American dramatic history to note that his work came to public attention because of his recognition that artists in America were likely to be discovered only with effort by the artist on his own behalf. As much as any artist of the period, O’Neill demonstrated the shift of artistic temperament from self-expression to self-actualization. Not only were the young men and women of the workplace adopting strategies for success, but also artists were not immune from engagement in the commercial world. The Provincetown Players experience stands as an example of the tension between the notion of art as seeking spiritual truths, without the taint of commerce, and the role of the individual artist who sought commercial as well as artistic success.

This reorientation to a commercial sensibility by artists was well under way by the second decade of the new century. From its instigation, the Armory Show of 1913 was at odds with itself, as organizers such as Arthur B. Davies sought to educate the public for its own good while its exhibiting artists sought to find customers. By that time, the old romantic notion that a true artist could not serve both mammon and the greater truth was being replaced by realizations that serious artists, as much as popular ones, could not rely on discovery from without, but needed to take an active role on their own behalf. In considering how the nation’s culture is constructed, the decision of an artist to be active in the management of his or her career plays a role in what cultural products will find a place on the cultural landscape.

By 1915, the Players seemed almost anachronistic in their philosophy of play spirit. To be heard or seen, it was becoming clear that artists, as much as any careerist, had to focus on the work and its trajectory. The dilettante and the easily distracted were less likely to find a place in the public sphere. One

may consider the role of work in the career of Willa Cather, a Village resident, who was not active in either the political or social circles of the era in favor of close attention to her work and the maintenance of her publishing contacts. “The business of an artist’s life is not Bohemianism, for or against,” she wrote, “but ceaseless and unremitting labor.”⁸ Similarly, Georgia O’Keeffe, long before her New Mexico days, treasured her independence outside the many pulls of the Village. For Theodore Dreiser, work was always his first priority, regardless of his multiple (and simultaneous) affairs, including his ongoing efforts to find success in the marketplace. Dreiser’s driven personality carried *Sister Carrie* from the purdah to which Doubleday’s disinterest had relegated it, to a new publication in 1907 that led to the book’s success. In contrast, Mina Loy has only recently returned to cultural attention for her role as a modernist poet. Her biographer Carolyn Burke believes the neglect occurred “because she paid no heed to the requirements for consistent self-presentation in an age that, increasingly, valued professionalism and its external sign, the career.”⁹

This demand for career attention did not fit with the philosophy of artists who had sought integration across artistic disciplines in a spirit that valued community. Less than five years after the Armory Show that had so highlighted the difficulty of commerce and community, O’Neill’s rise to success marked the road ahead, an approach that was secular, American, and twentieth century—in short, individual achievement verified by public acclaim. Artists in the twentieth century would find it increasingly difficult to practice their art without a professional and worldly outlook. Entry by artists into the cultural communities of bohemia seemed less about nurture than a step in strategic planning.

The fading of earlier optimistic notions of artistic community may be related to the hold of the nineteenth-century tradition of the self-made man, a notion that resonated with American artists who had come from modest roots and who had begun their careers in commercial establishments. Moreover, the new science of sociology, especially the work of Max Weber, was bringing attention to the necessity of managing a career. But what impacted upon O’Neill, as it had upon Duncan, Jack London, and Dreiser, was the conscious adoption of a philosophical outlook that reimagined the artist as larger than life. Individualism had been an issue for the critics of the Armory Show, but in the O’Neill model, individualism was not in the mode of the tradition of the rugged and independent but rather fit in a template of celebrity, acolytes, and an enlarged sense of self-importance. Indeed, there could be no modest artist in such a model; artistic success demanded commitment to self and its pronouncement.

Like Duncan, O’Neill’s creative work was shaped by his study of Nietzsche. O’Neill’s major biographers, Arthur and Barbara Gelb, tell us O’Neill was reading *Thus Spake Zarathustra* by the age of eighteen, introduced others to it, and, carried

the book with him. They suggest the book took the place of the Catholic catechism on which he had been raised.¹⁰ His adoption of Nietzschean ideas of charismatic leadership, the necessity of acolytes, and the proclamation of one's views came at a fortuitous time that also fit with American values of the drive for success.

From his first association with the Players, O'Neill had most in common with the professionalizing tendencies of his time that eschewed views that art was to be compromised by commercial success and the notion that artistic expression was feminine and genteel. This approach fit with the writing philosophy of the naturalistic writers of the first part of the century, Jack London, Stephen Crane, Upton Sinclair, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and David Graham Phillips, all of whom approached literature in a workmanlike fashion, called for writers to have a "masculine" voice, and negotiated openly for worldly appreciation.¹¹ At a time when male artists feared feminization, success in the marketplace appeared to prove they were not dilettantes. This concern for masculinity was accentuated in commercial theater, supported by the female theatergoers who had made the plays of Clyde Fitch so successful. But Kenneth Macgowan, O'Neill's later collaborator, considered American theater weakened by its lack of male interest. "Women rule the American theater; men are too busy making money or recovering from the worry of doing so."¹²

From the beginning, O'Neill wanted both uncompromised artistic achievement as well as worldly recognition. We may consider that the growing status of actors and actresses as serious artists was a logical influence on O'Neill. Certainly, O'Neill viewed Provincetown not only as a way to explore artistic notions in a coterie setting but also to use Provincetown as the first step in bringing his individual vision to larger audience. On the one hand, he told an interviewer, he did not expect to make money from his plays, but nonetheless "all the time I felt the urge to do what I could do to have them accepted."¹³ These efforts may not have been prompted by a desire for wealth—although prosperity did indeed evolve—but rather entailed a self-consciousness of individual value, quite opposed to the founding principle of group spirit of the Provincetown experiment. Early on, his commitment to his own, single vision was recognized by a reviewer, "Eugene O'Neill is not only no caterer, he is no follower; he is a leader. He does not permit the public to decide for him how or what he shall write; that question he settles himself."¹⁴

The Visionaries

On the face of it, the Provincetown Players was founded as gay aside, the urge of the moment by a bunch of Village expatriates spending the summer in

Provincetown, the village at the tip of Massachusetts's Cape Cod peninsula. As the Players' first president, George "Jig" Cook represented the founding in a press interview this way: "'Why shouldn't we have a little theatre and try out our new play,' said [Cook] one day as they were all sunning on the beach after a swim. 'Just the thing!' cried Jack Reed. 'I've got two that I'd like to try next week.' 'Where shall we have the theatre?' said they. 'Why not out there on the wharf?' suggested someone. An old sea captain was looked up and told they wanted to rent this old shed on the pier for a theatre. 'That ain't no theatre,' said he. 'You wait and see!' said Freddie Burt."¹⁵

The account gave life to the popular myth that the Players sprang to life spontaneously, but the version is true to the philosophy of artists who, like Duncan, had come of age in the Greek infatuation. "Back to Greece!—that was Jig's solution for every modern ill," Edna Kenton wrote in her memoir of the Players. "Back rather, to the spirit of Greece for its lesson, and then a return to re-evolve the group spirit from modern life."¹⁶ Indeed, the myth of the Dionysian founding of the Players may have been the first expression of what became a cliché for American filmgoers—"let's put on a show." In the popular version, the founding of the Players resulted from a spirit of vacation fun, the belief that the amateur spirit was worthy of exploration, and the rejection of commercial values, all waded into magical being by Cook's artistic genius. In the mythic telling, original plays appeared effortlessly and, in the Village sensibility, everyone could do anything—a playwright, a set designer, a ticket taker, or show up on stage. Lovers moved from one to the other, all in the philosophy that life was about integration and living in the moment. Energy, joyousness, the spirit of a community trying new things prevailed. As Linda Ben-Zvi writes, "Cook's character encapsulated the spirit of the time: contradictory, youthful, joyous, rebellious and visionary. If these were his failings, they were failings of the period as a whole."¹⁷

In concrete terms, however, the founding of the Players was in tune with serious trends of American theater. In the Comstock-censorship era, Broadway was known for its constantly changing plays, their general lack of distinction, and, Clyde Fitch's commercial successes notwithstanding, the absence of a great American playwright. Criticisms of the sensational and sentimental commercial theater doubled when the tour of the Irish Players from Dublin's Abbey Theatre showed American theatergoers all what the U.S. theater was not. In 1908, in Evanston, Illinois, close to Chicago's hub of modernist thought, an amalgam of clubwomen and academics established the Drama League to raise American tastes. No group was more important to modernist theater than the Chicago Little Theatre, the incubator for Cook and Dell's understanding of theater. The Chicago Little Theatre pioneered the "new stagecraft," which sought to move

stage design from naturalistic stage settings that looked like paintings, to a three-dimensional design that was integral to the meaning of the play. Lighting and sets did not just provide a backdrop but were also part of the artistic message, and, indeed, new playwrights (including O'Neill) wrote wordy directions on how the stage should appear before a word of dialogue was seen.

In 1912, Percy MacKaye published his visionary call for local theater, *The Civic Theatre*. The Neighborhood Playhouse was established in New York the same year as an adjunct of the Henry Street Settlement House and specialized in plays that appealed to the neighborhood's Eastern and Central European residents. Producer Winthrop Ames opened a 299-seat Little Theatre west of Broadway for the presentation of experimental plays. The Liberal Club inaugurated its drama wing whereby Dell introduced techniques learned in Chicago. In 1914, the Washington Square Players grew from that wing (transforming one of the two rooms in Boni bookshop for its first theater),¹⁸ shortly followed by the establishment of the Provincetown Players in 1915. By 1917, the movement rated a book, Constance MacKaye's *The Little Theatre in the United States*, which noted fifty little theaters existed in the United States. Meantime, issues related to new stagecraft, such as the need to American counterparts to the new modernist plays coming from Europe, were discussed in new theater journals.

When the Washington Square group was being formed, its interest in European works led to the rejection of works submitted by Susan Glaspell, George Cram Cook, Eugene O'Neill, and Theodore Dreiser. It was that rejection, perhaps less than the play spirit, that spurred the disaffected playwrights to found the theater in Provincetown at the tip of Cape Cod, quickly replicating the skein of Village connections and even included a kind of "salon" clustering around the journalist Mary Heaton Vorse, a promoter of Provincetown as an artistic haven. One Provincetown rooming house encapsulated Charles Demuth, Max Eastman, Ida Rauh, and Stuart Davis, alongside the usual collection of anarchists and bohemians. John Reed rented a large and roomy house to which artists tended to arrive and remain, in part because it included meals prepared by Polly's Restaurant chef, Hippolyte Havel. Reed found another place to work rather than ask guests, even ones he did not like such as Marsden Hartley, to leave. Close by were original members of the dramatic wing of the Liberal Club, including Dell and Kirah Markham. Mabel Dodge had her own house on the beach. Clearly, the talents at hand contributed to the notion that art was the result of a rubbing of artist with artist, while the summery, seaside location provided a patina that theater was about joyfulness not business.

The first group that came to the Players represented not only the mix of talents in the Village but also the mix of talents in each of the participants. Dell, for example, now remembered most for his role in *The Masses* magazine, was

at the time most interested in experimental theater. Living in Chicago and able to see the Armory Show on tour, Dell was editor of a literary supplement and involved with the Chicago Little Theatre. In New York, Dell instigated aspects of the new stagecraft as director of the dramatic arm of the Liberal Club, “Dell’s Players” as it was called, and took the same talents, for a while, to the Players. Rauh was a lawyer dedicated to liberal causes, but she also acted by way of the Washington Square Players. Like Dell, she was familiar with the Chicago Little Theatre and had plans to open a similar theater in the Village until Cook and Glaspell began planning the Players. Kirah Markham, Dreiser’s Village companion, made a brief foray into silent film in 1914 but was better known in Village circles as an actress in the local groups. The Players attracted the Village’s best and the brightest, drawn by the opportunity to experiment across disciplines. Painters William Zorach and Marguerite Thompson Zorach wanted to explore three-dimensional stage design, both of them still influenced by the Wassily Kandinsky vision of the spiritual in art. Robert Edmond “Bobby” Jones was an adherent of the Chicago school of new stagecraft, while artists Bror Nordfeldt and Charles Demuth brought to the Players modernist principles from their artistic work. Alfred Kreyembourg, in 1916 editor (with Man Ray) of yet another little magazine *Others*, introduced to the Players an *avant garde* circle of poets, including William Carlos Williams, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Mina Loy, a group that would seek to find ways to make poetry a theatrical experience. Dreiser simply wanted to write plays. And the summer also brought to Provincetown American artists living in Europe, including Mardsen Hartley, forced to leave his beloved and gay-friendly Berlin because of the war. Despite all their attention to local ills, the war in Europe hardly seemed to cross the minds of the summer inhabitants.

As in the Village, the Players included the married (Glaspell/Cook, Boyce/Hapgood, Zorach/Thompson, Rauh/Eastman, and O’Neill/Boulton) and the sexually connected (Dreiser/Markham, Dodge/Reed, and Reed/Bryant; Bryant/O’Neill and Dell/Markham). Modernist ideas of “free love” made the explorations of relationships between the sexes one of the enduring subjects for their plays, and occasionally caused contretemps among the Players. Players took the opportunity to marginalize Bryant—a “nymphomaniac,” “a whore,” and a “bitch”—for continuing her affair with O’Neill when the beloved Reed was having a kidney operation.¹⁹

In the storied first season, the rejected playwrights mounted their work first on the veranda of the Hutchins Hapgood/Neith Boyce home, thence moving to a small warehouse owned by Vorse and remodeled by Cook and his helpers into the Wharf Theatre. Seating was limited and one of the affectionate memories of the first seasons was that of subscribers (the Players was always a subscription

theater) walking down Provincetown's main street carrying their chairs. After two summer seasons, the Players moved to McDougal Street in Greenwich Village, although the Cook vision as described by Reed was still intact: "Be it resolved that it is the primarily object of the Provincetown Players to encourage the writing of American plays of real artistic, literary, and dramatic—as opposed to Broadway—merit. That such plays be considered without reference to their commercial value, since this theatre is not to be run for pecuniary profit."²⁰ Edna Kenton, a feminist and magazine writer who was not a founding member nevertheless became the group's most devoted adherent, described its philosophy even as it moved to Greenwich Village, "to remain un beholden to any merely monied angel without wings. Yes, we were very idealistic!"²¹ Less idealistically motivated, O'Neill, already the Players' dominant playwright, sought the change, hoping for attention from metropolitan critics, and pushed for the theater to be named "Playwrights' Theatre," which it was, although with the apostrophe after the plural.

In the Village setting, the Provincetown plays were popular in part because of the self-consciousness of its Village audience, who knew the players, or at least knew of them. Despite the emphasis on new stagecraft, the first plays were naturalistic in setting, typical for community theaters, in order to take advantage of the familiarity of the actors by the audience. The audience would have known, for example, that the play, *Suppressed Desires: A Freudian Comedy* written by Glaspell and Cook, was less a satire on Freud as it was an examination of the playwrights's marriage. Reed's play *The Eternal Quadrangle* was generally understood to have been sparked by Bryant's affair with O'Neill. Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood collaborated on a work about the difficulty of marriage in *Enemies*, and, again, it was no secret in the gossipy world of the Village arts scene that it reflected their own relationship.

Newcomers might not have known personally any of the principals, but to recognize names and know something about them could give to the newcomer a sense of belonging to an intimate circle. This sense of audiences as belonging was important for the success of a subscription theater and for plays that were advertised by word of mouth. At a time when Greenwich Village was becoming a tourist destination, going to a Village play, as eating in a famous Village restaurant, gave Village visitors a sense of involvement and intimacy with bohemian life, even though it had most to do with fandom. It was also a sign that the old easy entry into Village arts life was diminishing. As Village and its inhabitants became famous, the theater represented the nostalgic of the older Village life.

No one was more devoted to the Cook vision than Kenton, who described in press interviews the workings of the group as loosely knit and democratic and the mounting of plays a result of the give-and-take of discussion. "But the

play-spirit has been kept remarkably alive; and the spirit of play and the waste of time seem to have united to keep the Playwrights' Theatre a really experimental stage."²² By the time of interview, however, the play spirit was under attack. O'Neill was no fan of the play spirit and was maddened by amateurism—actors could forget lines, forget plots, and fall over furniture. Dell had come and gone and left a bitter account of “the ruthless egotism” of the group wherein the fingers of new talent “were brutally stepped on by members of the original group.”²³ The Players' play spirit was further amended by a hired stage manager and a permanent director. By the time of *The Emperor Jones*, even the hard seats of the shedlike theater had been amended, now cushioned.

O'Neill and the Players

No one was more suffused by the Provincetown mythmaking machine than Eugene O'Neill, and no one was further from its grasp. The story of O'Neill's entrance into the group was set in stone by Susan Glaspell in her homage to her husband's vision after his early death. In that version, O'Neill's arrival in Provincetown coincided with the start of the second summer season when the group was looking to fill out its bill. Glaspell, running into O'Neill's anarchist drinking companion, Terry Carlin, on the street, asked if he knew anyone who had some plays. Carlin volunteered that O'Neill had a “whole trunk full.” O'Neill subsequently dipped into the trunk to offer *Bound East of Cardiff*, and it was immediately recognized as the work of genius.²⁴

O'Neill was not in Provincetown for the summer sun, but came with the intention to be part of the Provincetown group. *Bound East of Cardiff* was not his first offering, he did not come to Glaspell's attention because of a chance meeting, and the Players did not embrace him at the first meeting, put off by what seemed to them his anxious careerism. The Players were sensitive to anxious careerism, and their manifesto was perhaps a way to keep at bay the pressures of their own desires for worldly success. Indeed, by the time of their involvement, many of Players were reaching a time for mature levels of production. By 1915, Glaspell, at thirty-nine, had published three novels; Boyce, forty-three, four books of fiction (giving birth to four children too). Zorach and Thompson had exhibited at the 1913 Armory Show, but they were close to penury. Dell and Hapgood had made their mark in publishing. Dreiser was a successful novelist, who wanted equal success as a playwright. Reed, after Cook and Glaspell, most dedicated to the vision of the founding, was himself already a recognized and successful journalist. In fact, all the founding Players had professional credentials, which gave them the freedom to indulge in the play spirit of the founding, even as they kept a realistic eye on other avenues of professional endeavor.

O'Neill, however, had everything to prove, and it was his focus on his work that challenged the amateur spirit of Provincetown. He was, indeed, something like the fox in the henhouse, reminding the artistic professionals—who surely knew about focus from their professional lives—that play spirit was not enough for real work. Unspoken in the increasing criticism of Jig Cook's leadership was the recognition that, of any of them, he was the least successful in terms of individual work. Although founded in anticommercial zeal, the question that still hovered was how a continued devotion to art for art's sake comported with desires of maturing artists for approval beyond the assuring Village audiences. When did artistic vision and personal ambition cross?

Only O'Neill seemed not to carry the burden of the Greenwich Village communal past. What he did represent was a rejection of the bohemian outsider status so much part of the Villagers' sense of themselves. In his unambiguous ambition, O'Neill was part of contemporary society, quite literarily embodying the characteristics of the professional man at a time when sociologists were first defining him. Max Weber, for example, provided these characteristics of the professional at the high end of the continuum—power, systemic knowledge and training; vocational qualification; specialization; full-time occupation; a clientele; and a distinctive way of life.²⁵ From his earliest days in Provincetown, O'Neill fulfilled all of these categories. They were also categories that fit well with O'Neill's adoption of Nietzschean ideas of leadership and the necessary role of followers. O'Neill, indeed, negotiated with the world rather than separated from it.

The Professional at Work

O'Neill wrote plays. He sometimes directed and occasionally performed in one of his own plays. But he did not paint scenery, he was not a journalist, he did not write novels or take on any activities that were not focused on his work as a playwright. He did write poetry, some of it published early in his career, and at one point he sought to integrate blank verse into his play. "I feel that a carpenter should stick to his trade," he told an interviewer in 1925. "I don't hold with these novelists who suddenly decide they will write a play. I think it takes years of intensive, hard work to learn your medium."²⁶ Unlike other Players, O'Neill did not seek to expand his talents across disciplines. His commitment to his own work and the life of his work beyond Provincetown, even in the face of the Provincetown environment, suggests the strength of his focus.

By 1914, after many years of dissipation, O'Neill had accepted playwriting as his goal in life. Like other Players, O'Neill was an admirer of Greek philosophy. The Greek tragic vision brought exaltation "an urge toward life," he told an

interviewer, “releasing them from the petty greed of everyday existence.”²⁷ And, particularly affected by its Irish sensibility, he had had seen the Abbey Players on tour. However, his own tragic vision in a modernist setting was inspired by one of the new European playwrights, August Strindberg. Additionally, Strindberg’s influence on O’Neill had much to do with Strindberg’s relationship with the Intimate Theatre in Stockholm that was organized to mount Strindberg’s work. This arrangement provided a model for O’Neill, a surprising goal for a young man who came to the Players with no professional credentials.

How O’Neill was able to turn group spirit into a hierarchy with O’Neill’s vision as its impetus speaks to how O’Neill’s was directly influenced by Nietzsche in the concrete terms of career trajectory. The Higher Man, the step to the Superman, was expressed in deeds, he explained in a remarkable 1922 interview. His decision to be a playwright was a way “prove our marksmanship by some target” as opposed to “shooting at stars as an amiable dreamer.” In this realistic world, the playwright needed his own theater devoted only to his plays and one in which theatrical colleagues stood at the ready to embody the playwright’s vision. To these acolytes the playwright would “tell them the inner meanings and spiritual significance of his plays as related to him.” The group might have the opportunity of exploring the ideas, although under the playwright’s guidance. “The playwright will not interfere where he sees the harmony of his imaginative whole is threatened. Rather, he will learn from his associates, help them to set their imaginations free” so they, too, could become Higher Men.²⁸

O’Neill was the only playwright in the Provincetown group who had studied playwriting in a formal writing class—professional training one of the Weberian standards. By the time of his Provincetown appearance he had been focused on writing with the same intensity he had given to his years of dissipation. From the beginning he envisioned a place for himself in the world. He famously destroyed his first eleven plays as not being good enough, but took the precaution of filing them with the copyright office at the Library of Congress. When packets of his early plays had been returned unopened from agents, he self-published a collection of the one-act, nonproduced plays, *Thirst and Other One Act Plays*.

These plays clearly indicate that O’Neill was not to be inhibited in his subject matter. In a period when the word was not even spoken, one of the plays in *Thirst* was boldly called “Abortion.” Certainly melodramatic, the focus is on a privileged young college hero who has paid for a cheap abortion for a lower-class girl, who dies as a result. *The Dreamy Kid* has a young black man as its lead. To modern eyes, it is filled with stereotypes (and scholars differ on how far O’Neill finally travels from the prejudices of the age). The most melodramatic of all, *Thirst*, had had to with interracial sex and cannibalism. Altogether, these

were hearty alternatives to the plays about difficult marriages that others of the Players were producing.

O'Neill offered a copy of his printed collection to the Players, but according to Harry Kemp's 1930 account that offer "did not forward his case," since self-publication was regarded as the "usual stunt of people without ability." The older members had already decided O'Neill was "one of those half-baked youngsters who persist in believing in their genius despite an equipment pitifully scant of education and general culture." And they did not care for the first play he offered, *The Movie Man*, which may have been chosen by O'Neill because it seemed to fit in with Players' political views of the Mexican War. Kemp considered it "frightfully bad, trite and full of the most preposterous hokum."²⁹ (Kemp's antagonism cannot be separated from his own frequently and boisterously declared ambition that he was the world's greatest poet, a self-assessment that was put into perspective by O'Neill's success). However, O'Neill probably only got a reading because it was held at the home of Jack Reed, a friend of O'Neill's from the Village. But the Players finally were impressed with *Bound East for Cardiff*, the all-male story of sailors below deck that marked O'Neill's clear rejection of the Players tendency to produce plays about male-female issues. Altogether, O'Neill's entry into the Players, as Gary Jay Williams writes, "is not that of a shy young drifter washed ashore by the tides of fate but rather than of a committed writer, aggressive on his own behalf, seeking out the group—and pressing his plays upon them."³⁰ These were qualities of an artist who had no sentimental illusions that his work would be automatically discovered.

Once in the door, O'Neill became the dominant artist because of the quality and the number of the plays he offered and his demands that the plays be performed in as professional a manner as possible. "Eugene O'Neill was the solid backbone of the Provincetown Players; his plays put over the project and held it together," Zorach wrote. "I used to gripe at his literal realism, but whatever he did was true theatre."³¹ Kemp recalled that Cook saw O'Neill as the group's most important asset. "'It's all for Gene!' George Cram Cook used to say proudly."³² This was not such a happy circumstance for the other playwrights, mostly women, the purpose of whose work often seemed to fill the cracks between the O'Neill productions, although now their work is being viewed as an influence on O'Neill.³³

O'Neill hardly merged into community life. Zorach described him as a "very withdrawn, very young man who swam long distances daily with beautiful style. He was shy and shunned everyone but a few cronies."³⁴ The cronies were Cook and Glaspell and Reed and Bryant—the most important of the Players. But his heavy drinking increased his isolation. He was also a mean drunk, who occasionally berated and struck his wife in public.³⁵ The Players

were generally tolerant of alcohol abuse, were heavy drinkers themselves, part of the credo of experiencing life intensely and the rejection of a Puritan past, and perhaps subscribed to an underlying belief that a little madness never hurt artistic production. (Cook believed he needed to be drunk to write.) But one advantage of his isolation from other artists meant that he did not participate in the coterie theater that sapped the energies of Susan Glaspell, who, with her husband, produced the unmemorable *Tickless Time*. One of his slighter plays, written in 1916, was *Now I Ask You*, a somewhat mean farce that revolved on the Players and suggested O'Neill had little sense of commitment. Kemp noted, "The moment they ceased to keep pace with his group he would frankly part company and go."³⁶ His poem "Submarine" published in the February 1917 issue of *The Masses* seemed less about his relationship with Louise Bryant than his view of life. At a time of German submarine warfare, the image of a submarine was not benign.

My soul is a submarine
 My aspirations are torpedoes
 I will hide unseen
 Beneath the surface of life
 Watching for ships
 I will destroy them
 Because the sea is beautiful³⁷

The "Clientele"

One of the early assessments of his success rested on a simple statement: "He knows the theatre and he know the public." Indeed, he had received "the ratification of public applause."³⁸ This was a remarkable encomium considering O'Neill wrote tragedy and confronted long-held American theatrical practice. O'Neill himself credited the public. "The public is about ten years ahead of the managers." When the Theatre Guild protested audiences "would not stand for one of his innovations," O'Neill's comment was, "The audience will stand for anything provided we do it well enough."³⁹

O'Neill had had plenty of opportunity to observe audience reaction by way of his father's touring company, his familiarity with New York City, and his career as a pub habitué that included familiarity with the city's homosexual and black-and-tan clubs. Despite the punishing and tragic role his father played in the themes of his work, O'Neill had also learned professional lessons from his father in the day-to-day world. In this world, his father's lessons had to do with professional focus, the judgments of audiences, and, indeed, the collaboration of audience and performance. O'Neill was an admirer of popular music,

especially the works of Irving Berlin and ragtime piano. Even when he was in periods of dire poverty, he had free entry into all of the Broadway shows thanks to his father's position. He attended some twenty musical shows in the 1908 to 1909 season alone.⁴⁰

From that appreciation, O'Neill could recognize that the popular culture of the time had already passed by many of the standard theatrical tradition of naturalism. It was not only that the little theater movement had prepared the way—at least for middle-class audiences—for new kinds of theater, popular culture had long rejected literal naturalism. O'Neill's use of masks, for example, has been traced to his introduction to African masks by modernist artists. However, masks had already appeared in little theater by the time O'Neill adopted them, and, of course, had long been a part of blackface performance in vaudeville.

For O'Neill, the Players not only were useful but also had some influences. Certainly, he could see close up what Zorach's stagecraft could do for indifferent works. But he also resisted some aspects of expressionism, avoiding nameless characters ("He" and "She" to represent universality, for example) favored by other Provincetown playwrights. But it is now recognized that his work was influenced by the Provincetown's women playwrights, developing O'Neill's rendering of women as "complex psychological beings interesting in their own right not simply as adjuncts to or tormentors of men."⁴¹ Perhaps in some recognition of her contributions to his own art, O'Neill tried to help Glaspell in finding commercial producers for a new play.⁴²

* * *

O'Neill integrated his father into the content of his plays in ways that were not so flattering. Still, O'Neill was not shy about using his father's connections developed in a thirty-year career as a popular actor most known for his title role in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. While James O'Neill's career had passed its high mark, in 1917 he was still on Broadway in a revival playing Jesus Christ in David Belasco's passion play extravaganza and known (and liked) in theatrical circles. For years James O'Neill had financially supported both of his sons, arranged jobs (sometimes paying their salaries *sub rosa*), and covered up scandals. Eugene O'Neill's commitment to theater reinvigorated James O'Neill's optimism, encouraging him to underwrite his son's study of playwriting at Harvard University, paying for the publication of O'Neill's collection of plays, and, later, offering his experience (not so sought) in the Players' productions. Negotiating theatrical contacts on behalf of his son was the least of his efforts. But also important to O'Neill's career was what O'Neill had learned by being his father's son about the practical operation of the arts community, including

the lateral connections between a play's performance, its publication, and the final transposition to film, as well as publicity engendered by each stage.

O'Neill early sought out publication for his plays from his first self-publishing effort and thereafter had arrangements with the firm Boni and Liveright. Also, after the debut of *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill had acquired the Broadway producer John D. Williams for *Beyond the Horizon*. Williams sold the rights to the play to Famous Players Film Company, which had produced the film version of *The Count of Monte Cristo* starring his father. But Williams was slow to produce *Beyond the Horizon* and O'Neill's efforts to move Williams along are clear from the constant drumbeat on the subject in correspondence to his agent, Richard Madden.

Agents were not the usual accoutrements for members of the Players, at least at this period, but O'Neill enthusiastically embraced the idea when it was broached by Madden: "I am not only not opposed to meeting an agent," he wrote to Madden on December 16, 1918, "but extremely desirous of having a talk with one in a business way."⁴³ From that day on, O'Neill bombarded Madden—sometimes every other day—with letters that demanded Madden search out new opportunities for his plays, negotiate for the best prices, and, in another theme, seek out movie deals. In his letter bemoaning the lack of financial rewards for *The Emperor Jones*, he wondered if it offered a movie possibility. It was "a great disappointment" that *Beyond the Horizon* was turned down for a movie treatment.⁴⁴ He was annoyed that Williams had submitted *Gold* to the Fox movie company without his knowledge. "Not that I have any stupid, high-brown, Arty aversion."⁴⁵ He "would only be too glad" if any of his one-act plays would be picked up by vaudeville. "Anywhere that means real money."⁴⁶ He was not about to allow the magazine *Shadowland* publish one of his plays for a mere \$50. He had allowed his plays to be published by *Smart Set* cheaply but that was because "I was unknown and anxious to break into print at any cost. It's a very different matter now," he wrote in 1919, just four years after he had arrived in Provincetown with a book of nonproduced plays under his arm. "If he wants my name and my play for his movie rag he's got to pay for it."⁴⁷

Money was on his mind as a new father, for sure, but no less was reputation. He agreed the Theatre Arts venue would be a very good place for *The Emperor Jones*, even though the money return was negligible. "I also think the idea of giving special matinees of the play at the Garrick is about the best scheme that could be worked out for introducing it uptown."⁴⁸ He was against the idea of producing *Beyond the Horizon* in Chicago. "He [Williams] must understand that my interests demand a showing in New York where I am known and have a certain amount of reputation"; in New York, "a play of mine will have some advance standing with the critics, at least."⁴⁹ This kind of savvy oversight

stands in contrast to Walt Kuhn's promotion of the Armory Show in which Kuhn eschewed coverage by knowledgeable art critics in favor of the day-to-day reporters who were quick to ridicule modern art. Finally, O'Neill did not get and did not ask for royalties from the Players' production, although not for altruistic reasons. "The more money they have on hand, the better productions my next play will get."⁵⁰

O'Neill, of course, would have known much about how plays were publicized by growing up in a theatrical family. O'Neill had also worked as a newspaper reporter in New London, included reporters and critics as his friends, and understood the role of press criticism in artistic success. Although he was not a man who entertained a large circle of friends, drama critics had a special place. George Jean Nathan had been a slight family friend who was helpful to O'Neill when he was coeditor of the *Smart Set*, which published O'Neill's early plays. But the men later became friends and correspondents. In his role as a drama critic, Nathan was a strong O'Neill supporter and wrote close to a dozen flattering articles in popular magazines.⁵¹ Another personal friend, Percy Loving, wrote one of the earliest journalistic treatments of his plays for the influential *Bookman* magazine. Kenneth Macgowan came into O'Neill's world when he favorably reviewed *Emperor Jones* for *Vogue* magazine. Macgowan and his wife became friends with the O'Neills (even though, as the theater critic for the *New York Globe*, he was charged with reviewing O'Neill's work) and later became the artistic director of O'Neill's Experimental Theatre, the successor to the Provincetown Wharf Theatre. Throughout his own interesting career, Macgowan was a promoter of O'Neill and a writer of more flattering articles about O'Neill for the popular press. Friendship with O'Neill seemed to entail some form of service.

The Players had a policy of eschewing publicity. Relying on their subscription lists for audiences, the Players did not collect press notices and refused to supply complimentary tickets for reviewers in their belief that they were offering an alternative to commercial theater and did not want to be rated by commercial standards. Heywood Broun was one critic who did not resist buying his tickets for the Provincetown productions and wrote a positive review of *Bound East for Cardiff* in its initial Village production. Alexander Woollcott was the new drama critic of the *New York Times* and was another supporter of O'Neill's early work in the newspaper and in at least one piece in a monthly magazine. Very quickly O'Neill was the focus of much press attention in reviews of his plays (with another round in their subsequent publications in book form) and as a subject of feature article in newspapers and magazines. His public profile was further raised by racial themes in *The Emperor Jones*, *The Dreamy Kid*, and, later, in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. O'Neill was the first playwright to insist on black actors when roles were

defined by race. The attention O'Neill received made it difficult for other Players to ignore the press. Indeed, by the third season the initial idealism was fading. "It was all intangible and not yet clearly analyzable, but somehow it had happened, the spiritual—even the practical—chemicals in our little laboratory were not quite one hundred percent pure," as Kenton described it.⁵²

It is not so clear how much O'Neill curried press attention, but he clearly cooperated with interviews, providing a studio shot for his interviews and the kinds of information that interviewers found appealing—his father's career, his association with the already-mythic Players, his seafaring experiences, and even his hospitalization for tuberculosis, which he framed as a turning point in his life. Excluded were the depth of his alcoholism, his suicide attempt, or the scandal surrounding his first marriage, birth of a child, and divorce. Yet, for the time, and considering his own taciturn personality, O'Neill was remarkably frank about the parts of his life that had interest, so much so that he "contributed to certain notions," as one scholar concludes.⁵³ The press tended to repeat the published stories in subsequent interviews in a frame that saw his alcoholic period as an appropriate training ground for an adventuresome male artist. Later O'Neill came to distrust the press, but in the beginning, as part of the management of his career, he did not mind serving up the kinds of stories that made good news hooks.

His single-mindedness was also reflected his choice of marriage partners. His second wife, Agnes Boulton, an ambitious writer herself, was apparently lax on providing him with the privacy he needed to write. His two children took up time and subsequently he had little connection with them. His third wife, Carlotta Monterey, an actress (introduced to him by Elisabeth Marbury), took on the role of protector, "shielding him from all such distractions."⁵⁴ In 1921, *Beyond the Horizon* won the newly established Pulitzer Prize, the first of four, and thus incurred another round of favorable attention. His first full-length biography appeared in 1926. In 1936, he won the Nobel Award for Literature.

When O'Neill sought to relocate *The Emperor Jones* uptown, Cook raged that O'Neill was intent on destroying the very foundation of the Players. O'Neill had no such agenda as long as the Players were useful to him as an experimental stage, and by that time even the founding Players had some realization that their "little time," in Glaspell's phrase, was over. Cook himself tried to emulate O'Neill's success on the Broadway stage with an elaborate production that failed. He died in 1923, on a trip to Greece following the dissolution of the Players, which he blamed on the loss of the original values. By that time, O'Neill was launched on a highly commercial career and involved in an experimental theater with Macgowan and no longer needed the Players. Reed was also dead, of typhoid fever incurred in covering the Russian Revolution.

Others had drifted away during the course of the seven years. Most returned to their original modes of work, although, in a final vindication marking her place as a playwright, Glaspell won the 1931 Pulitzer Prize for drama for *Allison's House*, thence sinking into obscurity until recently. Boyce, hampered by a difficult marriage and the death of a son, was never able to regain her artistic footing, publishing little from 1923 until her death in 1951. Max Eastman became remembered for his role in *The Masses* during its opposition to World War I. Ida Rauh continued to make important contributions to the theater, although her reputation did not outlast her time. The poets of the New Jersey group, most famously William Carlos Williams, made a place for themselves. Edna St. Vincent Millay soon became the darling of the Twenties. Dell worked as a government bureaucrat during the Depression, the peak of his career passed. The career of Djuna Barnes was hampered by alcohol and isolation. Theodore Dreiser, despite years of effort, never became a successful playwright. Edna Kenton died in poverty, burning rolled-up newspapers for heat, but remaining in Greenwich Village until the end.⁵⁵

After years of palsy that made the physical act of writing impossible, O'Neill died in 1953. His will dictated *Long Day's Journey Into Night* was not to be produced for twenty-five years following his death. That prohibition was skirted thanks to his widow, and arguably his greatest work was first produced in 1957, a final eulogy and farewell to his family in the work that fixed the star of his permanent reputation.

Zorach, who, with Margaret Thompson Zorach, had introduced expressionism to the Provincetown Players and eventually influenced O'Neill, became an esteemed American sculptor. Zorach, the immigrant, voiced an essential American reality that he may have learned from O'Neill. "It was hard to give up the fascination of the theatre," he wrote "but one had only one life and one cannot divide it between two gods. I found myself torn between art and the Provincetown Players and I began to feel terribly frustrated. The theatre had been a good education, but art was my medium of expression. I had to make a decision. I gave up theatre."⁵⁶

The old days of exploration and extension had disappeared, as if in recognition that the cultural world could not live so independently from the world at large. The costs of challenging cultural imperatives were increasingly high in the wartime stance of the nation, one in which popular culture was less about the joy of the moment than its pacifier.

CHAPTER 10

The Politics of Culture

The Singing Army

The biggest job in the War is to send the boys over the top with a smile. It is the men who go over the top with a song in their hearts who keep their wits about them, and come back—and you've got to provide the songs.

—Sgt. Arthur Guy Empey, in James W. Evans and
Captain Gardner L. Harding, *Entertaining the American Army:
The American Stage and Lyceum in the World War*

On April 23, 1918, two thousand of the nation's entertainers and entrepreneurs jostled for seating in New York's famous Palace Theatre, each ready to offer his or her services to the war effort. The month before the German offensive had broken through Allied lines. The considerable American war propaganda machine was at full strength, sweeping away the dissident voices in the call for national purpose that few could resist, none less than the nation's entertainers. From center stage, the producer Winthrop Ames, just back from a fact-finding trip to France, assured the entertainers they were not marginal to the war effort: "I can tell you, as a factor beyond dispute, that entertainment is not a luxury to the modern man. Once deprive him of it, even for a little time, and he learns that it is a necessity as vital to him as sugar in his food. We actors make something that is needful in this war as overcoats or shovels. And at last our opportunity has come to serve . . . to fight side by side with our soldiers, to enter actively the service of America's Army in France."¹

To appreciative cheers, entertainers who had been overseas could not say enough about the doughboys, wires were read from leading entertainers offering their services, a telegram from President Woodrow Wilson thanked entertainers for their efforts. Producers—who had already met on the matter—pledged their

support, as did the relatively new actors' organization, Actors' Equity Association. Sgt. Arthur Guy Empey, who had served in the British Army on the front lines (and written a book about it), exhorted the performers to send the boys "over the top with a smile."² The "Over There League" was born. The entertainer-entrepreneur George M. Cohan was named president, Edward Albee, representing the Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit, took on the vice presidency, and the board was composed of representatives of the leading theatrical organizations, altogether placing "the resources of the whole dramatic world at the feet of the United States Army."³

When Ames told the Palace crowd that entertainment was essential to the war effort he was reflecting a shared belief, from General John J. Pershing and his staff to a huge wartime volunteer bureaucracy dedicated to the task of uplifting troop morale and clean living by way of American entertainment. As the nation began construction of thirty-two massive training camps, the erection of the barracks was hardly ahead of the theaters and Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) "huts," readied to accommodate the vaudeville, plays, and music extravaganzas considered necessary for camp life. Once overseas, the military establishment and the volunteer bureaucracy worked together to supply song books for every member of the fighting forces, trained song leaders and theatrical directors for overseas' service, gave a privileged place to the regimental bands, and made sure that the visiting singing stars, lecturers, vaudeville acts, and dramatic turns made it through the mud of France and to the brink of the very trenches of the front lines in order to entertain the troops.

It speaks to the success of the gentrification campaigns that popular songs, movies, and theatrical performances were not only regarded as no threat to the two million men who were to serve in the American Expeditionary Force but were considered the proper vehicles to carry the values of the nation. By the end of the war, popular culture had taken on a permanent luster. From its wartime stage, the personalities and the cultural products of the age came to embody larger meanings. The melodic popular song that had been composed as a cheeky and ephemeral reflection of the moment was suddenly the example of American democracy. In times of separation, the sentimental parlor song from the turn of the century took on a second life. Jazz, only beginning to be heard by white audiences at the beginning of the war, spread through the troops by way of small groups and regimental bands, and soon had the imprimatur of a new *American* art. Beloved performers became living representations of the yearning for home.

The war also expanded the audience for popular culture to the thousands of young men recruited from the country's farms and crossroads—fully half of the recruits—who had limited or no experience of popular culture. Thanks to the

massive recruitment, the popular culture that had developed in the city found new audiences among rural populations, which, not so incidentally, were later to help compose and make possible the national audience necessary for radio as a broad-based entertainment vehicle.

Popular Culture Goes to War

By the time the military embraced popular culture as its most effective tool for troop morale, support of the war had already been marshaled by way of civilian popular culture. The substantial British propaganda campaign including an array of effective posters, films, and songs, demonized Germans as “the Hun” who tortured, raped, and destroyed for the pleasure of doing so.⁴ Any political rationale for the war was subsumed by the atrocity stories that turned on women and family, and few Americans were unaware of the lurid posers of the “rape of Belgium.”⁵ Calling on common roots, the British reiterated their theme in countless ways. The call was intense. How long could the white cliffs of Dover stand alone?

Despite its power, the British campaign was not universally embraced in the United States, certainly not by the many Irish and German-ethnic members of the population, nor among all Progressive reformers. In a time when Woodrow Wilson had been elected on a peace platform, prominent Progressives resisted the “preparedness movement” that put the nation into a wartime stance. Jane Addams, the nation’s heroine, led a significant antiwar effort that included her support of Henry Ford’s “Peace Ship,” sailing to Europe in 1915 to work for American neutrality. In the same year, sheet music for the pacifist “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” sold seven hundred thousand copies.⁶ In Thomas Ince’s 1916 film, *Civilization*, a submarine captain who refused to fire on a passenger ship transforms into the body of Christ—the image of Christ superimposed over battle scenes. D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* similarly carried a peace message.

But even in the period of supposed neutrality, the preparedness movement was mounting a campaign of its own. So-called war documentaries, some shot in New Jersey, fueled war fever. “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” was denounced. Vitagraph’s British-born J. Stuart Blackton, partnering with the preparedness advocate Theodore Roosevelt, released *The Battle Cry of Peace* (1915), which ridiculed peace attempts when the nation was faced, as the film had it, by invading Germans who reduced New York and Washington to flame and rubble.

The preparedness movement set the stage for the national focus when the United States announced its involvement. Antiwar activity was abruptly stilled by a set of legislative acts, the most severe since the Alien and Sedition acts of 1790.

Foreign-born dissidents such as Emma Goldman were rounded up and sent back to where they came from on a ship nicknamed the “Soviet Ark.” Eugene Debs, the popular socialist leader, was jailed for voicing support of individuals who were also jailed for handing out antiwar material at a recruiting station. Turning to cultural products, the U.S. Post Office rescinded second-class mailing privileges to *The Masses* and other dissident publications, thus putting them out of business. The demise of *The Masses* put an end to the magazine that had reflected the pacifist views of the Greenwich Village artistic community. Its harsh, charcoal sketches sought to show the side of war popular culture ignored: a headless, massive torso captioned “At last, a perfect soldier”; a capering skeleton atop a pile of skulls captioned, “Come on in, America, the Blood’s fine”; and, in 1917, cover art of a soldier so bandaged his face was barely to be seen, simply captioned, “Glory.”⁷ But the black press avoided the heavy hand of the Post Office by agreeing to support the war in exchange for promises of better times.

The extent of the dissidents, from the socialists and anarchists to the Progressive reformers, provided a rationale for all-out promotion of the war. As George Creel, head of the Committee of Public Information, assessed the problem, “It is to be remembered that during the three and a half years of our neutrality the land had been torn by a thousand divisive prejudices.” They were “conditions that could not be permitted to endure.”⁸ Under Creel, a former muckraking editor, the committee utilized every twentieth-century development of advertising, public relations, and film for its massive propaganda push. Creel later argued his view of “voluntary agreement” was put forward as a counter to a military-sanctioned censorship “that would have put the press in leg irons.”⁹

In the wartime hysteria, however, “voluntary” was interpretive. Creel’s committee virtually commandeered the nation’s cultural workers. The great illustrators were put to use in a poster campaign that was considered important, as the postwar Creel Report put it, for “building morale, arousing the spiritual forces of the Nation, and stimulating the war will of the people.”¹⁰ Other artists worked on huge paintings for backdrops to the Liberty Loan campaigns or provided war-themed work for exhibitions. The nation’s cartoonists were supplied “tips” that resulted in the “timeliness and unity of cartoon power.” The Division of Advertising mobilized the talent of the advertising industry and was provided free space from periodicals for its various national campaigns, including the “Greatest Mother in the World” campaign for the Red Cross. A Bureau of War Photographs censored what was not so useful to the cause and distributed what was. The Division of Film utilized wartime footage from the Signal Corps, utilized private firms to make short films, and finally, sponsored feature-length propaganda films of high-enough quality to be commercially distributed and carry a box office charge. *Pershing’s Crusaders, America’s Answer*

and *Our Colored Fighters* were all propaganda films that audiences paid to see (including a wartime movie tax on tickets), showings that were made possible by the cooperation of theater owners. It was, Creel said, "Through the medium of the motion picture America's war progress, as well as the meaning and purposes of democracy, were carried to every community in the United States to every corner of the war."¹¹ Movie theaters were also required to show short pro-war films before the main feature. And the main attraction was likely to be presaged by one of Creel's seventy-five thousand "Four-Minute Men," who appeared before any motion picture showing with a four-minute declaration of patriotism and might lead the audience in singing the favorite, "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag." The Division on Public Information, indeed, urged "four-minute singing" to promote patriotism and provided booklets of songs. Movie theaters were turned into patriotic centers, their lobbies ablaze with bunting, recruitment materials, and Liberty Loan posters, with recruiting sergeants sometimes hovering nearby.

In the battle for the word, Creel boasted that his committee "gathered together the leading novelists, essayists and publicists of the land, and these men and women, without payment, worked faithfully in the production of brilliant, comprehensive articles that went to the press as syndicate features." A pamphlet committee "commanded the services of any writer that it chose to call."¹² Seventy-five million pieces of literature were distributed on dozens of war-related topics.

Commercial Cooperation

At a time when every national industry was being mobilized for the war effort, entertainment entrepreneurs found it valuable to provide evidence of cooperation. Creel acknowledged, "It is a tribute to the patriotism of the photographic and motion-picture industries that the bureau, without a law of any kind behind it, enforced a censorship more effective than that in any other belligerent country."¹³ But censorship of antiwar messages was only the first step in a voluntary campaign by the entertainment industry that put its stars into patriotic service, produced an unending number of patriotic popular songs, mounted elaborate patriotic shows, and provided anti-German propaganda films so terrifying that even President Woodrow Wilson felt it necessary to distance himself.

The organized film industry had shown itself to be on the preparedness side before the war, led by British-born Blackton but similarly supported by other immigrant entrepreneurs. Once war was declared, the film industry was first in line to salute. Certainly there was concern about increased censorship, increased taxation of entertainment products, and the fear that movie theaters could be

declared nonessential and permanently closed to conserve fuel. But of all the considerations that made cooperation compelling, the war offered the opportunity for the entertainment world to overcome previous reputations: disreputable nickelodeons, actresses as near-prostitutes, entrepreneurs as ethnic invaders. The war offered opportunity for the industry's most famous producers, writers, and performers to reject their suspect ethnic affiliations in declarations of faith that could not be doubted. Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., of German ancestry, put the *Follies* into high gear. In 1915, his American girls had perambulated the stage with headdresses resembling battle ships. In 1917, he mounted a fleet of American warships, "steaming through the night with guns and lights flashing."¹⁴ German-born conductor Walter Damosch refused to play German composers and became active in war-related work that took him overseas.¹⁵ In contrast, Karl Muck, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and Ernst Kunwald, conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony, were interred in a camp for suspected German sympathizers and both returned to Germany after the war—Muck and his wife involuntarily deported.¹⁶ Meantime, all American orchestras tended to clear their ranks of the many orchestra members who were German. In this climate, the German-born and Jewish Carl Laemmle, president of Universal Film Manufacturing Co., offered to turn Universal's "entire facilities" over to the U.S. government.¹⁷ Laemmle was in the forefront of producing pro-war movies. From both keenly felt patriotism and from pragmatically determined considerations, the American entertainment industry embraced the war.

The Liberty Bond Campaign

Like the Four-Minute Men, the Liberty Bond campaigns sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Treasury called on all Americans to declare their patriotism by purchasing the low-interest bonds to help support the war. There was an installment plan for those who could not afford to pay for the whole bond up front. Secretary of the Treasury William Gibbs McAdoo, who had envisioned the plan, had no tolerance for anything less than full cooperation on any level. "I wanted the bankers, and all wealthy people and rich corporations not only to buy their full share of Liberty bonds, but also to buy them gladly."¹⁸ If not, he feared a "social poison" might leach into all communities. An army of community volunteers made that unlikely. "They reached, I believe, every home in the United States and every adult person. There were volunteer committees in every city and sizable town in the country."¹⁹

Few could escape what William G. Harding, U.S. Republican senator from Ohio and one of few dissenters called, the "hysteria."²⁰ On a lecture tour, Ida Tarbell, shared her platform—so swathed in bunting she had to watch her step

lest she trip—with local war promoters: “No gathering, not even a revival, certainly not a lecture, was allowed in the town which did not share its time with the grim banker heading the local committee. He opened the meeting and left me shivering with what might happen to those who differed with him about the size of purchase. Then came boisterous singing and praying, broken to let me tell my story. How dull and uninspired it sounded, sandwiched between this goading and inflaming.”²¹

The hamlet-by-hamlet organization was supported by the national campaigns, assigned to Treasury’s Frank B. Wilson as director of publicity. Wilson quickly recognized the pull of the celebrities from the entertainment world. Canadian-born Marie Dressler was first in line to offer her services to the nation at the outbreak of war. “I wanted to go to France as an entertainer, but Uncle Sam wanted me to stay at home and peddle Liberty Bonds.” She made forty-nine speeches in twenty-nine days. “I had the satisfaction of having sold more bonds than any other individual in the United States.”²²

Few major entertainment names were not involved in the bond campaigns—Elsie Janis, Sophie Tucker, Eddie Cantor, Houdini, and Mabel Norman—but the most famous were Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and Charles Chaplin. Chaplin was still a British subject and may have wanted to avoid conscription by participating so obviously in an activity that directly related to the British war effort. At his own expense, he made a short film to promote the sale of Liberty Bonds whose title, *The Bond*, was less about the naming of a financial instrument than the affiliation it represented. The attraction of the entertainers was simply enormous. At the launch of the Third Campaign, fifty thousand people crammed Wall Street to see the major stars. Standing atop the steps of the Sub-Treasury Building, Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks looked out on a “mass of upturned faces” for as far as the eye could see, all straining to get a look at the stars.²³ All four wartime campaigns were oversubscribed, raising \$17 billion.²⁴ A fifth campaign after the Armistice raised another \$4 billion. As one assessment noted, “There is scarcely a family to-day who does not own at least one Liberty Bond.”²⁵ The war had been paid for and the American entertainment industry was given the credit.

Film Industry

At a 1917 meeting in the White House, President Woodrow Wilson urged a group of motion picture company presidents to produce films of the American war efforts to “set aside fears we weren’t doing much,” as Samuel Goldfish, later Samuel Goldwyn, put it.²⁶ A National Association of the Motion-Pictures Industry was promptly organized. Its own Liberty Loan committee raised

millions in the campaigns and cooperated when the U.S. Treasury suggested that the nation's film stars should participate in the making of short films promoting the loans. Wilson, at Treasury, provided a list of stars who might be called upon to make such films.²⁷ Treasury, indeed, was calling in some chips. It had vigorously protected the film business from being declared nonessential earlier in the year.²⁸

Still, as the film scholar Larry Ward notes, "If anything, the government had to fight off volunteers."²⁹ For some, the preparedness movement was a call for war. Blackton, who had produced the frightening *The Battle Cry of Peace*, later admitted he intended the film to be a call to arms.³⁰ Carl Laemmle, whose offer of turning over Universal to the U.S. government had been declined, sought to show the depth of his patriotism by producing the most famous of the war's hate films. *The Kaiser—the Beast of Berlin*, which detailed every atrocity suggested by the lurid war posters of the time and prompted the song, "The Beast of Berlin." Universal also produced *Heart of Humanity*, in which Erich von Stroheim, in his pre-directorial days, established forever the stereotype of the German officer: gripped monocle, scarred face, shaved head, and sneering lip. In the role for Universal (already established in other films), Stroheim snatches a baby from the arms of a Red Cross nurse and tosses the child out of the window in order to have his way with the child's protector. Warner Brothers's *My Four Years in Germany* featured the slaughter of Belgian innocents, the torture of prisoners, and the comeuppance provided by American troops as they embarked upon the wholesale bayoneting of the German army. But after showing *Hearts of the World* to the president and Mrs. Wilson, D. W. Griffith—who had not so long ago directed the pacifist *Intolerance*—was persuaded to reshoot a scene in which a German soldier almost whips Lillian Gish to death.³¹ Although the talents of American women were expansively put to use in the war effort,³² propaganda films followed the British model in which female competence was subservient to themes of women in danger. Griffith directed Mary Pickford in *The Little American* in which, prompted again by German atrocities, her character becomes a spy and faces a German firing squad before the obligatory rescue. Altogether, such films, Ward writes, "fostered a terrifying image of the German people and their culture."³³

Popular Song

As entertainment was increasingly regarded as a tool of war, it was not surprising that songwriting soared. More than 35,000 patriotic songs were copyrighted in the years 1914 to 1919, and of those, 20 percent, or some 7,300, were published.³⁴ This extraordinary outlay of songwriting came at the hands of anyone

who could hold a pencil. Songwriting and song publishing of patriotic war songs was a national obsession, particularly for women who answered advertisements for writers of song-poems by what were called “pulpers.” For a price, such poems would be set to some kind of music wherein they might be published by a vanity press or find publication in one of the many small, publishing houses around the county.

With few exceptions, however, the successful patriotic song trade remained in New York, where its publishers were experienced in marketing songs, its composers knew the public taste, and the city continued to be the hub for vaudevillians in search of the patriotic songs for which their audiences were clamoring. Two hundred of the most successful wartime songs, about a quarter of their total output, came from just four New York publishers: Leo Feist, Inc.; Jerome H. Remick; Waterson, Berlin and Snyder; and Shapiro, Bernstein and Co. In variously sentimental, comic, or combative lyrics, the songs carried out the national thrust of propaganda, calling for enlistment by the able, restraint and patience by mothers and sweethearts, hatred and ridicule of the enemy, the “Hun”—all in a rigid song composition with easily memorized chorus and lyrics.³⁵

The most successful publisher of war songs was Leo Feist, despite his earlier publication (and perhaps because of it) of the pacifist “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier.”³⁶ Feist marketed his songs with tie-ins to piano rolls and recordings, sold his sheet music in a wide range of stores, and advertised in many middle-class magazines such as *Saturday Evening Post* and *Life*. Feist also published fifteen-cent, pocket-sized music books such as *Songs the Soldiers and Sailors Sing*, one of the several military songbooks published for civilian consumption.³⁷

Feist’s name could not be more publicly connected to patriotism than its appearance on the sheet music of the most song popular song of the war, “Over There.” He paid George M. Cohan \$25,000 for the song, “the most ever paid,” as his advertising had it, suggesting that the Feist firm saw the song to be so important as to warrant such a high fee. Its worth was further signaled by hiring Norman Rockwell to provide cover art. “Over There” was a declaration of the firm’s own patriotism, and perhaps, by implication, for all the Jewish firms who were in the forefront of patriotic-song publishing.

The Singing Army

“A singing army is a cheerful one, and a cheerful army is invincible,” wrote Edward Frank Allen in *Keeping Our Fighters Fit*.³⁸ Indeed, there seemed proof galore that the army was a singing one, as reported by the entertainers who returned from the Front, from Progressive observers on information-gathering forays, and from journalists who equated a singing army with innocence and

moral right: "All along the Western front, be their days eve be so cloudy, they sing, our boys . . . as long as they breathe they smile and laugh and sing; some, perhaps, as a small boy whistles, in the woods, at night, but most, undoubtedly, because their heart is young and their conscience clear, because they are at peace with themselves in the certainty, that they are the crusaders of Right and Justice, and that these must ever be triumphant as long as God is in His Heaven."³⁹

Civilians embraced the singing army, as if to sing the same songs as the boys overseas were to share the commonalties of American life. But singing came to take an overwhelming place in the military, although it had begun more modestly as an effort to defeat the twin evils of venereal disease and alcohol.

The need for a program to control venereal disease was made clear in the U.S. Army's 1916 campaign to roust the Mexican revolutionary leader Pancho Villa. The pursuit of Villa had led to an encampment of some 160,000 National Guardsmen at the U.S.-Mexican border. Sent to investigate the troop morale, the Progressive Raymond B. Fosdick found the guardsmen were willing guests of local hospitality. "There were no homes into which they could be received and out of sheer boredom they went to the only places where they were welcomed, the saloon and the houses of prostitution."⁴⁰ Venereal disease among the armed forces had already been identified as a problem. Secretary of the U.S. Navy Josephus Daniels noted that in 1914 alone 140,000 days had been lost because of illness.⁴¹ As involvement in World War I became clear, the Secretary of War Newton Baker tapped Fosdick to make sure the earlier experience would not be repeated, much less on the mammoth scale that America's involvement in the war promised. "I want them to have an invisible armor to take with them," Baker said of the troops. "I want them to have an armor made up of a set of social habits replacing those of their homes and communities, so that when they get overseas . . . they will have gotten such a set of habits as will constitute a moral and intellectual armor for their protection overseas." This could be accomplished, Baker directed, by providing the troops with "a substitute for the recreational and relational opportunities to which they have been accustomed."⁴²

Fosdick was invited to set up a committee, the Commission on Training Camp Activities, in which government and civilian agencies were to share the task of providing wholesome activities for the country's thirty-two training camps. The army established its own bureaucracies to deal with control of alcohol and prostitution, to promote anti-venereal disease or "social hygiene" programs and to provide troops with recreation by way of an athletic division, a theater division, and a Department of Camp Music, which conducted musical instruction for the development of the regimental bands. However, seven civilian agencies, none more important than the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)—the largest social welfare organization at the time—established

the network of social and entertainment activities in the camps and organized entertainers to go overseas. The camps soon included auditoriums, classrooms, and reading rooms, places to listen to phonographs or play the piano, and performance venues on a ratio of one for each unit of 5,000 men. By 1919, the YMCA had provided 127,000 motion picture programs and 114,500 other entertainments stateside alone. The aim was to make the camps wholesome small towns, with no reason to venture into surrounding communities, which, in any case, had been forced by government edict to close saloons and root out prostitution. Camps, in fact, became the opportunity for Progressives to build the kind of society they had long dreamed of building.

Central to the aim were opportunities for entertainers to be culled from the recruits, including musicians for the many camp bands, as well as the importation of acts from vaudeville and Broadway. Fosdick ensured access to professional performers by including on his board Marcus Klaw, partner in the powerful booking giant, Klaw and Erlanger. The selection of the entertainment early on tended to replicate the kinds of entertainment that Progressive reformers themselves enjoyed—a mix of high-mindedness and the popular arts. One account of a camp show noted a “shaky performance of the Tannhauser overture” by a camp band, ten vaudeville acts including a ventriloquist and a boxing match, and a “doughboy trio” of a violin, violoncello, and piano.⁴³ “It was thrilling,” wrote Phillip James, one of the new recruits, “to see the huge audience of olive drab sit through so quietly, spell bound and responsive.”⁴⁴ For many of the troops it may have been the first time they had even heard classical music or, indeed, for the most rural of the recruits, even seen a vaudeville act.⁴⁵

Recruits at Camp Upton at Yaphant, Long Island where James was billeted may have received a lion's share of entertainment because of the camp's proximity to New York. It surely benefited when another recruit, Irving Berlin, arrived. Berlin, now twenty-five and already the writer of many popular songs, was soon asked to write a show to raise money for a troop service center at the camp. What resulted was *Yip, Yip, Yaphant*, popular enough to go beyond the camp for two engagements on Broadway. Its most famous songs turned out to be “God Bless, America,” and “How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning,” performed by Berlin in his army uniform, an image that accompanied Berlin's subsequent career.

The tandem of songs that Berlin served up, the sentimental and the cheeky, could only have pleased the camp authorities, as such songs fit well in the campaign to foster the singing army and put song leaders in an official capacity. Song leaders led assembled troops in mass singing in the camps, often from a book of songs selected by yet another national committee that wanted the troops to all sing the same songs rather than regional favorites. In the camps, song leaders also

were provided with a vehicle that could carry an organ in the back seat along with a roll of oilcloth that was unfurled to reveal the words to songs. The song leader could set up his song-leading paraphernalia in a minute or two to help soldiers as they were involved in the drudgery of a specific task or help them pass the time in periods of waiting. The navy similarly designated “chantey-men” to reinstate the practice of chantey-singing among sailors.⁴⁶

From General Pershing on down, singing was called a “necessity,” seen as valuable for throat and lung health, for overcoming fatigue in battle, for mental alertness, for efficiency, for dealing with monotony, for the development of comradeship across regional differences, and for the development of patriotism. “Patriotism is no hollow, empty-thing,” Edward Frank Allen concluded in his report on troop morale. “It wins battles. And the music, be it instrumental or vocal, that awakens and feeds it is scarcely less potent than high explosives.” He both reflected and enlarged a common wisdom: “Our boys are singers. A singing Army is invincible.”⁴⁷

Overseas

Private James, who had enjoyed the doughboy trio at his camp, was not a typical recruit, but rather a classical composer who quickly learned the saxophone in order to be accepted into one of the army bands. Army bands had a long tradition, of course, and the army had its own music school. Ten bands existed in James’s camp alone, benefiting from Pershing’s declaration that the United States should be able to mount bands as significant as those of France or Great Britain. The benefits accorded band members suggests their prestige: better food, no guard or kitchen duties, better sleeping quarters, no hikes, and no guns, at least in a camp setting. The bands played at almost any occasion—the opening of a building, the arrival of a VIP, before a boxing match, before Broadway plays, before movies. And bands were important in parades, benefit concerts, in Liberty Bond campaigns, and sometimes shared the same program with major orchestras in clear reminders that the war was a national effort across all classes. In the new emphasis on music as essential for troop morale, bands increasingly adopted the popular music of the day. For thousands of young men, military bands provided their first introduction to what was being called “jazz.”

The American Expeditionary Force commander General John J. Pershing would have echoed General Robert E. Lee’s remark, “I don’t think we can have an army without music.”⁴⁸ In his efforts to improve American military bands, Pershing called on the symphony orchestra conductor Walter Damrosch to examine the competence of the army’s bandmasters and approved Damrosch’s plan for a band school on French soil. Damrosch noted, “It seemed to me at the time remarkable

that, in the midst of war and with all its immediate necessities weighing upon him, General Pershing should have had the acumen to perceive the value of music in war time and to interest himself in its improvements.⁴⁹ Pershing came to agree that band members were so valuable as to exempt them from the frontlines, even as stretcher bearers where they could be (and were) killed.

From the British perspective, Pershing might better have put his efforts into moving his troops to the Western Front in a timely manner, but the delay surely allowed the opportunity for morale building. Pershing may have most improved the life of the average soldier when jazz, or music with some kind of syncopation, came to be part of band repertoires, and with the concomitant formation of soldier jazz groups. Jazz, once so coupled with the interzone clubs of city life in prewar America, became accepted as a result of the wartime emphasis on music and morale. This new openness to music that clearly emanated from black American culture, even as a time of huge prejudice toward black troops, may be in some part be credited to Pershing's personal contact with African American life. As a young man in La Clede, Missouri, Pershing had been a teacher in a black school, and his rise to the top included his command of the army's 10th Cavalry composed of African American soldiers, notably serving in the Southwest and in the Spanish-American War. It was this command that led to his press nickname of "Black Jack."⁵⁰

Pershing was the appropriate commander under whose authority the African American orchestra leader, James Reese Europe, was recruited for the army. Europe, founder of some fifteen orchestras for the New York society trade, was a composer, arranger, conductor, and businessman. Following the dissolution of the dancing team Irene and Vernon Castle, for whom he had provided orchestration and accompaniment, Europe enlisted in the segregated and struggling 15th Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard and was assigned to a machine gun company. But his musical reputation led to request by the regiment's white commanding officer, Colonel William Hayward, to establish a military band, providing wide latitude (and a \$10,000 budget) to recruit for it. Hayward himself was a New York Progressive, anxious for the organization of an African American regiment. But Hayward's good intentions could flourish because his assistant was George C. F. Hinton, the theatrical agent for Elsie Janis, Lillian Russell, and other stars, a man who would have known of Europe's reputation and work.⁵¹ The result was the 369th Infantry Jazz Band, more generally known at the "Hellfighters Jazz Band" because of the regiment's frontline service under French command (more amenable to including black fighting troops than the U.S. Army). The 369th served the longest of any U.S. regiment, claimed several war heroes, and was awarded the French Croix de Guerre in recognition of its battlefield services.⁵² That reputation preceded it when the

band played a two-thousand-mile tour across twenty-five European cities and was widely and enthusiastically received by U.S. and French troops. The band's musical success prompted the organization of a number of regimental bands, black and white, on a jazz model: the 803rd Pioneer Infantry Band No. 16, the 350th Field Artillery Band, and the 58th Infantry Band.⁵³ Also encouraged were soldier jazz groups, whose abilities were acknowledged more than once by entertainer Elsie Janis during her army tour.⁵⁴

Jazz groups, however, were not easily integrated across race since they represented the segregated nature of the army (although Europe's band included many Puerto Rican players whom he had recruited for their ability to play wind instruments). But certainly the eagerness to form white jazz groups signaled the new acceptance of jazz into the larger population. One white group, Scrap Iron Jazzerinos, was popular enough to be invited to record in Paris at the end of the war, and they continued to play in France until 1921.

Not all officers liked jazz, but they found themselves on the defensive when, for example, the volunteer Alice Pennington counteracted Admiral Wilson's dislike by insisting "that all the sailors loved it and that in time of war they certainly should have anything they wanted."⁵⁵ Sheet music of the day reflected the attraction of syncopated music to enlisted men: "That Syncopated Sailor Band" (1918), "There's a Raggin' Tune 'Democracy'" (1918; with an illustration of dancing servicemen), and "Those Navy Blues" (with a cartoon figure of a fleeing black character).⁵⁶

Wartime jazz served to unite troops in a common enjoyment of what all agreed, particularly the French admirers, was *American* music. That was the same assessment made by the theatrical producers Winthrop Ames and Edward H. Sothorn during their evaluation of overseas entertainment. They regarded Europe's band as the best entertainment in France because it was "so typically American."⁵⁷ Jazz was now included as "American" without qualifier.

* * *

Months before the Over There League was organized, the YMCA had heard the call for American entertainment and already sponsored travel of more than a thousand U. S. entertainers to France, men and women entertainers who represented the wide swath of Progressive choices: Shakespearean actors, opera singers, dramatic monologists, choirs, vaudeville acts, and popular singers. But it was soon clear that popular singers were to be favored. The honor for being "the first to set the Army to singing its way to victory," according to a contemporary, was Miss Anna Hughes, a Philadelphia girl. She could "raise more volume of song from the men in a given space of time than anyone else in reach."⁵⁸

On one of the YMCA's early tours, the concert baritone Francis Rogers, tried to comply with the prevailing wind of popular taste. "They all want to hear the latest songs, and anything fresh from home," he wrote. "Their taste in music is frankly Broadway. The boys want songs with chorus and ragtime, their favorites are: 'When the Red Dawn Is Shining,' 'Sunshine of Your Smile,' 'I May be Gone for a Long, Long Time,' 'Oh, Johnnie, Oh,' 'I Want to Be in Dixie,' 'Keep the Home Fires Burning,' 'Indiana,' 'Joan of Arc,' 'Where Do We Go From Here?' 'Huckleberry Finn,' 'Over There,' 'A Long, Long Trail,' 'Pack Up Your Troubles,' 'Poor Butterfly.'" A close second to the popular songs, were "mother songs." "All mother songs the boys are crazy about—no matter how sentimental they are."⁵⁹

Despite the best intentions of concert artists, they would always be disadvantaged. It was not simply the songs themselves that the troops wanted, but the give-and-take of vaudeville entertainment. They wanted someone, in the popular phrase, "who could put a song over." The press noted, "There seems to be a greater demand for the sort of amusement which the vaudeville actor, accustomed to trusting largely to his wits, can best furnish."⁶⁰ In August the first group of *Over There* entertainers prepared to leave and, despite the offers from the legitimate stage, the performers were all from vaudeville.⁶¹

The vaudevillians brought a working-class alignment to the men in the trenches. The entertainers prided themselves on their endurance and their ability to reach the troops close to the front. Mary Rochester, appreciated for her knack "to get the boys to sing," was one such performer. "It was late at night and it seemed to me we had walked through miles of mud to get there. They stood at attention all the while, but the smiles on the boys' faces, especially when I sang for them in their dugouts, was worth the long ride out and my wet muddy feet. Only a few nights after that all these boys were killed when their battery was blown up."⁶² The English Five Hearon Sisters were legendary for performing under fire. "Many of the Yankee Division got their last real message from home from the plucky and laugh-compelling show put on by this courageous quintet." They performed close to battles, "helping in dressing the wounded and giving impromptu entertainments at the first aid stations along that line."⁶³

Following the army's policy, the shows generally included sing-alongs. Albert Wiederhold, a member of the Liberty Quartette who toured in France, considered the sing-alongs the appropriate conclusion to a program. "Each evening, nine thousand or more happy soldiers went away from the show feeling that life was worth living and that a million loving thoughts from America were still on their trail in muddy, dreary France."⁶⁴

The theatrical star Elsie Janis may have been the most ardent of all the American entertainers. She traveled all over France (accompanied by her

mother), singing popular songs, telling stories, and performing her signature cartwheels, under whatever conditions were at hand—bombardments, in hospital wards, from the back of trucks, in village squares, and in the YMCA “huts” that, despite their name, accommodated three and four thousand servicemen at a time. She arrived for one performance strapped to the front of a locomotive. At the end of performances she was likely to dance the foxtrot with one serviceman after another. She was loved by the troops, who called her “Elsie,” and was even feted by the great man Pershing himself, who told her, “If you can give men this sort of happiness you’re worth an Army Corps.” Janis said she never expected “to feel that proud again.”⁶⁵ As other performers attested, the gratitude always went two ways. “I told them all my new stories,” she said of one, “and sang anything they asked for, and felt really *useful* to humanity for the first time in my life.”⁶⁶

Finally, in a much different venue, another kind of American popular music was making its way in France; that, the compositions of the young Cole Porter, who had enlisted in the French Foreign Legion before the U.S. declaration of war. From his luxurious Paris apartment, Porter played his witty and risqué compositions to an audience of artistic and café elite and helped establish the tone of the Paris of the 1920s.

The Actors’ Strike

The final proof that entertainers had surely moved from the margins to the beloved center of American life was in 1919 when members of the Actors’ Equity Association walked off their jobs and closed down two-thirds of the New York playhouses. Like the mass meeting of a year before that had resulted in the Over There League, many of the same constituents jammed the ballroom at the Hotel Astor, but now to call a strike. George M. Cohan did not take the stage at this event. Cohan was on the other side, a member of the United Managers’ Protective Association. Up against the well-financed owners, the strike was, according to its chronicler, “the greatest struggle in the history of the stage.” Equity was untested; its resources limited. What was accorded to be its greatest asset was that “popular opinion was on the side of the actor.”⁶⁷

Abuses were long-standing: actors were not paid for rehearsal time, even though rehearsal could take months and shows could close quickly; managers could call for extra performances at no pay; and salaries were low for all but the stars. Equity had been formed in 1912 to address the abuses, but without a union affiliation, it made little progress. In July 1919, Equity members voted overwhelmingly to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor and to insist that no member of Equity would work for the managers unless the managers

recognized the union. The entertainers' decision to define themselves as a union resonated with much of the population, as did the strike, which was in tune with a wave of labor actions led by leaders, as Sean Holmes writes, anxious to consolidate their wartime position and "establish collective bargaining as a permanent feature of the industrial landscape."⁶⁸

The unionization of actors was not so easy to accept by performers who saw their work as individual art, worthy of the title "profession," a designation actively sought by actors for its prestige and middle-class status and supported by the founding of schools for acting and new acceptance of actors into respectable society. But that view was to be subsumed when Equity opened its doors to vaudevillians—a pragmatic decision to ensure that producers would not use them as strikebreakers. As a result, the union changed from an actors-only organization to one representing the wide swath of performing professions. There were two major exceptions: chorus girls, the most abused of all, who formed their own group under Marie Dressler (later blacklisted by theater owners for her activism); and African American performers, who were seen to have a separate set of issues but, as demonstrated by the disinclination of the *Follies* performers to invite Williams to the strike march, would not have been hospitable in any case. Still, for the actors who had hoped for a profession that marked them and their audiences as cultural elite, unionization was a step down a slippery slope of class loss. E. H. Southern, one of the organizers of the Over There League, resigned and sought to take actors with him. But the Barrymores remained committed to the union, as did James O'Neill, all household names not likely to lose their status.

The flood of vaudevillians soon took over strike activities. The Equity parade, organized by way of theatrical companies, was small by the standards of the day with just two thousand participants on a rainy day and did not promise to rally public support. Like traveling wartime entertainers, performers turned to street theater, which they conducted at picketed theaters in front of box office lines. Although there were more serious turns, Eddie Cantor, DeWolf Hopper, Ed Wynn, and W. C. Fields were the most popular with potential theatergoers, who were persuaded not to buy tickets. Chorus girls took the strike message to Wall Street, quite literally so, distributing pamphlets inside Wall Street offices.

But the real supporters of the strike were not so much the theater or financial crowds as among the small capitalists, ordinary folk and labor unionists around the theater district, the cabdrivers who refused to pick up riders who were on their way to the theater, police who ignored infractions, restaurants that provided free meals, and landladies who delayed the collection of rent for their performer residents. Even local gangs provided protection. Altogether, they were part of the generation who had themselves, or knew of, the men who had served

in the war. Who could resist solidarity with the wartime entertainers who had provided so much free entertainment at so much risk?

The entertainers themselves understood their new role in the culture. The subsequent benefit they mounted cemented a new compact between themselves and their audience, as recounted by Eddie Cantor: "Never were performances given with such enthusiasm and zest. Each actor thrilled with purpose. The comedians were never funnier, the tragedians never wrung such tears. Most of the men dressed together in a grand democracy. They shared one another's make-up, outfits, gave lavishly of all they had. We played twelve performances in six days and were eager to do more. We made bonfires of our emotions, and swept our audiences in a blaze of excitement. It was the greatest week of our lives."⁶⁹

In the end, Equity won, signing an agreement in early September 1919. The settlement was most prompted by a real estate firm, which preferred meeting union demands than allowing its property, the Hippodrome, site of elaborate extravaganzas, to stand empty. But the strike had a symbolic resonance for actors and their audience, making popular entertainment a fifth estate of American life.

After the war, some purveyors of popular culture faltered. The sheet music industry, despite its patriotic service, was felled by a printers' strike, the high cost of paper, competition from the recording industry and, quickly, radio. Most of the wartime songs disappeared, a few to be resurrected in World War II. Some of the most enthusiastically supported entertainers lost their way. Marie Dressler disappeared for ten years until she reappeared in character parts in movies. Considering her wartime service the high point of her life, Elsie Janis turned to songwriting and production lest the experience be sullied. Europe and his regiment were part of a ticker tape parade down Fifth Avenue and the Hellfighters Band, now having recorded for Pathé, began a national tour. But in Boston, Europe was killed by one of his drummers in a freakish misunderstanding that ended a career marked for increasing accomplishments.

The entertainment industry as a whole was served by the war. The American film industry came to supplant European filmmaking in the global distribution of film, thanks to favorable postwar terms, and thus established the beachfront of the cultural hegemony that America imposed on the world for the rest of the century. And while, in retrospect, it was not so likely that the 450 war-related films played any larger part in the marshaling of popular opinion than other aspects of wartime propaganda, for the Jewish entrepreneurs who were not so removed from the nickelodeon culture, the war effort served to proclaim their American patriotism and align them with the majority culture. "By the end of the war," Ward writes, "the film industry seemed to have achieved a degree of respectability and recognition that was previously unimaginable."⁷⁰

American popular music found new audiences in Europe, while returning soldiers enlarged the audience for popular music at home. As it had for the film entrepreneurs, the support of the war by Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker, Fanny Brice, Nora Bayes, and others legitimized the performers as mainstream cultural icons. Irving Berlin turned away from novelty songs into the composition of songs that came to represent broad American themes.

It seems clear that the service of the entertainment industry to the war helped integrate popular entertainment into the fabric of the culture. The success of the actors' strike as a broad-based organization tended to flatten public perceptions that had placed "legitimate" theater on a hierarchy above popular entertainment. Indeed, a mass audience as never seen before was in the making. "Creel's work," wrote social historian Mark Sullivan, "had deluged America, saturated it."⁷¹ The ability of propaganda to slip into every crevice of the nation presaged the same trajectory for American entertainment. Nearness to cities became less important for audiences now movie theaters, recordings, and, soon, radio, took popular entertainment directly to the children of the prairie.

Entertainment, in fact, seemed to spread outward in a single sea, submerging difference. Specialized audiences would remain for what would increasingly be considered high art, and for certain aspects of regional culture. But popular culture as it had been most defined by its World War I filter—popular song, popular music, and comedy—all flourished in the postwar period. In the next decade, popular entertainment came to take a favored place in a time that was increasingly characterized by repression, a "savage peace," as it has been called.⁷² As attention turned from wartime enemies overseas to perceived enemies within, including what the National Security League sneeringly called "hyphenated Americans," popular song took on increased stature as an Americanizing "cure for Bolshevism."⁷³

The acceptance that popular culture was *American* culture had surely been hastened by the war's industry-government cooperation. The cooperative relationship continued on an informal way when former government officials took their imprimatur to the film world. The U.S. Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo, the architect of the Liberty Bond campaign, became the chief counsel for United Artists, formed by Pickford, Fairbanks, Griffith, and Chaplin in 1919. McAdoo's second at Treasury, Oscar Price, known to the film community thanks to the bond campaigns, was the studio's first head. Frank Wilson, the director of the bond publicity for Treasury, formed a motion picture financing company, a recognition that a modern industry needed Wall Street respectability. In 1920, the Republican Will H. Hays resigned as U.S. postmaster to

become president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, a position that led to the “Hays Code” form of self-censorship.

It would be the development of radio, however, that provided the best example of a government-industry partnership. Popular entertainment had surely proved itself to be the nation’s number one soldier. Radio would be its next posting.

EPILOGUE

Broadcasting Begins

You stay at home and listen
To the lecture in the hall,
Or hear the strains of music
From a fashionable ball.

—Thomas P. Westendorf, “The Wondrous Telephone”

At a time when wireless communication was conveyed by dots and dashes, the Futurist Edward Bellamy predicted the delivery of music into the home. “Your concerts, for instances, and operas!” Bellamy’s Miss Leete exclaimed in a novel set in 2000. “How perfectly exasperating it must have been, for the sake of a piece or two of music that suited you, to have to sit for hours listening to what you did not care for!”¹ By the year 2000, the choices indeed were many but not from a spectrum that Progressives had in mind.

What Bellamy and other Progressive Futurists did not so clearly predict was the development of twentieth-century broadcast along lines of popular culture rather than the specialized cultures of the concert hall, opera, education or reform. Early discussion of radio was full of hope, promising the end of rural isolation, education for all, the spread of political discussion, and accessibility to uplift culture. But by the close of World War I, broadcast was already on the road to a mass entertainment vehicle, supported by advertising and aimed at a national audience whose tastes had been formed by popular song, vaudeville, and motion pictures from the first years of the century. How this occurred suggests that the final piece in the making of a national American culture was a government-business partnership, one that came to dominate the rest of the century.

Government-Industry Partnership

From our perspective, it is easy to see that radio as a national expression of popular culture reflected the ongoing centralization of the time. Telephone lines, the nation's electric grids, the railroad system, chain ownership, national branding and national advertising flattened regional differences in favor of messages from faraway hubs. Except for smaller markets based on race and ethnicity, the existence of national distribution methods made it more expedient for entrepreneurs to expand their customer base by way of shared tastes rather than on serving many separate tastes. By war's end, radio entrepreneurs followed the same trend by connecting many separate radio stations into networks that could distribute a few programs over a wide area.

But in the time this pattern was not so inevitable for radio, and certainly not a conclusion made by the U.S. Navy, which had taken over radio installations for military use in World War I and sought to maintain control in the postwar era. The telegraph and telephone lines of American Telephone and Telegraph had been nationalized during the war, and there was no guarantee that they would be returned to private hands. Indeed, the Wilson administration was not eager to return to their original owners many of the industries it had taken over in the war. Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo, for example, wanted the railroads to stay in government hands for at least five years after the war ended, already a provision for U.S. shipping. The U.S. Post Office, which had claimed operation of international cables in the war, supported a 1919 bill to put wireless under the control of the U.S. Navy. In the postwar world, however, the rationale for nationalization of industry had shifted from the Progressive belief that nationalization would best serve the public to the Wilson administration policy that nationalization was necessary to maintain the role of the United States as a world power. Opposition abounded to the plans for government control. The respected politician and eventual Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Charles Hughes asked, "In saving the world have we lost our Republic?"²

Amid a growing opposition to nationalization of any industry, the bill for U.S. Navy control of radio failed. But this hardly changed the administration's belief that the British would soon dominate the global development of radio because its most important patents were under the control of the aggressive British Marconi company. Failing in its efforts to nationalize radio, the Wilson administration turned back to the government-industry notions of cooperation of World War I, a model that had helped the film industry remain independent. Under this model, radio remained a private industry but so heavily supervised by the government as to make the government its secret partner. In less than ten years, the government had in place the licensing power that would determine who could own radio stations. Favored were "general-purpose" commercial

stations organized along network lines and emphasizing the popular culture that had proved itself in the war. Less favored were stations representing labor unions, political parties, educational institutions, regional culture, and any other entity outside of what was considered mainstream. The First Amendment, which has ensured the freedom of speech in print, did not apply to expression in over-the-air broadcast on the rationale that the airwaves were public and should be supervised.

The finally agreed upon system was beneficial to both sides of the government-business partnership, providing for the promotion of common messages helpful for governance yet in a profit-making frame of private ownership. Broadcasting in America was not to develop as a direct arm of government in the propagandistic or cultural uplift mode of other nations. But neither was it to provide a platform for the voices of change or serve as a vehicle for the already existing part of American culture that reflected difference to the mainstream. Vaudevillians, who had never had to change their act on a national tour, found a new home on radio for an audience that welcomed predictability as much as the audiences of the vaudeville tours.

The Battle for Broadcast

No government agency had followed the development of radio technology more closely than the U.S. Navy. As much as a private company, the U.S. Navy held its own set of patents, purchased technology from General Electric, and increasingly looked with worry at the international power of Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, “British Marconi” as it was known. Despite the contributions of American inventors to radio, the most important inventor and entrepreneur was Guglielmo Marconi, who had founded the company and maintained control of the most important of the patents. Like Edison, Marconi was ruthless in keeping competitors at bay, and it was feared that he had world ambitions for the extension of radio in his name.

Marconi established a U.S. subsidiary, Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America, in 1899. By 1912, American Marconi had taken over the assets of the United Wireless Telegraph Company and enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the United States. The company’s prestige increased when wireless was credited with saving lives in the *Titanic* disaster. Sure of its position in the United States, the company embarked on the construction of several U.S. stations to handle overseas communications.³

But Marconi’s vision needed an American invention to be fully realized, the Alexanderson Alternator, the powerful General Electric (GE) amplifier that extended the distances for wireless telephony (by continuous wave rather than

spark technology). In 1915, Marconi had begun negotiations with GE to purchase the keystone alternator, and by 1917 negotiations had proceeded to the point that GE had installed the alternator in Marconi's New Brunswick, New Jersey, station. Marconi's ownership of the piece of equipment was short. The U.S. Navy took over the New Jersey station in the name of war necessity. The former Marconi station became the navy's flagship for its communication to Europe.

The Navy Campaign

Well before the end of the war, the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Post Office had readied their campaigns to retain all broadcast technology, including telegraph and telephone, in government hands. At a time when socialism was viewed as the goal of ethnic radicals, U.S. Postmaster Albert Burleson argued that he was not advocating governmental "ownership" but rather the government's role to govern properly. "The Wire Service, like the mails, is a public utility of universal necessity," he wrote in one of the monthly quarterlies.⁴ But Burleson's custodial record did not inspire confidence. In his wartime administration, he rid the nation of dissident publications by revoking second-class mailing privileges, persecuted black postal workers, angered labor by forbidding postal workers to strike, and vigorously enforced the Espionage Act by ordering local postmasters to send him suspicious material.

A better chance for congressional approval was the U.S. Navy, which, under Secretary Josephus Daniels, had transported thousands of fighting men to France without the loss of one life. Daniels, a Wilson patronage appointment, was a man with a strong Progressive agenda. From modest Southern roots, Daniels made his mark as a Democratic newspaper proprietor, believing that "a newspaper should be like a preacher—always upholding righteousness."⁵ He had no qualms about impressing his own values of righteousness in his new job. As new secretary he prohibited the navy's traditional rations of liquor to its seaman and was excoriated in newspaper cartoons and in the press for the policy. But he was a man undeterred by criticism, and he was single-minded in his pursuit of a radio monopoly under the control of the U.S. government.

In 1916, during the preparedness era, Daniels began to agitate for a bill that proposed Congress purchase all existing commercial stations and disallow further licensing. In a high-handed action, Daniels authorized the outright purchase of existing coastal stations belonging to Marconi and the Federal Telegraph Company. At war's end, Daniels was rebuked for going too far—impeachment was hinted. Marconi organized a significant counter campaign, utilizing the amateur radio operators. Congress ordered radio stations back to their original owners.

And, once again, British Marconi—even more powerful since war's end—was interested in the Alexanderson Alternator. A lucrative contract was offered by Marconi on the proviso the company retained exclusive rights. The navy was quick to intervene. At a famous meeting, Admiral W. H. G. Bullard, Director of Naval Communications, argued that General Electric should refuse the contract in the name of patriotism, once again raising the specter that world communication might slip into British hands. GE officials were sympathetic, but pointed to the need to serve stockholders. Bullard offered a suggestion that had been discussed by navy officials *sub rosa*. An *American* company should be formed, one that would follow the war model by depositing all patents, including those of Marconi, in one place. American corporations could all benefit—indeed, there would be guarantees that companies would not compete with each other in certain areas. Most important, Marconi would be forced out and GE would not lose any business. A plan was struck, leading, in 1919, to the formation of Radio Corporation of America (RCA). RCA was to be the depository for all of the important radio patents, including Marconi's, in exchange for RCA stock.⁶ The success of the endeavor was put in the hands of the first RCA chairman, Owen E. Young.

The Business of America

One reason for the success of government-business cooperation during the war was the nature of the country's business leaders, men who had replaced the old robber barons and who had found success because some industries, such as the new utilities, had already required business-government partnerships. These new partnerships meant that the business leaders had to take a negotiated rather than a blunderbuss approach. The young men who best seemed to fill this requirement tended to come from modest backgrounds whose success was predicated on their adaptation to the business organization they had joined. In their rise to power, they were men who had experience with many levels of American society and found success because of their ability to negotiate common interests with governmental bureaucracies.

The leaders of the technology industry could also have been the culmination of the boy heroes of juvenile literature. In the adventures of the Radio Boys, Tom Swift, and the young heroes of the Invention series, it was the young heroes' grasp of modern technology that enabled them to be the saviors of older adults, and in the war years, of the nation. Tom Swift, indeed, was a young master of the universe in titles that illustrated his command of every new technology—motion pictures, aviation, dreadnoughts, and photography.⁷ But of all of the technologies, wireless alone was the focus of the series the Radio Boys

and the Ocean Wireless Boys. The books were about amateur wireless clubs whose collective knowledge saved adults from fire, flood, exploding islands, icebergs, shipwreck, starvation, and avalanches. In 1915, the Ocean Wireless Boys ferreted out a German wireless spy station and received the gratitude of the nation.⁸ Despite another short-lived series called the Radio Girls, the framing of radio as technological expertise strengthened connections to a male-only sphere that affirmed the traditional male role as protector.

In real life, the *Titanic* disaster in 1912 had burnished the reputation of the amateurs and the framing of wireless outside of entertainment. The press lionized two young wireless technicians as real-life heroes: Jack Phillips, the wireless operator who sent out *Titanic's* distress signals and died at his post; and the amateur wireless operator, Harold Cottam, who heard the signals and called for aid.⁹ Also in real life, the U.S. Navy targeted the substantial amateur wireless community in its World War I poster advertising, undoubtedly building a power base for its later power grab. By 1922, in the introduction to the first book in the Radio Boys series, Jack Binns, another of the real-life wireless heroes, lauded the boy amateur as imperative to the development of radio. "The attitude of the government toward the wireless amateur is well illustrated by the expressions of the Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, and is summed up in his declaration, 'I am for the American boy.'"¹⁰ As negotiations began with the fledgling radio industry and government, radio was imbedded in popular ideas of radio's importance to national security and, as a corollary, the role of young men as the nation's protectors.

The archetype of the new leader was Owen Young, who could have easily been the subject of one of the boy hero books. From modest beginnings as an upstate New York farm boy (where he had nonetheless studied Latin and Greek at the local school), he had done well thanks to his own efforts and the willingness of mentors to provide opportunities. His early business career was spent negotiating contracts between tramline companies and the ambitious, midsized American cities that wanted electric trams for cheap transportation. Young has been viewed as one of the new type of American businessmen, men who valued social responsibility and saw their purpose as custodians of values, whether it was in the stock of shareholders or in what he would consider the Protestant values in which he had been raised.¹¹ He maintained a kind of Jeffersonian contact with his rural past, from establishing specialty dairy herds to keeping ducks and chickens for the benefit of his children at his weekend retreat. It was a sensibility that was likely helpful in his dealings with the men and women of the nation's middle-sized cities and verified that he represented original values. As a Democrat, an affiliation he had held publicly from his college days onward,

Wilson's election in 1912 confirmed to him that the values as he understood them—cautious, fair, and balanced—would be part of public life.

Young's rise paralleled that of Edward J. Nally, the vice president of American Marconi. Nally was another poor boy, born in Philadelphia, who went to work at the age of eight. By fifteen he was a Western Union messenger boy, then an office boy for Western Union's president, who took Nally under his wing.¹² This was the kind of trajectory—jobs of messengers and operators as the first steps to larger careers—promised in the juvenile literature and specifically in Western Union recruiting materials.¹³ When Nally took the opportunity to go to work for American Marconi in 1913, no one doubted it represented an opportunity for upward mobility, not a shift of national allegiance. It fell to Nally, whose success was constructed on the values of the nation, to represent Marconi's interest in early negotiations with the U.S. Navy.

Nathan C. Kingsbury, vice president of AT&T, another self-made man who had risen to power from a varied background in which he worked as a printer's devil, railroader, and retail clerk became the trusted advocate for the entrepreneurial and crustier Theodore Vail, who had constructed the company. When the proliferation of telephone companies threatened a chaotic system that lacked national reach, Kingsbury carried the Vail message to the Wilson administration that telephony was a "natural monopoly" and was deserving of governmental protection.¹⁴ The 1913 "Kingsbury Commitment," as it became known, was concluded without the public's knowledge and remained in place until deregulation late in the twentieth century. Although the Wilson Democrats once had been in the forefront of antitrust activities, the administration seemed willing to believe that big business, in the hands of such amenable and so clearly *American* leaders, would best protect the public interest.

The leaders had risen to power because the new industry of telecommunications had been among the most open to the talented and the hard driving. Unlike the standard professions, telecommunications accepted and rewarded men without regard to economic background, yet it hardly seemed a haven for new immigrants as much as a place to demonstrate native American talent. But Jewish American David Sarnoff was a Russian immigrant who, like Irving Berlin, had started out selling newspapers in New York City, which may have helped him, like Berlin, to know the pulse of popular entertainment. Sarnoff found employment in the messenger business but soon jumped to Marconi in order to become a young operator.

Sarnoff was ambitious from the beginning, with a flair for self-promotion that led to a self-appointed heroic role in the *Titanic* disaster. In the story he promoted, Sarnoff was at the key of a Marconi wireless demonstration in New

York's John Wanamaker department store when the disaster occurred, remaining on duty around the clock in order to transmit information as it unfolded. Sarnoff's claim of heroism, a story constantly retold throughout his life, came to eclipse the stories of the other wireless operators and found its way, unchallenged, into history books.¹⁵

At a time when young boy inventors were celebrated, the prospect of being one of them could only have appealed to Sarnoff.¹⁶ Moreover, Sarnoff, as much as any of the movie moguls or music publishers, was likely keenly aware that his Russian Jewish ethnicity was most connected to anarchy and socialism in the popular mind. Unlike Berlin, who was close to him in age and was drafted, Sarnoff had spent the war years working for Marconi. He was not a man, for either idealistic or pragmatic reasons, to resist cooperation with governmental interests. Indeed, throughout his career he conflated RCA with the national interest and proudly bore the honorific "General," from his contributions in World War II, to the end of his days.

But it was Nally, Sarnoff's boss, who was persuaded to give his support to the new company, perhaps for some of the same patriotic reasons that he associated with his rise. Nally and A. G. Davis, GE's vice president, were soon sailing to England with the offer to purchase Marconi's American interests with stock in the new company. The negotiations themselves are not so clear, especially what was brought to bear to make Marconi comply, but in the end, when all the complicated cross-patents had been negotiated, the formation of RCA carved up the communications world as it then existed. Western Union, Westinghouse, General Electric, and AT&T were each provided with spheres of interest, from the manufacture of tabletop radios for the home to the erection of long-distance lines. While Young was chairman of the RCA board, Nally was appointed RCA president, and Admiral Bullard took a role on the board as the navy representative. Still not in the leadership, Sarnoff was, as he had been at Marconi, RCA's commercial manager.

The Radio Music Box

In 1916, when still at Marconi, the young Sarnoff offered a particular vision to his boss Nally: the future of radio, he said, was as a "music box," a source of musical entertainment for home listeners.¹⁷ As we know from Edward Bellamy's novel, Sarnoff was not the first to think of the idea, and Nally himself was pursuing an arrangement with the Gramophone Company, suggesting he was seeing radio beyond long-distance communication. Clearly, however, the music box notion was at odds with the vision of the U.S. Navy at the time. But once the war was over, navy interests mollified by the formation of RCA, Sarnoff reintroduced the

concept. In a far-reaching proposal, Sarnoff spelled out the idea again, this time in a long memo to Chairman Young. Its appeal now rested on the argument that radio, as a conduit for popular music, was a way to promote the sale of radios. E. W. Rice, Jr., the president of General Electric, asked for a cost breakdown. Sarnoff estimated that a million radios could be sold within three years at \$75 per set—a gross income of \$75 million. As it turned out, RCA exceeded the prediction. Cash sales in the first three years amounted to \$83.5 million.¹⁸

What prompted Americans to purchase the fine, living room models was the ability of the radio manufacturers to appeal to female listeners by turning radio into a listening device rather than one that demanded participation, as in amateur radio. This technical simplification removed radio from a representation of male power and responsibility, the model that the U.S. Navy had promoted, and put radio into the hands of the female consumer.¹⁹ Like vaudeville and family newspapers, much of the content of radio was based on what were perceived to be female interests, none more important than popular music. KDKA, operating from a Pittsburgh suburb and owned by one of the RCA partners, Westinghouse Electric Co. Early, was one of the radio stations that had already demonstrated the ability of music to attract listeners, simply by playing popular records. In bigger cities, a few independent radio stations discovered the popularity of African American performers, now to be heard on the “race” records, which had proved so useful in rescuing America’s phonograph industry, or in live hookups to dance halls, jazz clubs, and hotel ballrooms.²⁰ Although male ham operators had lost some national attention, white radio listeners, who may have first heard jazz thanks to their World War I experience, could reconnect to the music by anonymous travel to forbidden places, thanks to the turn of a dial.

The success of the entertainment model to sell radios, however, was just one use of radio developing in the 1920s. Under the 1912 act, the Department of Commerce had been issuing licenses to all comers for a variety of purposes: colleges and universities with ideas of “colleges of the air”; churches for “pulpits of the air”; department stores and others for selling their goods; municipalities for their own promotion and service to their cities; immigrant groups to hear their own language and music; and at least one labor union. By 1923, some 520 stations had acquired licenses.²¹ Unlike the music coming from hotel ballrooms, the programming choices for most of these stations did not particularly prompt radio purchases beyond their own coteries. But in this *mélange* of stakeholders, AT&T envisioned another route, setting up a system of “toll broadcasting” in which individuals or groups could simply rent radio time for their own purposes.

At the same time, commercial stations were finding that entertainment program not only sold radios, but also could be useful in finding sponsorships.

These lessons came together with Sarnoff's second idea, the activation of a radio "network." Looking at the dispersed landscape of independent stations, Sarnoff conceived a plan to connect the best of them in an "affiliate" pattern; that is, NBC would offer similar programming to the stations that would agree to affiliate with NBC. The resulting programming provided large enough audiences to interest national sponsorship. In 1926, Sarnoff, now president of RCA, formed a subsidiary, the National Broadcasting Company, for this purpose (it would have two networks based on differing levels of audio quality). In 1928, the Columbia Broadcast System was organized along the same principles by a consortium of Russian Jewish émigrés and was purchased by a member of their circle, William Paley, who, like Sarnoff, recognized popular taste.²²

Sarnoff's establishment of the NBC network coincided with favorable federal legislation. In 1927, after years of agitation, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover shepherded the Radio Act of 1927 through Congress, purportedly to make the airwaves less chaotic by preventing multiple station signals from interfering with each other, a rationale that would find favor with the nation's own radio boys. In substance, however, the Radio Act of 1927 strengthened the network organization by giving licenses to the most successful of the stations, that is, the network affiliates that had proved their worth by entertainment programming.²³ The 1927 act licensed only those stations that operated in the "public interest"—the phrase so close to Progressive hearts. What was defined as the public interest, however, came to mean stable ownership and nonconfrontational programming, that is, "general-purpose" stations rather than "propaganda stations," a critical way of describing stations owned for particular purposes. As Hugh Sloten writes, "In practice, general-purpose stations were commercial stations affiliated with NBC and CBS."²⁴ The so-called propaganda stations were those noncommercial stations operated by private interests of church, university, labor unions, local governments, and others. Many of these stations disappeared after the 1927 act in favor of commercial, affiliated stations that sold advertising for support and were the choices of regulatory support.

Entertainment had won the day, or at least the kind of entertainment that was of broad enough appeal to attract the audience desired by a sponsoring company. Since sponsorship and content tended to be equated, sponsors only wanted the kind of content that would reflect well on them. To find the kind of content to attract audiences, the new network programmers could look at what already had been successfully utilized—recorded music, dance bands, and live performers, and sports, including the live coverage, in 1921, of the heavyweight boxing match between Jack Demsey and Georges Carpentier. These were choices that sat well with the East Coast sensibilities of the network executives

and appeared to be the popular culture choices of an audience whose tastes had been impacted by wartime entertainments.

Still, this kind of content alone was not enough for the “general-purpose” definition of licensing. News, cultural uplift, and religious programming were offered, without sponsorship if necessary, in the belief they served the public interest and protected their licenses. Concert music, for example, played a significant role in the network programming of early broadcasting and lasted into the 1950s, appealing to the middle-class audiences that radio sought to attract.²⁵ But clearly the money was to be made from individual artists—Bing Crosby, Kate Smith, Jane Froman, the Mills Brothers, Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson, Burns and Allen, and many others, who had regular programs offered alongside radio drama, homemaker programs, religious programming, and a few public affairs programs.

The Making of the Mass Audience

Its technology encased in a fine box and placed in the center of the family home, the radio receivers carried messages of their own importance, the corporate nature of the industry, and the listening role of the family who clustered around them, all lessons in the formation of a mass audience. As we have seen, the formation of mass audiences had been under way in the United States from the development of vaudeville in an industrial model. In seeking the mass audience, popular entertainment products sought to evoke similar responses over a broad group of people, whether all in one place at one time, or in separate locations, or even one person at a time. Vaudeville audiences responded in polysemous ways. Popular songs were as satirical as they were sentimental. And audiences found personal meaning even in the standardized plots of movies. When the entrepreneur was in charge, these multiple readings were actually useful for building a mass audience. Entertainment as wartime propaganda, however, provided lessons in less-polysemous responses.

The advent of radio, so close to the wartime experience, did not bode well for the development of a medium in adventuresome ways. Network radio, ostensibly organized as a buffet of choices in the public interest model really had many versions of few choices. We know that great swaths of other kinds of content were not carried on network radio—country music, jazz in a club setting (outside of dance music), populist speakers, drama serials whose characters spoke in dialect or subgrammatically. Independent “rogue” stations developed to serve some of those interests.²⁶

However, millions of Americans embraced network radio. And why not? It provided cross-class, cross-gender, and cross-generation communication and a

sense of shared nationality; best of all, it was cheap amusement. Given those qualities, it is no surprise that the Federal Communications Act of 1934, an updated version of the 1927 act, was passed during the Depression, when political agitation seethed and free entertainment verified American values. Nor is it surprising that the legislation was passed in the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who, from his World War I experience as Undersecretary of the navy and as promoter of the Liberty Bond campaigns, was long familiar with the cooperative nature of entertainment and governance.

Critics long have argued that U.S. commercial broadcast has been an essentially conservative medium, affirming U.S. normality by its orderly schedule, known personalities, and familiar programming.²⁷ It is also to be considered that the medium organized a national audience along lines that encouraged predispositions. Vaudevillians found a new home on radio for an audience that welcomed predictability. For their part, the old vaudevillians might push the envelope on occasion, but never at the risk of breaking its seal.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. See, for example, "The Drama of the Twentieth Century," *Arena*, February 1900, 157–66; Marrion Wilcox, "A Challenge to American Scholarship," *Harper's Monthly*, May 1901, 953–54; Frances Hart, "Our National Peculiarities," *Arena*, August 1900, 164–87; Edwin Earle Sparks, "The Expansion of the American People," *Chautauquan; A Weekly Newsmagazine*, serialized October 1899 to June 1900; "Critical Studies in American Literature," *Chautauquan*, January–March 1900; "American History Lists for the Library," *Chautauquan*, July 1900, 38; L. B. R. Briggs, "Some Old Fashioned Doubts About New-Fashioned Education," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1900, 463–70; Charles H. Caffin, "The Story of American Painting," *American Illustrated Magazine*, September 1905, 479–85; Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1904).
2. Alexander Hume Ford, "Waterways of America," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, October 1900, 783–92; P. Treat, "A Retrospective of American Humor," *Century*, January 1901, 45–64; Theodore Dreiser, "Fruit Growing in America," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, November 1900, 858–68.
3. Reginald De Koven, "Music Halls and Popular Songs," *Cosmopolitan: A Monthly Illustrated Magazine*, September 1897, 531.
4. D. Laurance Chambers, "American Literature and the National Character," *National Literary Magazine*, October 1899, 131.
5. Henry B. Fuller, "Art in America," *The Bookman: A Review of Books and Life*, November 1899, 220.
6. Quoted in Rapson, *Britons View America Travel Commentary, 1860–1935*, 220.
7. Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*. A counter to the social control model, particularly as it applies to New York, is Horowitz, "Music and the Gilded Age," 1–16.
8. Busbey, *Home Life in America*, 127.
9. Advertisement for *An American Anthology*, Edwin Clarence Stedman, ed., in *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1900, 39.
10. De Koven, "Music Halls and Popular Songs," 532.
11. Quoted in U.S. Senate, "Statements and Recommendations Submitted by Societies and Organizations Interested in the Subject of Immigration," 107.

12. The Immigrations Restriction League was established from a Harvard University base in 1894 and sought a literacy test and other devices for immigrant control. Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 447.
13. Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, 152
14. Quoted in Jones, *Heretics and Heltraisers: Women Contributors to the Masses*, 2.
15. "The All-American Poets," *The Independent*, October 9, 1920, 64.
16. "The Superiority of American to European Films as Explained by a French Critic," *Current Opinion*, October 1917, 250.
17. Brooks, *The Wine of the Puritans*, 4.
18. Quoted in Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (1961; New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 7.
19. Robert Henri, "The New York Exhibition of Independent Artists," *The Craftsman*, May 1910, 161.
20. Dorothy Norman Oral History, interview by William McNaught for Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, May 31, 1979, 3, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/oralhist/norman79htm> (accessed February 17, 2009).
21. Gerald Stanley Lee, "Journalism as the Basis for Literature," *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1900, 32.
22. Wallace Irwin. "Why is a Lyric?" *Collier's*, October 5, 1908, 22.
23. Busbey, *Home Life in America*, 174.
24. Quoted in "An Artist of the New York Underworld," *Current Literature*, March 1910, 329.
24. Quoted in Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, 13.
26. Burton J. Hendrik, "The Bill-Board Abomination," *Leslie's Monthly Magazine*, May 1905, 85–90.
27. Bennett, *Your United States*, 15.
28. "Hurly-Burly Vaudevilles," *Life*, January 25, 1900, 63.
29. Busbey, *Home Life in America*, 327–28.
30. Annie Russell Marble, "The Reign of the Spectacular," *Dial: A Semi-monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion and Information*, November 1, 1903, 297.
31. Van Wyck Brooks, *America's Coming of Age* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1915), 9, 14.
32. Walter Prichard Eaton, "Class-Consciousness and the Movies," *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1915, 57.
33. De Koven, "Music Halls and Popular Songs," 39.
34. van Dyke, *Spirit of America*, 273.

Chapter 2

1. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, 60. Mrs. Potter was the president of the Board of Lady Managers of the fair and had an interest in Sandow's success. Accounts of the incident vary in its multiple retellings.
2. James Huneker, "The Seven Arts," *Puck*, April 3, 1915, 11.

3. A. H. Christy, "The Church and the Theater," *Congregationalist and Christian*, June 20, 1903, 873.
4. Davis, *The Exploitation of Pleasure*, 32.
5. E. M. Royle, "The Vaudeville Theatre," *Current Literature*, December 1899, 565.
6. "The Decay of Vaudeville," *American Magazine*, April 1910, 840–48.
7. Quoted in Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 2:336.
8. Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 4:523.
9. Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 131–32.
10. Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 80–90.
11. Holmes, "All the World's a Stage!" 6.
12. Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 220–36.
13. John Wanamaker, founder of the Wanamaker department stores in Philadelphia and New York, was the U.S. postmaster in the Benjamin Harrison administration and sought to make the post office a tool in forging a country as a "national entity linked by cultural, economic, and commercial ties." Herbert Ershkowitz, *John Wanamaker: Philadelphia Merchant* (Conshohocken, PA: Combined, 1999), 88.
14. Quoted in Damrosch, *My Musical Life*, 194.
15. B. F. Keith, "The Vogue of the Vaudeville," in *American Vaudeville As Seen by Its Contemporaries*, ed. Charles W. Stein (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 17.
16. "Ethel Barrymore at Home and Play," *Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1903, 3–4; "Actresses as Housekeepers," *Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1906, 50–51.
17. May Irwin, "The Business of the Stage as a Career," *The Cosmopolitan, a Monthly Illustrated Magazine*, April 1900, 655–65.
18. Walter Prichard Eaton, "The Wizards of Vaudeville," *McClure's Magazine*, September 1923, 48.
19. Caffin, *Vaudeville*, 18.
20. Tick, "Women as Professional Musicians," 95–133.
21. Mintz, "Humor and Ethnic Stereotypes in Vaudeville and Burlesque," 19–28.
22. Moon, *Yellowface*.
23. Leo Carrillo regularly advertised in *Variety* where he also drew editorial cartoons from 1909 to 1912.
24. Cantor, *My Life Is in Your Hands*, 76.
25. Fields and Fields, *From the Bowery to Broadway*, 126.
26. Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 120–21.
27. Maschio, "A Prescription for Femininity," 43–49.
28. Kibler, "Rank Ladies, Ladies of Rank," 97–115.
29. Cantor, *My Life Is in Your Hands*, 159.
30. George Seldes, "The Demoniac in the American Theatre," *The Dial*, September 1923, 305.
31. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 121–22. A large body of literature exists on minstrelsy, including Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*; Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness*; Riis, *Just Before Jazz*.
32. Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence*, 96.

33. Israel Zangwill, "The Future of Vaudeville in America," *The Cosmopolitan, a Monthly Illustrated Magazine*, April 1905, 648.
34. Graziano, "The Early Life and Career of the 'Black Patti,'" 543–96.
35. David Belasco, "Preface," in *Bert Williams Son of Laughter*, ed. Mabel Rowland (New York: English Crafters, 1923), 7.
36. *Ibid.*, 18.
37. *Ibid.*, 6.
38. Forbes, *Introducing Bert Williams*, 252.
39. Watts, *Mae West*, 24.
40. West, *Goodness Had Nothing to Do With It*, 59.
41. Glenn, "Give an Imitation of Me," 48.
42. "The Theater. The Remarkable Versatility and Success of George M. Cohan as Author, Composer, Promoter and Star," *Town and Country*, July 28, 1906, 23.
43. William Dean Howells, "On Vaudeville," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, April 1903, 815.
44. Caffin, *Vaudeville*, 23.
45. John Lahr Interview, "Vaudeville," Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 1997.
46. Barrymore, *Memories*, 78.
47. Marx, *Harpo Speaks*, 99.
48. Fanny Brice, "The Feel of the Audience," *Saturday Evening Post*, November 21, 1925, 10.
49. Nora Bayes, "Holding My Audience," *Theatre Magazine*, September 26, 1917, 128.
50. Irwin, "The Business of the Stage as a Career," 658.
51. Cantor, *My Life Is in Your Hands*, 76.
52. Watts, *Mae West*, 280.
53. Seldes, "The Demoniac in the American Theatre," 306.
54. "The Silent Drama," *Life*, September 29, 1921, 22.
55. Caffin, *Vaudeville*, 226.
56. Mary Cass Canfield, "The Great American Art," in Slide, *Selected Vaudeville Criticism*, 225.

Chapter 3

1. Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant African American Theatre*, 75.
2. Preston, "Popular Music in the 'Gilded Age,'" 25–27.
3. Hall, *Immigration and Its Effects Upon the United States*, 31, 50, 94, 106.
4. Graziano, "Music in William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*," 383–424.
5. Cantor, *My Life Is in Your Hands*, 22.
6. "The Great American Composer—Will He Speak in the Accent of Broadway?" *Current Opinion*, November 1917, 316.
7. "Jazz and Ragtime Are the Preludes to a Great American Music," *Current Opinion*, August 1920, 200.

8. Henry T. Finck, "What Gives a Popular Song Its Vogue?" *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, February 1900, 303.
9. Fred Mierisch, "In Tin Pan Alley," *New York Times*, February 18, 1923, XX10.
10. Page, *Writing for Vaudeville*, 356.
11. Harris, *After the Ball: Forty Years of Melody*, 60–61.
12. "New Aspects on the Art of Music," *Edison Diamond Points*, May 1917, 13.
13. Hamm, "Irving Berlin's Early Songs As Biographical Documents," 26.
14. Quoted in Jablonski, *Irving Berlin American Troubador*, 67.
15. Hamm, *Yesterdays Popular Song in America*, 289.
16. Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States 1900–1925*, 3:358.
17. Munsted, "Kansas City Music Publishing: The First Fifty Years," 353–83; Gay, "Before the Deluge," 396–412.
18. "Negroes and Music," *Outlook*, December 19, 1903, 968.
19. "'Black Music'—And Its Future Transmutation Into Real Art," *Current Opinion*, July 1917, 27.
20. "Cartoons and Comment: The Negro and His Song," *Puck*, August 12, 1903, 7.
21. Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States 1900–1925*, 376.
22. Rubin, "Jeannette Meyers Thurber and the National Conservatory of Music," 294–325.
23. Harris, *After the Ball: Forty Years of Melody*, 212–14.
24. *Ibid.*, 8.
25. Mierisch, "In Tin Pan Alley," XX10.
26. Page, *Writing for Vaudeville*, 325.
27. Harris, *After the Ball*, 288.
28. Cantor, *My Life Is in Your Hands*, 162.
29. Altman, *Silent Film Sound*, 182.
30. Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 37–38.
31. Melnick, *A Right to Sing the Blues*, 151.
32. Witmark, *The Story of the House of Witmark*.
33. Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, 22.
34. Dorman, "Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks," 466.
35. Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*.
36. Quoted in Riis, *Just Before Jazz*, 119.
37. For a critical view of its New York production, see "The Negro on Broadway," *Life*, May 12, 1903, 224; for its reception in London, see Green, "'In Dahomey' in London in 1903," 22–40.
38. Quoted in David Krasner, "Parody and Double Consciousness in the Language of Early Black Musical Theatre," *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 319.
39. Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880–1920," 107.
40. Quoted in Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 4.
41. Quoted in Marks, *They All Sang, from Tony Pastor to Rudy Vallee*, 6.
42. Lester A. Walton, "The Modern Stage Negro," *New York Age*, March 30, 1911, 6.
43. Forbes, *Introducing Bert Williams Burnt Cork*, 198–99.

44. Shirley, "The House of Melody," 79–112.
45. "Will Marion Cook," in *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol. 40, ed. Ashya Henderson (Gale Group, 2003), reproduced in *Biography Resource Center* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomas Gale, 2007), <http://shelob.ocis.temple.edu:2090/servlet/BioRC> (accessed February 17, 2009).
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47. "Negro Put Mannes on Road to Fame," *New York Times*, March 20, 1912, 9.
48. Wilson, "The Black-American Composer and the Orchestra in the Twentieth Century," 26.
49. Walton, "Black-Music Concerts," 74.
50. "Negro Talent Revealed," quoted in Walton, "Black-Music Concerts," 77.
51. "Negro Music in the Land of Freedom," *Outlook*, March 21, 1914, 611.
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54. Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity," 316.
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59. Horn, "From Catfish Row to Granby Street," 165–74.
60. Quoted in Altman, *Silent Film Sound*, 223.

Chapter 4

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2. "Amusements of the Summertime," *New York Times*, June 2, 1910, X8.
3. Graphicus, "On The Screen," 1470.
4. Russell Merritt, "Nickelodeon Theatres, 1904–1914: Building an Audience for Movies," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio, 59–82.
5. Alvarez, "The Origins of the Film Exchange," 433.
6. Barton W. Currie, "The Nickel Madness: The Amazing Spread of a New Kind of Amusement Enterprise Which is Making Fortunes for its Projects," *Harper's Weekly*, August 24, 1907, 1246.
7. Day Allen Willey, "The Theatre's New Rival," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, October 1909, 454.
8. Fenin, *The Western*, 32.
9. Addams, *Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, 91.
10. Quoted in Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 148.
11. *Ibid.*

12. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 11–82.
13. Alice Guy Blaché has come late to recognition as a filmmaker, but her body of work includes one of the first films to be shot in color, *The Spring Fairy*. After working for Gaumont, she and her husband established the Solax Company in Flushing, New York, where she directed many of its productions and helped develop a natural style of film acting. McMahan, *Alice Guy Blaché*, 78–158.
14. Interiorization, as it was practiced in the reading of Gothic novels, is explored by Karen Haltunnen in *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 82–86.
15. Theodore Waters, “Out with a Moving-Picture Machine,” *Cosmopolitan: A Monthly Illustrated Magazine*, January 1906, 253.
16. *Moving Picture World*, August 26, 1911, 547.
17. A. C. Bernhem, “Result of Picture-Exhibition in Lower New York,” *Forum*, July 1895, 613.
18. Quoted in “The Factor of Uniformity,” *Moving Picture World* 5, no. 4 (July 14, 1909): 115–16.
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20. Stephen Bush, “The Filmmaker’s Responsibilities,” *Moving Picture World*, August 5, 1911, 270.
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15. Bloemink, *Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*.
16. Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*, 2:654–55.
17. Luhan, *Intimate Memories*, 122.
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46. Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice*, 20-23.
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2. Quoted in Martinez, "A Mixed Reception for Modernism," 104.
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4. Leja, "Modernism's Subject in the United States," 62–72.
5. Royal Cortissoz, "The Post-Impressionist Illusion," *Century Magazine*, April 1913, 815.
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12. Steiner, *The Art Students League of New York*, 134.
13. Homer, "The Exhibition of 'The Eight.' Its History and Significance," 59.
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45. "The Armory Show: A Selection of Primary Documents," 24.
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47. Mancini, "'One Term Is Fatuous as Another': Responses to the Armory Show," 833–70.
48. Quoted in Brown, *Story*, 110.
49. Julian Street, "Why I Became a Cubist," *Everybody's Magazine*, March 1913, 814–25.
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9. Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, 5.
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35. Ibid., 47.
36. Kemp, "Out of Provincetown," 97.
37. O'Neill, "Submarine," in Gelb, *O'Neill Life with Monte Cristo*, 580.
38. William Lyon Phelps, "Eugene O'Neill, Dramatist," *New York Times*, June 19, 1921, 43.
39. Theresa Helburn, "O'Neill: An Impression," *Saturday Review of Literature* 15 (November 21, 1936): 10, in Estrin, *Conversations*, 149.
40. Gelb, *O'Neill Life with Monte Cristo*, 198.
41. Radel, "Provincetown Plays," 41.
42. O'Neill used his family connections to obtain a reading for Glaspell's play, "Chains of Dew," by John D. Williams and George C. Tyler, who had options on his own work, and also advised her to submit it to the Theatre Guild. It was not optioned and was eventually produced in Provincetown. She wrote several more plays but finally returned to her first vocation, novels. Murphy, *The Provincetown Players*, 197.

43. Eugene O'Neill to Richard Madden, December 16, 1918, <http://www.eOneill.com/letters/18960.htm>.
44. Eugene O'Neill to Richard Madden, April 3, 1920, <http://www.eOneill.com/letters/20370.htm>.
45. Eugene O'Neill to Richard Madden, September 26, 1920, <http://www.eOneill.com/letters/20730.htm>.
46. Eugene O'Neill to Richard Madden, January 15, 1919, <http://www.eOneill.com/letters/19040.htm>.
47. Eugene O'Neill to Richard Madden, September 13, 1919, <http://www.eOneill.com/letters/19680.htm>.
48. Eugene O'Neill to Richard Madden, November 18, 1920, <http://www.eOneill.com/letters/20845.htm>.
49. Eugene O'Neill to Richard Madden, September 27, 1919, <http://www.eOneill.com/letters/19720.htm>.
50. Eugene O'Neill to Richard Madden, November 29, 1920, <http://www.eOneill.com/letters/20890.htm>.
51. Miller, *Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic*, 303, 241, 244–45.
52. Kenton, "The Provincetown Players."
53. Estrin, *Conversations*, xxii.
54. Black, *Women of Provincetown*, 259.
55. Bogard, "Preface."
56. Zorach, *Art Is My Life*, 47.

Chapter 10

1. Evans, *Entertaining the American Army*, 52.
2. *Ibid.*, 61.
3. *Ibid.*, 65.
4. Sanders, *British Propaganda During the First World War*.
5. Gullace, "Sexual Violence and Family Honor," 714.
6. Vogel, *World War I Songs*, 21.
7. Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 59–61.
8. U.S. Committee on Public Information, *The Creel Report: Complete Report of the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information 1917; 1918; 1919* (1920; New York: DaCapo, 1972), 40, 43.
9. Creel, *Rebel at Large Recollections of Fifty Crowded Years*, 194, 157.
10. U.S. Committee on Public Information, *The Creel Report*, 40.
11. *Ibid.*, 4.
12. *Ibid.*, 2.
13. *Ibid.*, 61.
14. "Between Seasons," *New York Times*, January 17, 1917, X5.
15. Damrosch, *My Musical Life*.
16. Bowles, "Karl Muck and His Compatriots," 405–40.
17. Ward, *The Motion Picture Goes to War*, 49.

18. McAdoo, *Crowded Years*, 385.
19. *Ibid.*, 389.
20. *Ibid.*, 366.
21. Tarbell, *All in the Day's Work. An Autobiography*.
22. Dressler, *My Own Story*, 153.
23. "Stirring Celebrations Help Speed Loan Drives," *New York Times*, April 9, 1918, 4.
24. McAdoo, *Crowded Years*, 410.
25. Fisk, *Our Public Debt*, 60.
26. In Berg, *Goldwyn A Biography*, 78.
27. "Liberty Loan Films," *New York Times*, August 4, 1918, 33.
28. "The War and the Movies," *New York Times*, June 16, 1918, 36.
29. Larry Ward, "The Moving Pictures Boys in the Great War: The Making of a Documentary," in Rollins, *Hollywood's World War I Motion Picture Images*, 220.
30. M. Paul Holsinger, ed., *War and American Popular Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 197.
31. Ward, "The Moving Pictures Boys in the Great War," 56.
32. Ida Clyde Clarke, *American Women and the World War* (New York: Appleton, 1918).
33. Ward, *The Motion Picture Goes to War*, 56.
34. Vogel, *World War I Songs*, 45.
35. *Ibid.*, 49
36. *Ibid.*, 61.
37. Similar songbooks included Berton Braley, *In Camp and Trench; Songs of the Fighting Forces* (New York: George H. Doran, 1918); Erwin Clarkson Garrett, *Trench Ballads and Other Verses* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1919); Will Stockes, *Songs of the Services: Army, Navy and Marine Crops* (New York: Frederick A. Stockes, 1919).
38. Allen, *Keeping Our Fighters Fit For War and After*, 67.
39. Frances C. Fay, "The Singing Armies," *The Bookman: A Review of Books and Life*, October 1918, 168.
40. Quoted in Durham, "Big Brother," 57.
41. Allen, *Keeping Our Fighters Fit For War and After*, 201.
42. Quoted in Durham, "Big Brother," 58.
43. Quoted in D. Royce Boyer, "The World War I Army Bandsman," 192.
44. *Ibid.*, 193.
45. Durham, "Big Brother," 60.
46. Allen, *Keeping Our Fighters Fit For War and After*, 64–83.
47. *Ibid.*, 83.
48. Quoted in Hamm, *Yesterdays Popular Song in America*, 231.
49. Damrosch, *My Musical Life*, 248.
50. Gene Smith, *Until the Last Trumpet Sounds: The Life of General of the Armies John J. Pershing* (New York: Wiley, 1998).
51. Badger, *A Life in Ragtime*, 140–217.
52. Harris, *Harlem's Hell Fighters*.

53. Miller, *Some Hustling This*.
54. Janis, *The Big Show*, 32, 35, 47.
55. Quoted in Damrosch, *My Musical Life*, 268.
56. Parker, *World War I Sheet Music*, 2:651, 674, 699.
57. Quoted in Badger, *A Life in Ragtime*, 165.
58. Evans, *Entertaining the American Army*, 14.
59. *Ibid.*, 18.
60. "Stage rallies to call for over there," *New York Times*, April 24, 1918, 13.
61. "Over-there players may be on way," *New York Times*, August 2, 1918, 9.
62. Quoted in Evans, *Entertaining the American Army*, 29–30.
63. *Ibid.*, 32.
64. *Ibid.*, 25.
65. Janis, *The Big Show*, 103.
66. *Ibid.*, 81.
67. Harding, *The Revolt of the Actors*, 84–88.
68. Holmes, "All the World's a Stage!" 15.
69. Cantor, *My Life is in Your Hands*, 210.
70. Larry Wayne Ward, *By the End*, in Rollins and O'Connor, *Hollywoods World War I Motion Picture Images*, 221.
71. Mark Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States, 1900–1925* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 6:439.
72. Hagedorn, *Savage Peace Hope and Fear in America*.
73. Holder, "Americanization as a Cure for Bolshevism," 334–52.

Epilogue

1. Bellamy, *Looking Backward from 2000 to 1887*, 5.
2. Quoted in "National Ownership as the Big Issue of the Near Future," *Current Opinion*, February 1919, 73.
3. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting 1899–1922*, 240–67.
4. Albert Sidney Burlison, "Why We Should Keep the Wires A Question of National Defense and Economic Efficiency—Not a Partisan Question," *Forum* 56, no. 2 (February 1919): 155.
5. Quoted in Alf Pratte, "Danielson, Josephus," in *American National Biography Online* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
6. For detailed accounts, see Howeth, *History of Communications-Electronics in the United States Navy*, 313–18; Archer, *History of Radio to 1926*, 160–67.
7. Victor Appleton [Howard R. Garis], *Tom Swift and His Wireless Message* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1911).
8. Captain Wilbur Lawton [John Henry Goldfrap], *The Ocean Wireless Boy and the Naval Code* (New York: Hurst, 1915).
9. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting 1899–1922*, 227–32.
10. Allen Chapman [John William Duffield], *The Radio Boys' First Wireless, or Winning the Ferberton Prize* (New York: A. L. Burt, 1922), 3.

11. Heald, "Business Thought in the Twenties: Social Responsibility," 126–39.
12. "E. J. Nally, 94, Dies; First R.C.A. Head," *New York Times*, September 23, 1953, 31.
13. *Western Union as A Career* (New York: Western Union, 1917).
14. "Nathan C. Kingsbury Dies in His Sleep," *New York Times*, January 25, 1920, 22.
15. Sarnoff's *Titanic* story appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* on August 7, 1926, apparently as part of the publicity surrounding the launch of NBC. There is no evidence that the event made him famous in the time, as Sarnoff claimed. Sarnoff, *Looking Ahead*, 23.
16. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting 1899–1922*, 189–191.
17. Benjamin, "In Search of the Sarnoff 'Radio Music Box' Memo: Nally's Reply," 98–105.
18. Archer, *History of Radio to 1926*, 189.
19. Carlat, "'A Cleanser for the Mind': Marketing Radio Receivers for the American Home, 1922–1932," 115–37.
20. Vaillant, "Sounds of Whiteness: Local Radio, Racial Formation, in Chicago, 1921–1935," 25–66.
21. Lippman, "The Institutional Context of Industry Consolidation: Radio Broadcasting in the United States, 1920–1934," 467–95.
22. Smith, *In All His Glory: The Life of William S. Paley*.
23. Benjamin, "Working It Out Together," 221–337. Speculation exists that Hoover deliberately allowed chaos on the airwaves for strategic purposes. David A. Moss, "Radio Regulation Revisited: Coase," 389–426.
24. Slotten, "Radio's Hidden Voice," 14.
25. In an account of the 1926 to 1927 season, nine of the continuing network programs were devoted to concert music, while sixteen programs were devoted to musical variety and light music. Summers, *A Thirty-Year History of Programs Carried on National Radio Networks*, 31.
26. Doeksen, *American Babel*.
27. How U.S. broadcast serves as a palliative influence in American culture has been explored in a rich and varied literature, beginning in the 1940s with the Critical School of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, whose work influenced a generation of scholars in the 1970s and is still the point of view of some contemporary scholars. Robert McChesney, *Telecommunications: Mass Media and Democracy*.

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