

## Brand Name America

### *Remaking American Nationhood at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*

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"Today, the issue is national life," Republican Senate candidate Albert Beveridge instructed an Indiana audience in 1898. "Are the American people a nation, or are they an aggregation of localities?" Beveridge's question highlighted profound worries about the state of the nation at century's end. Like many of his contemporaries, Beveridge was rethinking the very nature of American nationhood. They worried not only about how to knit together diverse regions but also about divisions of class and national origin. And yet this rethinking of American nationhood, this effort to see it not merely as a union of like-minded entities—a band of brethren—but as an integrated whole extended far beyond the political realm. Powered by advances in communication and transportation, it became possible—even necessary—to conceive of the United States as a single national market, a national audience, and to imagine the construction and preservation of a unified American culture.

Writing about the integration of the French nation during the same period, the historian Eugen Weber described a congeries of diverse regions and communities that "felt little identity with the state or with the people of other regions." Over a period of decades, however, the accretion of ties—roads, railways, military service, the widespread circulation of affordable printed matter—created common experiences, swept away old commitments, and "instilled a national view of things."<sup>1</sup> The United States of the Gilded Age was far more expansive than the France Weber analyzed, sprawling across a continent, peopled by migrants from far corners of the earth, engaged in the production of more crops and goods than any Frenchman could imagine. Nation builders like Beveridge and Theodore Roosevelt would navigate fierce crosscurrents and

never fully realize their ambitions. Still, in the decades on either side of the turn of the century, the United States would experience something very much like the process Weber identified in France—the transformation into “a materially and morally integrated society.”<sup>2</sup>

It fell to the most old-fashioned of men to oversee the remaking of American nationhood at century's end. Pious, taciturn, and severe in bearing, William McKinley had exulted little in his elevation to the presidency. Soon after his election, an old army acquaintance hesitated before speaking to the president-elect, not knowing how to address his one-time commander. “Call me Major,” McKinley replied. “I have earned that title. I am not sure of the rest.”<sup>3</sup> The new president's discipline and modesty defined his character. Admirers hailed his steadfastness, dignity, and patience. The president of Yale University even saw McKinley's lack of intellectual distinction as a badge of honor, a sign of his connection to ordinary working Americans.<sup>4</sup> With his bushy eyebrows, high brow, formal frock coat, and stiff white shirt, McKinley fashioned himself a model of reassurance for an era of crisis.

Nonetheless, the McKinley administration pointed toward a new style of politics and a more assertive role for the chief executive; in numerous ways, McKinley's presidency pioneered the administrative mechanisms and enhanced policymaking role that would eventually make the White House the most powerful locus of American governance. Meanwhile, the economy, mired in the enduring doldrums of the Panic of 1893, boomed. Between 1896 and 1901, GNP soared from \$13 billion to \$21 billion. The stock market rallied, as annual production of raw steel, consumption of horsepower, and total manufacturing capital dwarfed the output of previous years.<sup>5</sup> Electricity and telephones began appearing in homes.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, gold strikes in Australia and the Yukon Territory helped fuel the expansion, thanks to an 80 percent increase in the money supply. That good fortune also eased the political pressure for monetary reform that had so animated McKinley's opposition in 1896.

Even as prosperity returned, however, the president acknowledged the economy's lingering problems and injustices by moving to calm labor unrest. As Ohio governor, McKinley had instituted a state arbitration board and endorsed the eight-hour day for workers. Despite calling out the state militia to quell labor militance, he developed a reputation for restraint in workplace disputes.<sup>7</sup> In 1898, McKinley transferred that approach to federal policy. He signed the Erdman Act, which established wage mediation procedures for interstate railroads. To be sure, the president cared more about preventing disturbances and keeping factories humming rather than protecting workingmen. But he understood that stability required at least some accommodation to the needs of industrial workers.

At the same time, McKinley's tenure in office witnessed the knitting together of the national economy and the forging through advertising, theater, and song of a more unified, more recognizable national style. No longer disparate, rural, and local, in the era of brand name products American culture took on its own brand identity. Indeed, a theme of comity and reconciliation suffused many of the president's public remarks: harmony between labor and capital, Democrats and Republicans, North and South. “Reunited—one country again and one country forever,” McKinley declared during a visit to Atlanta. “At peace with the world and with each other, what can stand in the pathway of our progress and prosperity?”<sup>8</sup>

### Lydia Pinkham's Face: Toward a National Market

By 1900, it seemed that the United States had removed many old obstacles from that primrose pathway. As the nation pulled itself out of depression in the last years of the century, a subtle shift in American economic life became apparent. An economy renowned for its prodigies of production—the world's granary and blast furnace—now concentrated on the challenges of distribution and consumption. Manufacturers that could produce unprecedented volume and endless variety—condiments and crackers, steel rails and ceramic plates—had to keep merchandise moving from the factory floor into customers' homes.<sup>9</sup> Other industries had to invent new methods of distribution because they faced problems beyond the sheer volume of goods, such as temperature control and customer service, that established wholesalers could not handle.<sup>10</sup> Amid the intense competition and falling prices of the late nineteenth century, savvy entrepreneurs more and more realized that business success—even a firm's survival—depended on assessing and responding to consumer preferences.

If American manufacturers had risen to industrial might by sheer muscle—the advantages of size, speed, volume, churning out lots of uniform goods for a continental market—new conditions put a premium on artistry, sales, and marketing. Simply useful dishes and tableware, one pottery maker explained at the turn of the century, found a “poor market.” Manufacturers found it imperative to monitor “the demands of the people for novelty and beauty.”<sup>11</sup>

On the other side of the store counter, ordinary Americans found new identities as consumers, participants in a national consumer culture that hummed the same songs, read the same advertisements, and bought the same brand-named goods. Even the word *consumption* took on new meaning; before the last years of nineteenth century, buildings were consumed by fire and persons by disease; only after 1900 did customers routinely consume goods.<sup>12</sup>

Industrialization brought working Americans unprecedented opportunities and unforeseen struggles in their lives as producers, but also introduced them to a new world of consumption: ready-made clothing, brand name food and drugs, imitation crystal, cheap knock-offs of designer tableware.<sup>13</sup> Pressed glass, one turn-of-the-century guidebook for homemakers announced, "is so cheap, so plenty, and so pretty, there is no excuse for even the humblest household's lacking a full supply."<sup>14</sup>

This consumer revolution reflected fundamental changes in daily life. In 1860, the majority of the nation's labor force tilled the soil, supplying many of their own needs for food, clothing, and shelter. By the turn of the century, only two in five Americans remained on the farm. As the numbers of salaried employees and factory wage earners swelled, Americans bought more and more of the accouterments of life. Sales of ready-to-wear clothing doubled in the 1890s; production of glassware and lamps tripled between 1890 and 1914. In 1890, Americans purchased a grand total of 32,000 pianos; fourteen years later, annual sales exceeded 374,000.<sup>15</sup>

Americans entered the new era of shoppers and salesmen amid another fundamental shift in the rulebook of economic life. After a generation of falling prices—deflation that affected the cost of basic commodities and manufactured goods—the United States experienced sustained inflation. In the two decades after McKinley's inauguration, the cost of living shot up 31 percent.<sup>16</sup> This seemingly inexorable upward spiral forced Americans to think differently about their standard of living and how their government might maintain it. Amid the falling crop prices of the late nineteenth century, farmers and small producers advocated inflationary policies as a strategy to relieve their debt and increase the value of their property. Their concern fueled the "Money Question" that had dominated the politics of the Gilded Age and energized Bryan's 1896 campaign against the Gold Standard. But as wages and salaries replaced crops as Americans' source of income and inflation became a daily fact of life, a new politics of purchasing power emerged. Rising prices no longer conjured the promised land for a producer nation; they meant trouble for a consumer society.<sup>17</sup>

In this new economic arena, manufacturers and customers, advertising firms and uniformed sales forces knit together a national market. Across the vast continent, Americans encountered many of the same goods, advertising campaigns, and retailers. Some products—and their manufacturers and sellers—became so ubiquitous that they became the stuff of legend. Numerous hit songs and popular vaudeville routines mocked the omnipresent intrusions of national brands. In one popular ditty, the performer was troubled by the "face that haunts me ever." Lampooning the universal availability of a woman's herbal remedy and the company founder's visage staring out from every bottle, the tune laments the "eyes I always meet, as I read the morning paper, as I walk the crowded street. Ah! she

knows not how I suffer," the song concludes. "Hers is now a world-wide fame; But till death that face shall greet me, Lydia Pinkham is her name."<sup>18</sup>

During the nineteenth century, legions of wholesale drummers had crisscrossed the landscape, supplying shopkeepers with generic goods in bulk. By 1900 many products—molasses, vinegar, ammonia, and hundreds of others—arrived on store shelves in colorful containers with the manufacturer's name on the label. Developments in printing and packaging accelerated the trend, as sealed packages replaced the cracker barrel and the sugar bin.<sup>19</sup>

More and more, wholesale drummers followed their bulk-processed wares into oblivion. Beginning in the 1870s and 1880s, catalog outlets like Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward sold directly to customers. By century's end, huge department stores appeared across the nation. Supplanting the old retail dry goods houses, the new palaces of consumption offered a vast range of merchandise under a single roof. Their size and sales volume allowed department stores to bypass wholesalers and order directly from manufacturers.<sup>20</sup> Most important, the nation's industrial leaders, especially the consumer products giants that formed at the end of the nineteenth century, maintained their own sales forces and ran their own sales campaigns. Companies like National Cash Register, Coca-Cola, Westinghouse, Carnegie Steel, Wrigley's Gum, and General Electric took over their own marketing and distribution.<sup>21</sup> American manufacturers "branded their salesman" as well as their products. They planned routes, assigned territories, and established quotas. Creating corporate armies, managers told their salesmen how to dress, how to stand, even the correct way to hand the customer a pen.<sup>22</sup>

At the turn of the century, the trademarks of nationally advertised brands began to appear across the country. In New York, Chicago, San Francisco, even in small-town Kansas newspapers like William Allen White's *Emporia Gazette*, readers saw advertisements for the same products: Royal Baking Powder, Uneeda Biscuits, Hires Root Beer, Quaker Oats, Shredded Wheat, Gold Dust washing powder, Kodak, and Standard Oil. These national advertisements truly captured people's imagination. Their superior design and brilliant illustrations invariably made them the most striking pages in newspapers of the age. Local businesses could not compete; they normally relied on simple, text-filled boxes listing the goods on hand. The national campaigns won so much attention that local retailers of brand name goods started incorporating their material into their own advertising.<sup>23</sup>

These pioneering brands invested heavily in advertising and marketing. Throughout the nineteenth century, wholesale drummers had peddled undifferentiated goods to local merchants. To circumvent these middlemen and build brand loyalty, manufacturers needed to establish relationships with customers and to reassure them about quality and reliability. Companies like Heinz

and Coca-Cola spent nearly 20 percent of net sales on popularizing and selling their brands.<sup>24</sup>

Brand name goods carried the nation across the threshold to a new century and a modern economy. Nineteenth-century Americans had relied on local businesses; they bought goods they trusted from people they knew: the grocer in the town square, the pharmacist around the corner. As they came to rely on distant manufacturers and unfamiliar purveyors to supply their homes and tables, brand name products offered reassurance. National advertising campaigns testified to the purity of products in a market where fears of adulterated goods ran rampant. Recognizable trademarks and packages became old friends, easing the transition to a brave new world of commerce. Some manufacturers even created characters, asking customers to write with questions, recipes, and problems.<sup>25</sup>

Henry John Heinz helped blaze the trail. Born in 1844 to a family of German immigrants in Pittsburgh, young H.J. sold vegetables from his family garden. He entered the seminary to train for the Lutheran ministry, but commerce remained his natural *métier*, and he soon enrolled in a nearby business college. In a still rural nation where many grew their own food or bought produce from local farmers, Heinz anticipated the potential market for prepackaged condiments. A savvy promoter, he handed out pickle-shaped bins at the 1893 World's Fair. He developed the slogan "fifty-seven varieties," because he liked its sound; when he introduced the famous phrase in 1896, his company already produced far more than fifty-seven products, including several varieties of ketchup. Heinz carefully balanced the output of his gigantic, spotless, high-volume factories with his sales force's ability to distribute the wares to grocers. And the company supported its sales effort with advertising designed to make Heinz a household name. In 1900, the Ketchup King erected the first electric sign in New York City, a blindingly bright 1,200-bulb beacon at the corner of 5th Avenue and 23rd Street.<sup>26</sup>

Like Heinz, Asa Griggs Candler transformed a small local firm, Atlanta's Coca-Cola, into a global organization. Combining mass production with branding and aggressive face-to-face selling, Candler's salesmen promoted sale of the soft drink at soda fountains, restaurants, and hotels. Coke salesmen gave away prizes—clocks, trays, glasses; they taught retailers how to serve the beverage. Annual sales soared from just \$1,500 in 1887, the year after the company's founding, to \$223,600 a decade later.<sup>27</sup>

No company demonstrated the potential of name brand goods, their ability to adapt old verities to new market conditions, better than Lydia Pinkham, the manufacturer of an enormously popular remedy for women's ailments. When the company founder, Lydia E. Pinkham, began bottling her vegetable compound in the 1870s, Pinkham's was but one of hundreds of brand name medicines on the market (unlike rivals that deserved the name of "patent medicine," Pinkham never patented its formula nor sold its wares among rural folk with

song-and-dance routines). Half a century later, when its revenues peaked, Pinkham was one of the industry's few survivors. It thrived like Heinz or Coke by building brand loyalty.<sup>28</sup>

A decade after Mrs. Pinkham's death, her heirs hired James T. Wetherald, an ambitious advertising man, to revive the company's sagging fortunes. Wetherald made the risky decision to "re-animate" the deceased founder in newspapers across the country. With carefully worded copy and ubiquitous use of Mrs. Pinkham's grandmotherly image, the national campaign established Lydia Pinkham as a sympathetic personality—a trustworthy maternal figure who would preserve women's intimacies and answer their private letters. Lydia Pinkham's "letters from ladies in all parts of the world average one hundred per day," the ads announced, "and truly she has been a mother to the race. Suffering women ever seek her in their extremity, and find both a helper and a friend." Wetherald promised that correspondents "will receive prompt and conscientious answers, and the sympathy of a mother."<sup>29</sup>

Wetherald's campaign exploited the already thriving social practice of letter writing among American women. Largely denied the public fellowship of workplace and party politics in the late nineteenth century, private correspondence offered women a world of intimate connection and an avenue for support, love, and friendship from female friends, sisters, and mothers. Wetherald traded on this practice, encouraging women to treat "Mrs. Pinkham" as their confidante. In so doing, the company assembled an extended network of consumers—women who not only bought the product themselves, but also recommended it to friends, relatives, and neighbors. Eventually, the company mobilized this extended "family" to supply testimonials for the product and to join in the correspondence.

Between 1890 and 1935, more than a million women wrote Mrs. Pinkham for advice. Without saying so directly, Wetherald's advertisements implied that Lydia herself responded to mail, although a group of female clerks supplied with prepared response books actually gave pre-written answers to frequently asked questions.<sup>30</sup> Faith in Mrs. Pinkham turned into confidence in her brand and her product. A real person as a trademark, Wetherald and his fellow brand name pioneers recognized, kept commercial transactions on a familiar human scale. They smoothed the transition from a marketplace of face-to-face exchanges to the everyday purchase of prepackaged goods produced by strangers. During the 1890s, many products relied on faces to promote their brands, including such Pinkham rivals as Sloan's Liniment, Doan's Kidney Pills, and Hostetter's Bitters.<sup>31</sup>

Pinkham surpassed its competitors by prompting customers to contact the founder and building a loyal network of users. Wetherald also set a standard by stressing the truly national range of Pinkham's market. The company self-consciously touted the wide geographical distribution of its customers. The

1893 national campaign featured women from Iowa, New York, and Oregon; another printed side-by-side testimonials from Nebraska and Connecticut. Pinkham deliberately ran the same advertisements in every part of the country. It made no attempt to define regional messages by printing letters from Midwesterners in Iowa newspapers or Massachusetts women's testimonials in New England. North and South, East and West, Pinkham's faithful users across the country appeared as fellow sufferers and as participants in a national consumer culture.<sup>32</sup>

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Coca-Cola and Heinz, Pinkham's Vegetable compound and Homer Laughlin tableware would fill shelves around the United States. These companies would spare no expense in popularizing and protecting their brands, even employing private detectives to crack down on counterfeiters. In one celebrated raid, Pinkerton agents and municipal police burst into a Cleveland home in May 1900. They found a small factory with hundreds of medicine bottles, an engraved bronze printing plate bearing a sophisticated facsimile of Mrs. Pinkham's famous image, and a stack of newly printed labels. The Pinkertons carted off the goods, while the police took two apron-clad pirates into custody, their hands still redolent of the alcohol and herbs they were mixing at the kitchen stove.<sup>33</sup>

America's growing fondness for brand names extended beyond the coast-to-coast embrace of familiar labels. Merchants also cultivated relationships with customers around the country and established distinctive national reputations. Five-and-dime king Frank W. Woolworth set the standard. Born on a farm near Watertown, New York, in 1852, Frank went into the dry goods business at the age of sixteen. He married, and after a brief attempt at farming, returned the store in Watertown, where he demonstrated a capacity for hard work and a flair for window displays. After installing a hugely successful five-cent counter, he saved enough to open his own business, moving from town to town across the western part of the state, eventually landing in New York City in 1886.<sup>34</sup>

Emulating the aggressive cost-cutting techniques of railroads and steel producers, Woolworth drastically reduced prices for housewares so that factory workers and their struggling families could afford a few modest luxuries. Woolworth did not extend credit, but his five-and-ten cent stores charged no more than a dime for any item. Committed to giving customers the "most at least cost," Woolworth eliminated the middleman, purchasing goods from the manufacturer. Studying demographic charts, Woolworth's stores located in the most densely populated neighborhoods of urban America. They served a heavily immigrant clientele—catering largely to the "woman with a shawl." By 1895, Frank had opened thirty stores across the eastern United States; a decade later, his five-and-dimes were nationwide.<sup>35</sup>

Woolworth did more than just buy direct in large quantities; his chain carefully monitored the tastes and desires of its customers. He looked for specific goods to sell and developed close partnerships with many manufacturers, getting their factories to build to order for Woolworth's.<sup>36</sup> In fact, while the nation's largest businesses—Heinz and Standard Oil and American Tobacco—produced standardized goods in startling quantities, marketing them through national advertising campaigns and professional sales departments, an equally vital sector of specialty producers emerged to meet the demand of retailers like Woolworth's. Sensitive to consumer preferences and especially nimble in their responses to changing tastes, these manufacturers produced merchandise to order or made limited runs of certain goods. They made it possible for Frank Woolworth and his competitors to distribute not just mass-produced goods, but knock-offs of luxury china and floral-decaled pottery across America.<sup>37</sup>

The growth of a national market also reshaped the culture industries at end of the nineteenth century. In 1891, the United States joined in international copyright protection, a measure that prevented piracy of foreign publications and boosted American publishing. Book production rose dramatically after 1895 and American publishing houses enjoyed their first huge successes. Hardback sales of over 100,000 became commonplace by end of the 1890s, including such national sensations as *Ben Hur*, *Black Beauty*, *Quo Vadis*, and *The Red Badge of Courage*. When a trade publication compiled the first-ever national bestseller list in 1897, American authors dominated the top spots.<sup>38</sup>

Arguing for the international copyright measure in Congress, Henry Cabot Lodge (R-Mass) anticipated not only a boon for business, but also the opportunity to strengthen American culture. Instead of "second-class English novels," written "about dukes and duchesses and lords and ladies," upholding "ideals utterly hostile to ours," young Americans could encounter "wholesome American books, which will bring them up to love America, which will fill them with American ideas, with reverence and love for American principles of government, and with respect for American society, instead of admiration for systems of government and society wholly alien to their own."<sup>39</sup>

### Only Entering Upon Her Song: Toward A National Culture

Lodge voiced a growing concern in end-of-the century America, a sense that economic and political integration were not enough. The United States needed to build not only a national government and a national market but also a truly unified, distinctively American culture. In 1894, Theodore Roosevelt made the case for cultural nationalism in the pages of the *Forum*, a high-toned national journal of politics and culture. Decrying the tendency to

celebrate regional voices and traditions, Roosevelt described the "futility of talking of a Northern literature or a Southern Literature, an Eastern or a Western school" of art or science. The United States required a "full and ripe literary development."<sup>40</sup> Roosevelt complained that "certain classes of our people," and here he wagged a finger at his own people, the Eastern elite, "still retain their spirit of colonial dependence on and exaggerated deference to, European opinion."<sup>41</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, citizens of the new nation strove to establish its identity. They labored to create distinctively American art and literature, philosophy and song. But while they did define a nation—one that was democratic and capitalist, Protestant and white—and while nineteenth-century artists and writers laid the foundations for an American culture, achievements like the poetry of Walt Whitman, the nostalgic songs of Stephen Foster, and the skyscrapers rising out of the Chicago skyline, they left only the foundations.

Even at the turn of the century, American culture was defined more by what it was not than by what it was—by its absences, rather than its achievements. It was not European, not elegant or refined, not enduring, not tied to a set of national institutions—a national gallery, a symphony, a national theater or academy. "Abundant with brawn and force," one prominent Boston man of letters, wrote in 1900, America was "only entering upon her song."<sup>42</sup>

Music and musical theater proved to be the most dynamic realm of cultural creation at the dawn of the new century. In the last years of the Gilded Age, respectable citizens flocked to the newly formed symphony orchestras in cities like Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. These sanctuaries of elevated culture, and a large number of similarly motivated small musical societies that developed at the same time, took pride in their ability to offer audiences precise renditions of the most distinguished and difficult pieces. Considering the immaturity of American art music, most of their concerts featured the canonical works of the European masters.

By century's end, however, many musicians joined in Theodore Roosevelt's call for a singular American culture, at once independent from and equal to the achievements of the Old World. To advance the composition, performance, and appreciation of American music, the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) began to organize all-American concerts. Formed in 1876, the MTNA promoted national standards for music instruction and performance, including the largely successful campaign for the adoption of a uniform pitch. This standardized tuning (where the note A = 435 Hz) began to harmonize performance practices across the country. Beginning in 1884 with small works for piano, chamber groups, and vocalists, the MTNA all-American concerts expanded so that by the McKinley years, the performances featured full orchestras and choruses.<sup>43</sup>

But what did the MTNA and other boosters mean by "American music"? Did any work of American-born composers qualify or only pieces with some recognizably American quality? Not surprisingly, musicians disagreed. One group, led by composer Edward MacDowell, saw musical art as a universal language that transcended nationality. Widely regarded as the nation's preeminent talent, MacDowell returned from years of training in France and Germany to widespread acclaim.<sup>44</sup> During his twelve years in Europe, MacDowell had encountered much condescension because of his national origins, criticism he found unjust and irrelevant to his vocation. During the 1890s, MacDowell increasingly scorned the efforts of groups like the MTNA and encouraged his countrymen to focus on writing good music without trying to develop a distinctive American sound.<sup>45</sup>

Prominent as it was, MacDowell's voice soon drowned under the rising tide of musical nationalism. While the MTNA sponsored all-American concerts and established national standards for performance and instruction, composers and critics agitated for the development of self-consciously American music—rhythms and melodies that derived from the nation's spirit and reflected its people.

Paradoxically, the most assertive and influential proponent of musical nationalism in the United States proved to be a foreigner, the Czech composer Antonín Dvořák. Upon his arrival in 1892, Dvořák had already established himself as one of the world's leading composers, a reputation he would burnish during his sojourn in the United States with the completion of his Ninth Symphony, the so-called New World Symphony. Unlike MacDowell, Dvořák wanted to nurture a distinct American style. He saw the unique ingredients of the nation's heritage—including the contributions of immigrants, African Americans, and American Indians—as the building blocks of its musical culture. Rather than impeding the quest for a coherent American sound, the nation's very diversity—its ethnic and geographic heterogeneity—could underpin American music.<sup>46</sup>

The Czech would never have reached this controversial conclusion, or even have reached the United States, without the efforts of Jeanette Meyer Thurber, the musician and philanthropist who founded the National Conservatory in 1885. Supported by such benefactors as Andrew Carnegie and William Vanderbilt and operating under the official imprimatur of a Congressional charter, the National Conservatory promised American students musical education comparable to the best the Old World had to offer. Thurber's conservatory also welcomed women, minorities, and disabled students, making it one of the few institutions in Gilded Age America to operate as a true meritocracy.

But Thurber's greatest coup, in her own estimate, lay in luring Dvořák to America as director of the conservatory. "Every nation has its music," the Czech argued in a series of essays published during his three-year tenure in the



United States. "Why not American music?" When critics like MacDowell answered that the United States had no "*Volkslied*," no folk tradition upon which to ground a national style, Dvorák offered up Indian and African American melodies as the "sure foundation" for a "new national school of music."<sup>47</sup> Of course, most American musicians recoiled at Dvorák's proposal. The most prominent musical nationalists, who were overwhelmingly white Protestants of native stock and affluent backgrounds, abhorred the mounting numbers of immigrants and nonwhites among them. Even the most tolerant voices dismissed Dvorák's suggestion that music must "sound foreign to their ears to qualify as truly American." Moreover, as musicians steeped in the European classical tradition, they could not conceive of popular and folk music as the building blocks of a national style. No wonder that many of Dvorák's American colleagues regarded the Czech master as a foreign upstart with little understanding of the American scene.<sup>48</sup>

Yet, if Dvorák's message found little heed in the world of symphonic music, he proved a prescient analyst of the broader American public. Outside the rarified realm of orchestras and opera companies, a distinctive national style would take shape in popular music, one assembled from less exalted traditions by less-privileged persons. Indeed, the turn of the century proved a turning point in American cultural history—with the advent of new musical forms and a new industry to promote them.

In an era before electronic recordings, the production and distribution of sheet music supplied the lifeblood for American popular music; sales reached hundreds of millions of units each year. Still, Gilded Age music publishing remained a rather old-fashioned profession of musty offices and bookish editors serving narrow, regional audiences. Firms like Boston's Oliver Ditson supplied the music lovers of New England, while Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and Chicago housed influential publishers that supplied a regional clientele. They remained genteel operations, producing a wide range of sheet music in a variety of styles. Like the older generation of illustrated magazines—*Harper's* and *The Atlantic*, for example—they sold their wares at prices too high for the new five-and-dimes and other emporiums catering to working people. Moreover, these old-line publishers did not market their music. When a song caught on with a popular audience, they still forced performers to pay for them; they did not distribute free "professional copies," much less induce popular entertainers to publicize their songs.<sup>49</sup>

In last years of the century, the T.B. Harms Company and Marcus Witmark and Sons revolutionized the business. Unlike their rivals, these upstarts concentrated on popular song (they did not bother with piano music, choral music, hymnals, instructional booklets—any of the other material music publishers usually put out). They hired teams of composers and lyricists to churn out new

songs and promoted their songs with catchy titles, colorful covers for their sheet music, and aggressive advertising. They also recruited popular entertainers, signing well-known vaudeville performers to sing and promote only their songs.

Harms and Witmark succeeded so extravagantly that other music publishers sprang up nearby, in the neighborhood around 14th Street and Union Square in New York City. "Tin Pan Alley" was born. The nickname had obscure origins, although most observers credit it to newspaper reporter Monroe Rosenfeld, who coined the term to capture the cacophony of the many pianos he heard through open windows. The United States possessed for the first time a national music industry, with a handful of New York publishers producing a huge volume of sheet music and distributing their product nationwide.<sup>50</sup>

In 1895, a group of Tin Pan Alley houses formed the Music Publishers Association of the United States; they successfully lobbied the federal government to extend the term of copyright for published music to forty years, renewable for an additional twenty. The business boomed as it consolidated. Between 1890 and 1909, the wholesale value of printed music in the United States more than tripled.<sup>51</sup>

But the birth of a national musical culture entailed more than innovative business practices; it involved product as well as process, the songs themselves as well as their means of production and distribution. The American popular song—the form that would conquer the world—took on its defining characteristics around the turn of the century. Instead of long, complex melodic lines, built up over a lengthy period, Tin Pan Alley songs had short, snappy melodies. They used short hooks, two-note motives, one-line musical phrases, repeated in crisp three or four line structures: "Won't you come home, Bill Bailey? Won't you come home? She moans the whole day long."<sup>52</sup>

These tunes also featured pointed, even risqué lyrics, emphasizing wordplay, contemporary life, clever rhymes, and sexual innuendo. Nineteenth-century popular music had generally insisted on divine grace as the only source of contentment. To be sure, many Civil War-era Americans did not live by this principle, but their songs laid out an ideal of sacrifice and spiritual tranquility. Even the era's comic tunes fit this pious pattern, mocking transgressors who pursued happiness through ostentatious living.<sup>53</sup> During the Gilded Age, many of the most well-liked songs evoked nostalgic themes in the spirit of Stephen Foster's "Old Folks at Home." Among the era's popular ballads were Jennie Lindsay's "Always Take a Mother's Advice" and James Bland's "In the Evening by the Moonlight," a tale of contented Negroes peacefully strumming banjoes in front of their cabins. The settings tended to be rural, the language formal, the love courtly.<sup>54</sup> Vice, love, gritty scenes, the city: these rarely appeared in Gilded Age lyrics. But Tin Pan Alley songs reveled in the sounds of the street; they chose

urban themes, described current conditions, and relied heavily on slang and vernacular speech.<sup>55</sup>

Of course, rhythm, the music's swing and drive, would become the most important characteristic of the new American popular song. Historically, rhythm had played a subsidiary role, merely moving the melody forward. But in Tin Pan Alley hits, the backbeat came to the front; rhythm became just as important as melody. Composers ragged words against the music, beats changed, tempos slowed and quickened in one song. And that syncopation was just plain fascinating.<sup>56</sup>

Making New York the center of American musical culture, Tin Pan Alley embodied a paradox. American music emerged at the turn of the twentieth century—and the people who created it were foreigners, outsiders, travelers from distant lands. Immigrant Jews dominated the music business and because they were outcasts—viewed by many natives as biologically and culturally inferior—immigrant musicians could look with fresh eyes on the achievements of black culture, initiating a potent and profitable collaboration with African American musical forms and African American artists.<sup>57</sup>

These immigrants of Tin Pan Alley invented the American standard by merging together European styles and techniques with African American traditions—the scales and clipped melodies of the blues, the rhythms and syncopations of ragtime and jazz, the linguistic cleverness of black folk tales. Of course, these achievements had long been a part of African American culture, but white audiences and mass culture audiences of all races had only experienced them within the tradition of blackface minstrelsy. Enormously popular, these so-called “coon shows” and the “coon shouters” who performed them (*coon* was even then a racist term of derision) introduced black culture to a huge audience, but they did so only in the context of racist distortion and insult and mockery.

Immigrant musicians staked out a different, complex, sometimes contradictory, but ultimately productive relationship with African American culture. They not only forged African American and European materials into a distinctive defining American idiom; they also collaborated closely with black composers and performers. For example, when Bert Williams debuted in the *Ziegfeld Follies* in 1910, he became one of the first black performers to be featured alongside whites, perhaps the first in a leading role in a major Broadway production. Famous for his ability to act songs—he introduced long pauses to suggest irony—he would sometimes let the music get ahead of him then sing fast in a desperate effort to catch up or wryly make asides in song to the audience. Williams was an enormously successful and enormously influential performer; his style exerted lasting effects on the show tune and the whole idea of musical comedy, but without Tin Pan Alley, without the immigrant underground that forged the new American repertoire, his contributions and that of other black artists might have been consigned to obscurity.<sup>58</sup>

Another outlet of the emerging national popular culture—the vaudeville circuit—thrived in symbiosis with Tin Pan Alley. After all, performers needed a reliable source of new material and sheet music publishers craved exposure for their songs. “A new song must be sung, played, hummed and drummed into the ears of the public,” explained composer and publisher Charles K. Harris, whose 1892 hit “After the Ball” became the industry’s first multi-million selling song, “not in one city alone, but in every city, town, and village, before it ever becomes popular.”<sup>59</sup> Tin Pan Alley publishers paid vaudeville stars as much as \$1,000 to introduce a new song into their act, counting on the performer’s reputation to make it a hit. Beyond money and gifts (food, accommodations, railroad tickets), the publishers provided free publicity, often plastering the performer’s image on the cover of the sheet music. The publishers also employed professional “pluggers,” who planted themselves in vaudeville house audiences and burst into song between acts. A single plugger might visit six or seven theaters in a single night.<sup>60</sup>

Together with the emergence of Tin Pan Alley, the rise of vaudeville marked a new era in American popular culture. During the nineteenth century, popular culture had remained a fundamentally local phenomenon, situated in specific places. Before the 1880s, theaters and concert halls were small and widely dispersed; the show business industry made do with small profits and little organization. The high cost of transportation and the difficulties in negotiating long-distance contracts normally confined theatrical touring companies to a particular region or cluster of cities, limiting the geographic dispersal of jokes and songs. The nation’s scattered dancehalls and concert saloons also suffered from a decidedly low-brow and low class reputation; most Americans viewed them as dens of iniquity filled with drunken men and loose women.<sup>61</sup>

By 1900 all this had changed. A well-organized, centralized entertainment industry took shape, with the New York-based Keith agency linking hundreds of theaters and arranging cross-country tours from coast to coast. Audiences in Providence, Cincinnati, and San Francisco might see the same acts performing the same material only a few weeks apart. The new vaudeville houses also reached out to middle-class patrons, building sumptuous playhouses, banning alcohol sales, reining in the rowdy behavior of the young men in the balconies, and promising female customers shows free of vulgarity and profane language.<sup>62</sup>

Theater owner Tony Pastor had begun this transformation back in the 1860s, enhancing the respectability of popular theater by cleaning up the acts, locating his theaters in fashionable shopping districts, and welcoming women and children into his audience. Pastor took pains to create a “family” environment, banning smoking and drinking in many of his establishments.

But the great impresario of vaudeville, the architect of the national audience for popular theater in turn of the century America, was a visionary showman named Benjamin Franklin Keith. Portly and bald with a bushy handlebar mus-



tache, Keith shared with his illustrious namesake a young life of constant striving, starting his career at the very bottom, wrestling with vice and temptation before achieving success. Young Ben traveled with the circus selling fraudulent curiosities like hand-held blood testers to the crowd outside the big top. In 1833, he opened a storefront museum in Boston, locating it in the central business district instead of the neighborhood where most dime museums and cheap saloons concentrated. But his fat ladies and demon dwarves had scant appeal in a respectable area just down the block from the posh Jordan Marsh department store. Keith replaced his variety show with a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, then playing to full houses at one of city's most prestigious venues. Keith simply stole the operetta (at that time foreign publications did not enjoy copyright protection in the United States) and sold tickets for twenty-five cents, one-sixth the price his high-toned competitor was charging. Keith scored a huge hit, and his combination of theater with variety acts proved a successful formula. He soon opened similar establishments in Providence, Philadelphia, New York, and eventually throughout the northern half of the country. Along with his associate Edward Albee, Keith also established the national vaudeville circuit and the nation's most successful theatrical booking agency.<sup>63</sup>

As their business expanded and consolidated in the 1890s, vaudeville managers aggressively targeted female customers, seeing women both as sources of revenue and as guarantors of respectability. Theater owners took pains to exclude prostitutes, regulate smoking, and feature acts more appealing to women and children. So far did Keith go in seeking mass audiences by maintaining a family friendly atmosphere that some disaffected customers nicknamed his theaters "the Sunday School Circuit."<sup>64</sup> But vaudeville could only go so far in the direction of middle-class respectability. Given their cultural position as vessels of virtue and guardians of hearth and home, female patrons certainly lent the circuit an air of legitimacy. But their very presence seemed to erode existing conventions that confined women to the private sphere and looked askance at married, middle-class women in such public spaces. Furthermore, in defiance of the theaters' expectations, women often joined in the rowdy behavior of single men in the galleries.<sup>65</sup>

"Vaudeville is very American," Edward Milton Royle wrote in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1899. "It touches us and our lives at many places. It appeals to the business man, tired and worn, who drops in for half an hour before a train goes, or before a business appointment; to the woman who is wearied of shopping; to the children who love animals and acrobats; to the man with his sweetheart or sister; to the individual who wants to be diverted but doesn't want to think or feel; to the American of all grades and kinds who wants a great deal for his money." Seeing in the Tin Pan Alley song and the vaudeville routine the gather-

ing of a national audience and the birth of a national culture, Royle concluded that the vaudeville house belonged "to the era of the department store and the short story. It may be a kind of lunch-counter art, but then art is so vague and lunch is so real."<sup>66</sup>

But if the United States acquired its own name brand identity in the final years of the nineteenth century, knitting together markets for its products and audiences for its songs, those seemed like pitifully small steps to those who imagined their country as great power. "Is the Stars and Stripes the flag of a vital nation?" Albert Beveridge asked in 1898. Did it fly over "an invincible people?"<sup>67</sup> For Beveridge and like-minded men such as Lodge and Theodore Roosevelt, economic dynamism and cultural achievement could not alone produce national greatness. That required political institutions—a military, a national bureaucracy, an enhanced executive, bodies of public scientific expertise. Building them would become the project of Roosevelt's generation of American leaders, those who took power in the first decades of the twentieth century.

That project would meet with mixed success. But even if economic and cultural ties hardly constituted sufficient evidence for the integration of regions, classes, and constituencies into the single, powerful nation that Theodore Roosevelt and Beveridge desired, the construction of national markets and audiences proved to be a necessary condition for their efforts. "Modern life," Roosevelt would explain after entering the White House, "is both complex and intense, and the tremendous changes wrought by the extraordinary industrial development of the last half-century are felt in every fibre of our social and political being. Never before have men tried so vast and formidable an experiment as that of administering the affairs of a continent under the forms of a Democratic republic."<sup>68</sup> The turn-of-the-century United States, Roosevelt explained, had outgrown the perils that his predecessors had faced, the struggle to preserve the political integrity of the union. Now it passed to his generation to make more meaningful what he called "the name of a mighty nation."<sup>69</sup>

## Notes

1. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 485.
2. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, p. 485.
3. William H. Armstrong, *Major McKinley* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2000), p. 103.
4. Arthur Twining Hadley, "Living for Others," in n.a., *The Authentic Life Of William McKinley, Our Third Martyr President* (Washington, D.C.: W.E. Scull, 1901), p. 418.
5. Nell I. Painter, *Standing at Armageddon* (New York: Norton, 1987), pp. xvii–xviii.
6. Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, p. 171.
7. n.a., *The Authentic Life of William McKinley, Our Third Martyr President*, pp. 160–61.

3. Ibid., p. 192.
9. The last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed an explosion in high-speed production in—in flour, cereal, cigarettes, chewing gum, soft drinks, and so on. Leading manufacturers could produce more than they could distribute through traditional channels. When James B. Duke began rolling cigarettes out of the Bonsack cigarette machines, he easily produced more cigarettes in a year than the whole nation had regularly consumed. See Alfred E. Chandler, *Visible Hand*, pp. 239–99.
10. Glen Porter and Harold C. Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971).
11. Regina Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*, p. 24.
12. Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang, *The Unmanageable Consumer* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 8. Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, 2nd edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 78–79.
13. Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*, p. 1.
14. Emily Holt, *Encyclopedia of Household Economy* (1903), quoted in Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*, p. 40.
15. Mieg Jacobs, *Purchasing Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 40. William Leach, *Land of Desire* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 16.
16. Jacobs, *Purchasing Power*, p. 15.
17. Ibid., p. 33.
13. Elysa R. Engelman, “‘The Face That Haunts Me Ever’: Consumers, Retailers, Critics, and the Branded Personality of Lydia E. Pinkham,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 2003).
19. Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 99.
20. Leach, *Land of Desire*, pp. 15–16.
21. Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 36–39.
22. Ibid., pp. 5–6, 90–91.
23. Griffith, *Home-Town News*, p. 192.
24. Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 103.
25. Griffith, *Home-Town News*, pp. 85–86.
26. Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 100–101.
27. Ibid., p. 103.
28. Elysa R. Engelman, “‘The Face That Haunts Me Ever’: Consumers, Retailers, Critics, and the Branded Personality of Lydia E. Pinkham,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 2003). The medicine contained herbs cooked, macerated, and suspended in water and alcohol. Originally touted as a panacea, it became successful as a cure for women’s menstrual, obstetric, and menopausal disorders.
29. Elysa R. Engelman, “‘The Face That Haunts Me Ever’: Consumers, Retailers, Critics, and the Branded Personality of Lydia E. Pinkham,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 2003).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. John K. Winkler, *Five and Ten: The Fabulous Life of F. W. Woolworth* (New York: Robert M. McBride, 1940).
35. Regina Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*, p. 103. See also John K. Winkler, *Five and Ten: The Fabulous Life of F. W. Woolworth* (New York: Robert M. McBride, 1940).
36. Regina Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*, pp. 103–106.
37. Ibid. Philip Scranton, *Endless Novelty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
38. Christopher Wilson, *The Labor of Words*, pp. 69, 74. Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture* (New York: Verso, 1996), pp. 23–24. The first regional bestseller list appeared two years earlier.
39. Henry Cabot Lodge, Speech in the House of Representatives, May 2, 1890, in Henry Cabot Lodge, *Speeches and Addresses, 1884–1909* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), pp. 55–56.

40. Theodore Roosevelt, *American Ideals*, p. 20.
41. Ibid., p. 23.
42. Edmund Clarence Stedman, quoted in Charles C. Alexander, *Here the Country Lies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 2.
43. This is not today’s standard concert pitch (A = 440 Hz). In the late 1850s, the French government established a uniform pitch (A = 435 Hz). This frequency, which the MTNA adopted in the 1880s, became the international standard for many years, though some instrument makers and orchestras continued to use different standards. In 1955, the International Organization for Standardization adopted today’s concert pitch (A = 440 Hz). See Christina Kopp, “A School of New Men’: Composing an American Identity in the Early 20th Century,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 2005).
44. Alan H. Levy, *Edward MacDowell: An American Master* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1998), p. 54. After one performance in the early 1890s, a critic for the *New York Tribune* went so far as to assert that he had “derived keener pleasure from the work of the young American than from the experienced and famous Russian” Tchaikovsky, whose work had appeared on the same program.
45. Christina Kopp, “A School of New Men’: Composing an American Identity in the Early 20th Century,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 2005).
46. Ibid. See also John C. Tibbetts, ed. *Dvorák in America, 1892–1895* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1993), and David Beveridge, ed., *Rethinking Dvorák: Views from Five Countries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
47. Letter, Edward MacDowell to Carl V. Lachmund, December 22, 1887, Music Division, New York Public Library, cited in Francis Brancalone, “Edward MacDowell and Indian Motives,” *American Music* 7 (Winter 1989): 362. Antonín Dvorák, Letter to the Editor, *New York Herald*, May 28, 1893.
48. Christina Kopp, “A School of New Men’: Composing an American Identity in the Early 20th Century,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 2005). See also MacDonald Smith Moore, *Yankee Blues* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).
49. Nicholas Tawa, *The Way To Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), p. 38.
50. The nerve center of Tin Pan Alley soon moved from Union Square to the area around Broadway and 28th Street.
51. Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 29.
52. Nicholas Tawa, *The Way To Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), pp. 146–47.
53. Nicholas Tawa, *The Way To Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), p. 17.
54. Ibid. pp. 101–11.
55. Ibid., pp. 101–103.
56. Ibid., pp. 198–206.
57. Jeffrey Melnick, “Tin Pan Alley and the Black–Jewish Nation,” in Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick, eds., *American Popular Music: New Approaches to the Twentieth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), pp. 29–45. Kenneth Kanter, *Jews on Tin Pan Alley: The Jewish Contribution to American Popular Music, 1830–1940* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1982).
58. Nicholas Tawa, *The Way To Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), p. 64. On Bert Williams, see “Come, Josephine in My Flying Machine: Inventions and Topics in Popular Songs 1910–1929,” Sound Recording, New World Records, 1977.
59. Charles K. Harris, *After the Ball: Forty Years of Melody. An Autobiography* (New York: Frank-Maurice, Inc., 1926), p. 40. See also Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music*, pp. 31–33.
60. Isaac Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley* (New York: John Day Co., 1930), p. 112. See also Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music*, pp. 29–30, and Engelman, “The Face That Haunts Me Ever.”
61. Nasaw, *Going Out*, p. 23.
62. Robert W. Snyder, *Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), pp. xiv–xv, *passim*.
63. Nasaw, *Going Out*, pp. 19–22.

64. Ibid., p. 26. Robert W. Snyder, *Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), p. 28.
65. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Robert W. Snyder, *Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000). Whereas Albert F. McLean Jr. in *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (1965) had argued that vaudeville was largely a middle-class phenomenon, Snyder and Kibler have portrayed it as a complex site of cultural exchange.
66. Quoted in Nasaw, *Going Out*, p. 33.
67. Albert J. Beveridge, "The March of the Flag," Speech at Tomlinson Hall, Indianapolis, Indiana, September 16, 1898. The speech became the official 1898 Republican campaign document for several midwestern states.
68. Theodore Roosevelt, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1905, in *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, Vol. XV, *State Papers* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1926), p. 263.
69. Theodore Roosevelt, Address at Madison Square Garden, October 26, 1900, in *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, Vol. XIV, *Campaigns and Controversies* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1926), p. 400.

## National Ideas and Local Power in Fargo, North Dakota, during the Great Depression

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As we have been reminded in the twenty-first century by debates over health care and immigration policy, conflict among the national, state, and local governments is endemic to America's federal system. In periods of heightened federal activity, such as the Great Depression, such conflict becomes more intense and pronounced, as national conceptions of programs and how they should operate clash with state and local customs, prejudices, and power structures.

Because historians have viewed federal programs mainly from the perspective of Washington, D.C., they have tended to underplay these conflicts, if they are considered at all. When they have been taken seriously—as with conflicts over the operation of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration in the cotton South—local critics of federal programs have been stereotyped as racists and reactionaries and their arguments dismissed with little consideration.

Ignoring, downplaying, or dismissing local attitudes leads to the oversimplification of the United States' complex ideology, culture, and history. A close study of the local reception in Fargo, North Dakota, of two federal relief programs—the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Work Progress Administration (WPA)—reveals points of contact and conflict, while illustrating a complicated set of attitudes regarding the operation of the programs and the nature and character of the unemployed. In the process, it challenges the triumphalism so often present in treatments of the New Deal from the perspective of Washington, while serving as a reminder that vigorous and self-confident localities were not reluctant to resist a federal government whose philosophy and regulations they found abhorrent.