AN HISTORICAL VIEW OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN SOCIETY AS WITNESSED THROUGH MUSICAL THEATRE: 1927-PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

The recent centennial celebration of the production of musical theatre on Broadway draws attention to the existence of a vast collection of historical and societal data provided by the genre of musical theatre. Not only do these musicals teach about their own selected subject matter, usually by retelling or predicting events in a given time, but musicals also provide a telling comment on American society during the time in which they were first presented.

The purpose of this study was to draw parallels between historical and social conditions in American society with selected Broadway musicals from 1927 to the present. The criteria used to formulate conclusions in this study involved selecting the most influential musical written and produced in a given decade during the twentieth century. This study investigated the following questions: First, do musicals reflect their contemporary society, and second, does musical theatre contain conditions of ongoing concern to society, such as women's rights, racism, and war? The plot content of each musical was analyzed and compared with actual historical events, social conditions, and artistic trends occurring in American society during the year of each musical's premiere on Broadway. Conclusions were drawn and observations made as to the impact of the musical on society or society on the musical production.

In response to the research questions posed in this study, it was concluded that musicals do reflect historical events, social conditions, and musical style in the year of each selected musical's premiere on Broadway. It was also confirmed that a great deal of past historical fact and ongoing issues of social concern in twentieth-century American society are preserved in and can be studied through the genre of musical theatre.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The recent centennial celebration of the production of musical theatre on Broadway draws attention to the existence of a vast collection of historical and societal data provided by the genre of musical theatre. Not only do these musicals teach about their own selected subject matter, usually by retelling or predicting events in a given time, but musicals also provide a telling comment on American society during the time in which they were first presented.

It is important to note that the organization of musical theatre provides a synthesis of the arts by successfully integrating dance, theatre, visual art, and music, thus providing a valid means of portraying historical and societal trends as viewed through the arts. Musical theatre also provides a symbolic re-enactment of certain historical events and societal trends with the music adding the emotional and dramatic element not found in a straight play or book. Politics, social conditions, historical facts, literature, and popular culture, past, present, and future, can all be studied through one source: the musical theatre.

Musical theatre has recently (1994) been a prominent topic of discussion in the media. Reports of controversy and cries of racial injustice were reported with the revival of *Show Boat* in October of 1993 in Toronto. National praise was bestowed upon one of the innovators of American musical theatre with a Kennedy Center Honor for lyricist Stephen Sondheim in December 1993. The United States postal service recently released a new limited edition set of postage stamps representing a series of classic American musicals. Numerous revivals on Broadway as well as sold-out national tours of new musicals and revivals across the country continued throughout 1993 and into 1994 while the successful December production of the revival of *Gypsy*, with Bette Midler, aired

during primetime viewing on CBS television. With all of this current attention being paid to the musical theatre, one becomes aware of the continued effect the musical has upon the American society.

Background and Development

Throughout history, the coexistence of music and drama has been an influential feature of the dramatic stage. In England, from Shakespearean productions through the rise of seventeenth and eighteenth century ballad opera, music became an important element of comedy and drama. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, ballad opera's style of alternating spoken dialogue with songs based on familiar folk tunes to supply the emotional comment prevailed and eventually lead to the American musical form as we know it today. This was in sharp contrast with grand opera's practice of delivering plot and emotion through the combination of recitative and aria (Jackson, 1979).

The first documented presentation of a musical in America occurred in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 8, 1735, when the ballad opera *Flora* was performed, marking the beginning of the serious development of musical theatre in America (Bordman, 1992). In 1753, Lewis Hallam had established New York's *New Theatre in Nassau Street*. John Gay's ballad opera, *The Beggar's Opera*, was one of the first productions of Hallam's theatre and was used, as most musicals were in eighteenth-century America, to fill the gap between the featured dramatic plays given on the same evening (Jackson, 1979).

By 1781, American composers began to produce their own musicals by incorporating original music instead of the common practice of borrowing folk tunes for musical stimuli. The musical moved into the realm of spectacle or extravaganza with enlarged sets, bold costumes, and increased numbers of players combining to create an integrated theatrical experience. Francis Hopkinson's *The Temple of Minerva* (1781) was described as "oratorical entertainment" and was presented in Philadelphia as part of a concert given by

the French Minister to honor George Washington. The influence of Hopkinson's musical style lasted well into the nineteenth century and eventually reemerged in the revues of Florenz Ziegfeld and the musical stage as it is known today (Bordman, 1992).

The late nineteenth century saw the demise of ballad opera, the expansion of spectacle, due to popular demand for grandeur and "spectacle" in musical productions, and the rise of new forms of musical entertainment for the stage including: burlesque and the minstrel show. The burlesque combined comedy, song, and dance into an entire evening's entertainment with no real theatrical formality. The minstrel show, with its social commentary ranging from racial parody to political satire, provided America with some of its greatest achievements in original popular song through the compositions of Stephen Foster and *Dixie* by Dan Emmett. The integration of dance also came to the forefront of the musical stage through the introduction of the Negro shuffles, "buck and wing" and "soft shoe." Eventually tap dancing added a lighter style to the previous practices and become an art still studied today.

By 1866, all of the elements were in place for the America's first integrated musical theatre production. Charles M. Barras' *The Black Crook* was presented at William Niblo's Garden and Theatre on September, 12, 1866. *The Black Crook*, a loose interpretation of Carl Maria von Weber's German romantic opera *Der Freischütz*, combined spectacle with the elements of exquisite sets, innovative scene changes, ballet, and music into a five-and-a-half-hour event of lavish musical entertainment (Bordman, 1992). With the premiere of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's operetta *H.M.S. Pinafore,* in 1879, the American musical theatre continued its evolution. Musicals began to emulate the operetta style of the integration of book or story, lyrics, and music into a dramatic whole. This combination of elements was what the American musical theatre needed to raise it to a more cohesive art form.

The term "musical comedy" came into use in America with the premiere in 1894 of the British musical comedy entitled *A Gaiety Girl* (Mordden, 1976). It was signifigant to the

development of American musical theatre in that it utilized popular tune formats present in the late 1890's, specifically, "...story ballads, parlor waltzes, and comic situation rather than rapid-patter songs" (Mordden, 1976, p. 25).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, musical theatre was a staple of society in theatres from Chicago to New York. The musical revue was the rage with George M. Cohan, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin providing America with a national legacy of musical heritage in song. These revues were filled with lighthearted musical numbers with spectacular staging but contained no unifying plot as will be seen in later musical theatre productions. From 1910-1912, producer Florenz Ziegfeld, beginning with his *Ziegfeld Follies of 1910*, introduced and showcased such classic American stars as Al Jolson, Fanny Brice, Will Rogers, and W.C. Fields while over forty new musicals were appearing on Broadway (Bordman, 1992).

By 1914, America had become disenchanted with Europe and was looking to its own talent to bring the truly modern American musical to fruition. From these new composers would come the future of American musical theatre and the American musical on film. These composers were combining their talents with lyricists and the creative efforts of teams like George and Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, and Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II would eventually bring the American musical into its own. With the production of *Showboat* in 1927, composer, lyricist, book, sets, costumes, character, and music combined to elevate the American musical to a position without equal on the stage and provided for its audience an informative, insightful, thought-provoking art form for the future (Gottfried, 1979; Green, 1985; Mates, 1985).

Review of Related Research

Several sources exist which deal with the history of musical theatre from a chronological perspective providing valuable details of production methods and personnel. Works by Stanley Green, *The World of Musical Comedy* (1980) and *Broadway musical* (1985), also

Martin Gottfried, *Broadway musicals* (1979) and his follow-up survey, *More Broadway Musicals: Since 1980* (1991), and Arthur Jackson's *The Best Broadway Musicals: From Show Boat to A Chorus Line* (1979), provide excellent historical information on musical theatre during the time-frame of this study. Thomas Hischak's *Stage it with Music: An Encyclopedic Guide to the American Musical Theatre* (1993), provides an encyclopedic approach detailing numerous musical theatre productions and biographies of choreographers, directors, producers, and perfomers from decades of American musical theatre production.

Of the many works available which deal with the musical theatre in a chronological fashion, the following provide necessary background information important to this study. Joseph P. Swain's *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey* (1990) offers detailed analyses of the dramatic elements inherent in the music of the Broadway musical. Swain provides insight into characterization, plot, and conflicts in the drama through analysis of the interaction of musical elements with dramatic elements of the plot. Swain finds tonal centers, rhythmic diversions, and melodic and harmonic characteristics to be just as important to the pace and emotion of the drama as lighting and dramatic presentation of dialogue.

Swain organizes his study into categories of musical stimuli, for example: "Morality Play as Musical," "Shakespeare as Musical," "History as Musical," and so on. Swain discusses many of the same musicals contained in this study but does not compare them to actual events and conditions in society in their year of introduction as this study intends to detail. Instead, Swain finds a common stimuli in selected Broadway musicals, such as ethnicity, history, and love, followed by a detailed analysis of plot development through musical elements. As Swain (1990) suggests: "The intention here is not to write a comprehensive history of the American musical theatre, but to survey the achievements of its music as a dramatic element" (p. 3).

Another valuable source to this study is Ethan Mordden's *Better Foot Forward* (1979). Mordden organizes his study into decades while describing the sweeping changes in form and presentation of musical theatre occurring within each new decade. Mordden (1979) suggests that his work emphasizes "...the hard realities of music, lyrics, and script..." (p. x). Mordden quotes critical reviews of opening nights which provide this writer with information about the temperament of the audience during the time of a given musical's premiere. As with the other sources mentioned, Mordden does not dwell heavily on current events, but does preface each discussion with a description of the mood of society during a musical's run.

Cecil Smith and Glenn Litton's collaboration *Musical Comedy in America* (1980) gives more information about historical events than do other sources. Smith's contribution from *The Black Crook to South Pacific* covers the early years of musical theatre in America through World War II. Smith provides a detailed history of a given musical's development and plot content while concentrating on the overall picture of the history of American musical theatre's composers, lyricists, entertainers, stars, and producers. Glenn Litton continues this valuable historical reference with *The King and I* (1951) and goes through *Sweeney Todd* (1979). Smith and Litton discuss the emotions of the country throughout the history of American musical theatre, whereas this writer concentrates on specific historical and social references contained in a particular musical.

Barbara Lee Horn's 1991 book entitled *The Age of Hair* describes the background, production, and influence of the musical *Hair* on the American society. It is a valuable source to this study due to its description of the elements which make up the musical, specifically 1960s culture, fashion, and hippie lifestyle. Interviews with performers, creators, and critics involved in the musical *Hair*, add validity and concrete information on the production.

To date, this writer has only discovered two sources, by the same author, which touch on the topic of this dissertation. In Barbara Means Fraser's 1982 dissertation, from the

University of Oregon, entitled "A Structural Analysis of the American Musical Theatre Between 1955 and 1965: A Cultural Perspective" and her subsequent 1989 article entitled "The Dream Shattered: America's Seventies Musicals," Fraser deals directly with values in American society and how they were dealt with and reflected in selected musicals from a ten-year period. The purpose of Fraser's study was: "...to select a period in American history (1955-1965) and representative American musicals from the same period to compare the underlying values communicated through the American musical with the values within the American society" (Fraser, 1982, abstract).

Fraser divided the ten-year period into three eras: 1955-1959 (the Eisenhower Years), 1960-1962 (the Kennedy Years), and 1963-1965 (a new Romanticism following the assassination of John Kennedy). Randomly selected samples of American musicals and selected samples of the longest running American musical of each year were then analyzed for each era.

Random Samples:

1955-1959: *Once Upon a Mattress, The Music Man, Flower Drum Song, Li'l Abner,* and *West Side Story.*

1960-1962: *Do Re Mi; Mr. President; The Unsinkable Molly Brown; Bye Bye Birdie,* and *How to Succeeded in Business without Really Trying*

1963-1965: *Skyscraper, Here's Love, 110 in the Shade, Man of La Mancha,* and *Do I Hear a Waltz?*

Selected Samples:

Damn Yankees, My Fair Lady, The Music Man, Flower Drum Song, The Sound of Music, The Fantasticks, How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way To The Forum, Fiddler on the Roof, and *Man of La Mancha* (Fraser, 1982, abstract).

Fraser (1982) describes her methodology in this manner: "A structural analysis of libretto and original Broadway or Off-Broadway cast's recordings revealed the values of the musical theatre world for comparison with the American values isolated by a collection of images, events, and themes from popular and historical documents" (abstract). Her study concluded that "musicals are reflective of the American values of its era." She also felt that the information gathered "should be useful to all producing artists of American musicals who may choose to adapt characters when negative values are being communicated or to emphasize positive values of the past." Fraser (1982) hoped her study would alert producers and directors of their responsibility to be aware of "the values of the art they portray" (abstract).

Fraser's analysis consists of a chronology of the period being discussed, the social history, and analysis of plot, character, theme, and images from the random and selected samples for each period. Fraser provides a detailed description of the rhythm of the music and text in *West Side Story* while detailing how the rhythms of speech used by the characters reflect their thoughts and actions. She notes that "the artist is a member of society: the art reflects society (or perhaps the society is a reflection of the art); thus some research should be conducted analyzing the relationship between the art and society" (Fraser, 1982, p. 5). She believes that "sociological studies of musical comedies are needed to discover whether the musical is a reflection of its society" (Fraser, p. 6).

Fraser chose the philosophical theory of structuralism as the methodology for her study. She delves into great detail in defining structuralism and its relation to her topic of study. Fraser (1982) defined structuralism in the following manner: "...an artist is a member of his or her society, and draws his or her vision or reality from experiences within those societal structures. The structures of the society often parallel structures in art, or the myths of a society are often found in the arts" (p. 10).

Fraser summed up structural thought by citing a statement from the book *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Hawkes, 1977). Hawkes (1977) believed that: "Structuralism is

fundamentally a way of thinking about the world which is predominantly concerned with the perception and description of structures" (p. 17). Fraser (1982) felt structuralism provided "...the most logical approach to [her] study of the American musical comedy because of its primary focus on the relationship between the art and the society" (p. 11). Through Fraser's (1982) structural outline, examinations of plot, character, theme, and imagery were broken into subcategories to examine reality, character types, vision of reality presented in the plot, words and idioms that reflect the time period, and "visual and aural imagery" (p. 12). These categories were thoroughly examined with a theatrical emphasis. Fraser (1982) suggested that her: "...ten-year time span is being chosen so that a larger number of musicals can be analyzed within a shorter period of time to thoroughly assess the comparative values. If the study works in a ten-year span then it could probably be expanded in a later study with fewer musicals per decade" (p. 17).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to draw parallels between historical and social conditions in American society with selected Broadway musicals. This study will examine a representative musical from each decade from 1927 to the present, beginning with *Showboat*, which marked the first successful integration of topical musical numbers, poignant drama, character development, and social conflict. These factors all serve to elevate the genre of musical theatre to new heights of artistic significance. A great deal of historical fact, social commentary, and popular culture can be studied through a musical's plot, setting, and musical style.

The purpose of this study will be investigated through the following research questions: (1) Do musicals reflect their contemporary society? (2) Does musical theatre contain conditions of ongoing concern to society, such as women's rights, racism, and war? In summary, this study will attempt to detail the parallelism between American culture, history, and society as displayed in the musical theatre from 1927 to the present.

Description of the Study

Whereas Fraser (1982) focused primarily on American societal values as portrayed by the American musical comedy, this study will focus on the historical events, social conditions, and artistic movements during the time when each musical was first presented on the American stage spanning 1927-1991. Not all of the musicals in this study are of American origin, but all were significant on the Broadway stage at the time of their debut and subsequent run. While Fraser (1982) includes a comprehensive outline of the history and social conditions of the time period at the beginning of each chapter, she stresses that "The primary emphasis of this study resides in the structural analysis of the plays rather than an exhaustive historical study of the period" (p. 17). This author will concentrate on the broader picture of American society, distinguishing whether current events at the time of each musical are reflected in the content of the musical in its setting.

The criteria used to formulate conclusions in this study involved selecting the most influential musical(s) written and produced in a given decade during the twentieth century, beginning in 1927. Specifically, the selection of musicals is based upon their altering affect on preexisting musical theatre style in a given decade. Longest-run figures for a musical in a given decade do not provide a valid means of choice, in all decades presented in this study, due to population growth during a given decade. Therefore, innovative alterations of style in presentation, musical forms, and artistic design provided by prototype musicals in a given decade, provide a visible thread of evolution of the musical on Broadway from 1927 to the present.

A brief introduction into the temperament of American society during that prevailing decade will begin the discussion of each musical. The plot content of the musical will be analyzed and compared with actual historical events, social conditions, musical style, and movements in the arts occurring in American society during the year of each musical's premiere on Broadway. Finally, conclusions will be drawn and observations made as to the impact of the musical on society or society on the musical production.

Selection Procedures

An influential musical has been chosen for each decade beginning in 1927 with the musical *Show Boat* and continuing through 1991 with the musical *Miss Saigon* (which is still in production on Broadway and currently touring across the United States and Canada). A specific musical was selected for each decade because of its unique contribution to the progress and evolution of the genre of musical theatre: *Show Boat* (1927): the first example of integration of book, music, and dance in a musical; *Of Thee I Sing* (1931): the first musical to deal with politics and to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize; *Oklahoma!* (1943): the first musical to connect all the elements of book, music, and dance into the act of storytelling; *West Side Story* (1957): the first musical tragedy and the first to utilize modern dance with jazz; *Hair* (1968): the first musical using rock and roll music; *A Chorus Line* (1975): the longest running musical in Broadway history (1975-1990); *Les Misérables* (1987): the epitome of book-song-spectacle musical with continuous music—musical-opera; *Miss Saigon* (1991): the first musical to deal with the Vietnam War and to command $100 as the top ticket price. Conclusions will result from the exploration of the interaction of the arts and society in an effort to determine the effect arts and society have upon each other.

Organization

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I: Introduction and Background, provides a detailed description of the study and a historical survey of the evolution of the American musical from its European roots. Chapter II: A Growing America, deals with three decades of early American musical theatre beginning with the 1920s and the musical *Show Boat* (1927), continuing into the 1930s with *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), and concluding with the 1940s and *Oklahoma!* (1943). Chapter III: An Evolving Society, will cover a great period of transition in the American musical theatre beginning with the 1950s and

West Side Story, through the 1960s and *Hair*, and culminating in the 1970s with *A Chorus Line*. Chapter IV: European Predominance, will detail the infiltration of Broadway with musicals from Europe. Chapter IV will include the 1980s and *Les Misérables*, and the 1990s and *Miss Saigon*. Conclusions and recommendations will be included in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

A GROWING AMERICA

The 1920s—*Show Boat* —1927

Introduction

Show Boat premiered on Broadway on December 27, 1927, and was selected because it provided a model for future musicals with its integration of book, music, and dance. This integration provided for a more cohesive form for musical theatre production while the songs in the musical became a more integral part of the action of the plot. The musical *Show Boat* reflected contemporary society in 1927, specifically in its candid portrayal of racial conditions in America and with drug and gambling addiction. Present generations are still voicing discontent at the portrayal of blacks in *Show Boat* evident in a protest during a recent revival of *Show Boat* in Canada in 1993.

The Roaring Twenties

The Roaring Twenties in America were anything but passive and conservative. The period from 1920 through the eventual crash of the stock market in 1929 saw many changes not the least of which involved the way musical theatre was presented on the stage (*Oxford American History*, 1966). With the premiere of *Show Boat* on December 27, 1927, musical theatre as was previously known was forever changed.

After the First World War, America was in a state of renewed vitality prompting changes in women's rights, fashion, economy, transportation, and overall conduct of the common man. Prohibition of alcohol manufacture and consumption was enforced which allowed bootlegging of liquor to become a widespread and very lucrative profession. Bootlegging, playing the stock market, and ragtime music provided the excitement of wealth and prosperity. During this abundant time in American society a new art form emerged—the first truly integrated, fully American musical—*Show Boat* by Jerome Kern

and Oscar Hammerstein II. "The credibility of the production crossing from song, instrumental music, and dancing through crowd scenes, while stemming from a serious plot produce this [unique] distinction" (Pasqua, 1993, p. 409). This was Americana at its best in a nation bursting forth with pride for country and liberty for all.

Production History

Show Boat is based on Edna Ferber's 1926 novel of the same name. Florenz Ziegfeld produced the first stage production in 1927 with music by Jerome Kern and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II. What resulted was a new kind of art form which was at first difficult to label. In Thomas Hischak's *Stage it with Music* (1993), he discusses this discrepancy: "*Show Boat* was neither a musical comedy nor operetta but the first true musical play and it broke rules as quickly as it set up new standards for the American musical theatre" (p. 232). William A. Henry III's observation of *Show Boat* in the November 1, 1993, issue of *Time* magazine states that: "...the show's literary significance as one of the first musicals to take on political subjects, integrate song and dance into the plot and range from barroom tunes to opera" (Henry III, 1993, p. 84) is a truly significant comment on the place *Show Boat* holds in the history of the Broadway musical.

There exist numerous outstanding features of *Show Boat*. Apart from the fact that Kern's music heightens every emotional situation by using song to describe events and advance the plot, the actual events and conflicts experienced by the characters are intense and represent a "real world" quality that had been lacking in musical productions up to this point. Issues such as racism, unhappy marriages resulting in desertion, gambling and alcohol addiction, and single parenting are just a few of the elements brought to life through the dramatic and musical elements of *Show Boat* (Hischak, 1993).

The story spans a fifty-year period in the life of a show boat captain, his family, and crew and takes place on and around the Mississippi River and its surrounding cities. Fortunately, the creators of *Show Boat* did not try to delete the past, only to represent it as

accurately and affectionately as possible. Miles Kreuger, in his book *Show Boat: The Story of a Classic American Musical* (1977) summarizes the appeal of *Show Boat*:

> More than a mere musical comedy, *Show Boat* was a musical play, a drama-with-song that could not help but touch upon the life of any American who viewed the work. The depiction of the innocent South of the nineteenth century, the roistering gaiety of old Chicago with its world's fair, smart hotels, and colorful cabarets, and the depiction of the modern theatre all rang true, because they were sketched without the exaggeration and superficiality theatregoers of the 1920s had come to expect. (p. 64)

Plot

Show Boat begins in the late 1870s and traces the lives of Cap'n Andy, his wife Parthy, and their daughter Magnolia through the year 1927 as they tour up and down the Mississippi River on the show boat *Cotton Blossom* run by Cap'n Andy. Act I opens on the levee of the Mississippi River at Natchez with the cast of the show boat entertaining the crowd in hopes of interesting them in the evening's performance. Negro workers are busy in the fields with the cotton crop as all of the main characters are introduced to the audience.

The primary characters are Magnolia, daughter of the show boat captain, and the deceptive gambler Gaylord Ravenal whom she first meets in a "Romeo and Juliet" kind of situation and later marries. They live in a world of make-believe throughout the show and "Make Believe" becomes their signature song. Secondary to the plot, but no less important, are the *Cotton Blossom's* leading lady Julie and her leading-man husband, Steve. Julie finds she must leave the *Cotton Blossom* or be arrested for miscegenation—she being a white woman of mixed parentage (black and white) married to a white man. It was illegal in the state to be married to someone of mixed race (Kreuger, 1977).

Other characters include Joe and Queenie, black workers on the show boat, who were always present at family functions of significance. Joe seems to understand a great deal about the family and their numerous situations but knows that the river is the first and final judge. His song "Ol' Man River" is a testament to life on the river for himself and those

close to him. Gaylord and Magnolia are married, against her mother Parthy's wishes, and after moving to Chicago, live in fine style (Kreuger, 1977).

Act 2 begins on the midway at the 1893 World's Colombian Exposition in Chicago. For Gaylord, gambling has now become a way of life. After years of bad luck and a child to feed, Magnolia and Gaylord move to a second-class boarding house. By 1904, their daughter Kim is eight years old and Gaylord, feeling pressure from debts owed, deserts his family, leaving Magnolia and Kim just enough money to get back home to the security of her family on the show boat. Magnolia's family helps her raise her daughter in comfort. By 1927, Gaylord returns to the show boat to make up with Magnolia. The chorus overwhelms the situation with a reprise of "Ol' Man River" and the show ends on a happy note. The fact that Gaylord reappears and there is a "happy ending" is typical of musical comedy of the time. Later in his career, Hammerstein might have stayed true to the original novel in which Edna Ferber's Gaylord never reappears (Kreuger, 1977).

Musical Style

The songs used in the musical theatre provide a unity similar to that of the most sophisticated opera or ballet. Unity is achieved throughout the story of *Show Boat* through a series of songs that became almost instantly popular depicting romance, life on the river, and life on the stage. Strains of common melodic fragments or leitmotifs, give this "American Musical Play," as Ziegfeld billed it, an almost operatic unity. The entire score is held together with the philosophical song "Ol' Man River." This ballad to American life defines the common thread linking all of the lives on the stage—the river itself. Throughout the play, the river sees birth, strife, happiness and heartbreak.

The music contained in *Show Boat* is a mix of period tunes from the late 1800s and the contemporary ragtime rhythms sweeping the nation in the 1920s. "[The] *Cotton Blossom* theme is essentially the beginning of 'Ol' Man River's chorus played in reverse and

accelerated...'Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man' is headed with the curious marking 'Tempo di Blues.'" Alec Wilder in *American Popular Song* says: "...the song 'Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man'...doesn't have the turn of phrase or over-all quality of a relaxed rhythm ballad. It is [marked] 'Tempo di Blues'...[and] the cadences of the first, second, and fourth sections were unusual for the time" which Wilder attributed to harmonies unrelated to the key allowing for the blues marking (Wilder, 1972, p. 57).

The songs in musical theatre provide the only avenue for character description and development through their sheer ability to provide a musical image using tempo, meter, and style. For example, Julie's songs are "torch songs" through which one immediately understands her motivations and dreams. "Crooning of sad songs while seated on an upright piano, [is] today regarded as one of the symbols of New York during the roaring '20s" (Kreuger, 1977, p. 53). In a review of *Show Boat* in the December 16, 1927, *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Arthur B. Waters comments on Jerome Kern's choice of music:

> ...he has blended the Negro spirituals of the Southland with jazz of today. What is even more noteworthy, he has caught the subtle distinction that exists between jazz and the ragtime of twenty-five years ago, and several of his numbers of the last-named category are amazingly characteristic of the early years of the present century. *Show Boat* took a piece of beloved Americana and treated it with appropriate romanticism and yet with a theatrical seriousness. Identifiable American types: the river gambler, the showboat crew, the black workhand sang American sentiments in an American idiom. (Kreuger, 1977, p. 292)

Historical Events

Show Boat premiered on December 27, 1927, a year that witnessed many significant events serving to alter the American way of life. Transportation was changing at an exhausting pace with the completion of the 15,000,000th Model T Ford which rolled off the assembly line in the spring of 1927. This one event would mark the end of the almost pedestrian society which had existed before. In the air as well as on land, transportation was reaching new heights with the successful completion of the first nonstop solo flight

from New York to Paris on May 20, 1927, by Charles A. Lindbergh. All of this contributed to a new era of air and ground travel (*Oxford American History*, 1966).

Another major historic event occurred in 1927 in New York City: the first successful demonstration of television on April 7. Even today, in 1994 with the "information super highway" only minutes away from the American living room, television still affects, for better or worse, the entertainment and living styles of the American family (*Oxford American History*, 1966). Radio was the most typical instrument of entertainment in the American home over the next few decades with 1927 seeing significant growth in the radio industry. All of these forms of entertainment eventually marked the end of the era of the showboat and its own, unique, vaudevillian form of diversion (*Oxford American History*, 1966).

Industrialization was not limited to transportation and communications alone. With the invention of the mechanical cotton picker (1927) invented by John D. Rust, occupational discrimination of blacks in society was destined for a change (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). Obviously *Show Boat* provided a significant, if not all too real, portrait of the life of the blacks in the South and an accurate historical record to study for the future.

Social Conditions

Social conditions during 1927 have a significant bearing on the plot of *Show Boat.* There are many parallels to societal activity and attitude shown in the social conditions of the characters in the musical. The first and most constant threat to society from 1927 to the present day are the attitudes and activities associated with racism (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). In 1993, during (yet another) revival of *Show Boat* in Toronto, Canadian news services reported the following: "Police were out in force to quell more than 100 placard-waving demonstrators, chanting 'this racist show has got to go' who protested outside the first preview on October 5" (Murray, 1993, p. 61). The article went on to say that: "...protesters insist that its [*Show Boat's*] language and racial stereotyping make the

1927 Jerome Kern/Oscar Hammerstein II musical an inappropriate choice for a publicly funded theatre in a city whose population is 40% black" (Murray, 1993, p. 73).

The $6.4 million *Live Entertainment* production of *Show Boat,* which opened October 17, 1993, was staged by Hal Prince to inaugurate the $40.8 million North York Performing Arts Center in Toronto. This latest outcry against the stereotypical portrayal of black characters in the arts, present in *Show Boat* in 1927, is still at the forefront of thought in society today. Through the study of *Show Boat,* one sees society's attitudes toward blacks during the turn of the century and can possibly gain insight into the roots of racial uprisings today. The 1993 conflict in Toronto was profiled on Ted Turner's *Cable News Network* (CNN) and prompted a meeting between Garth Drabinsky, the producer of the new *Show Boat,* Hal Prince, and the recently formed "Coalition To Stop Show Boat." "Prince and producer Garth Drabinsky have responded to community concerns with a commitment to remove racial stereotypes and offensive language" (Murray, 1993, p. 61). Although, in the same article Murray quoted Prince as further insisting that he "...has no intention of rewriting history" and "...is interested in preserving the authenticity of the period between 1887 to 1927 and showing the truth of the time...the disparity of the lives led by the blacks in the South and the whites in both the South and the North will be sharply contrasted. He plans to depict and reveal the evils of the bigotry of the time in ways other than language" (Murray, 1993, p. 73).

A motion condemning the new production, made by a trustee of the North York Board of Education, prompted the cancellation of a "Show Boat Gala" fundraiser which was to be sponsored by the United Way's Black and Caribbean Fundraising Committee and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Ticket sales were not hurt by the demonstrations but attention was again called to an art form sparking controversy within the community.

Racism

Racism ran rampant in the 1920s. In 1927, the United States Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional a Texas law prohibiting blacks from voting in Democratic primary elections. Mississippi's Constitution "contained suffrage restrictions that effectively disfranchised most of the black population...blacks were virtually excluded from the political process, even though they constituted a majority of the population until 1940" (*Encyclopedia Americana International*, 1990, p. 247). Segregation of blacks and whites was very much part of the social order between World War I and World War II (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). This attitude is an important sub-plot of *Show Boat.* Some scholars believe that the racial angle should be the major thrust of the plot. One could question the possibility of audiences accepting a story dealing with blacks along the Mississippi in 1927.

The original book for *Show Boat* is filled with "period" language usually omitted in more modern performances. For example, the word "nigger" is used during the scene in which Julie is dismissed from the company and the town due to her heritage. One also feels there is some sympathy for Julie's situation in that her husband becomes well-aware of her ethnic background and supports her unconditionally. Obviously, this kind of forward thinking was sorely lacking in the other productions of the time and times previous possibly because of negative public reaction to such subject matter in a musical comedy. Changes made over the years to the script of *Show Boat* are dismissed by Angela Lee, General Manager of Canadian Artists Network—Black Artists in Action:

> *Show Boat* supports a particular kind of white mythology...the problem with the revisions has always been, and will always be, that the racial sensibilities being considered are those of the white audience...the changes allow white audiences to view themselves with little discomfort. (Murray, 1993, p. 73)

Addiction, Prohibition, and Women's Rights

Show Boat provides a further comment on society in the 1920s with its open portrayal of alcohol and gambling addiction. As has been mentioned previously, the society of the Roaring Twenties was alive with prosperity which resulted in overt participation by some with excesses in many areas. Specifically demonstrated in *Show Boat* is the constant attention given to gambling by Gaylord Ravenal. Gambling, also a part of the "speak-easy" environment of the 1920s, became obsessive for him and ultimately proved to be his downfall. Society in 1927 was gambling with prosperity and eventually succumbed to the truth of the times with the Stock Market crash of 1929. *Show Boat* described the problems of uninhibited social survival in an atmosphere of fleeting affluence.

After being abandoned by her husband, Julie becomes an alcoholic. This poignant characterization of the fate of some women in the 1920s is significant during a time of prohibition. Prohibition is defined as: "...a nationwide effort in the United States to stop people by law from drinking alcoholic beverages. As enforced between 1920 and 1933, it forbade the manufacture or sale of any drink with more than 0.5% alcohol" (*Encyclopedia Americana International*, 1993). This threat to law and order by society during the 1920s was directly influenced by the influx of immigrants into the country. Prohibition led many to a newfound career of bootlegging liquor. *Show Boat* was set during the turn-of-the-century and continued through 1926. During the course of the musical, Julie can be seen indulging in her passion for drinking, just as many members of society did in 1927.

> By the late 1920s the country had more speakeasies than it ever had saloons, and though much bootleg liquor was of low quality, even dangerous to health, millions of people were drinking it. Women who would never have considered entering a saloon were now gleefully sitting at bars, "making whoopee." (*Encyclopedia Americana International*, 1993, p. 647)

Julie's drinking was obviously a familiar vice to the audience witnessing *Show Boat* in 1927 and her characterization only serves to illustrate the truth of the times. Her character stands as an example of society's corruptive potential on the Jazz Age community.

The strength of the female characters in *Show Boat* illustrates the stalwart move toward emancipation by American woman in the 1920s. It is difficult to imagine the identity struggles women of the early twentieth century had when compared with the active role women play in 1990s society. In 1920 women received the right to vote, ushering in a new era of change in the role a woman would play in society. Just as *Show Boat* provides an accurate portrayal of the racism of the times, it also admits to strength of character in the women portrayed throughout the drama.

Parthy, the matriarch mother of Magnolia, is the manager of the show boat and without her the elements of strong family ties, tradition, upright moral attitude, and guided authority would be sorely lacking in the plot. On the other hand, Magnolia's character must mature throughout the musical and while doing so, one sees a parallel with the changing role of the woman in American society during the 1920s.

It is important to note that the women's roles mentioned above have all been "white" female characterizations. Corrupt as they may be, they are developed more fully and significantly than the only "black" character in the musical, that being Queenie the cook. The portrayal of "black" characters is not a subject ignored in *Show Boat* by any means. Julie is described as being of mixed blood and ultimately thought of as a "black" character. Her characterization as "black" branded her an outcast eventually leading to her demise. Although racial problems would continue, the strength of the characterization of women in *Show Boat* would serve as a victory for women in their changing role in American society.

The Arts

Dance

Dance was an integral part of musical theatre, and *Show Boat* utilized the dances familiar at the turn-of-the-century as well as popular trends of the '20s. The dance numbers in *Show Boat* are not necessarily significant to the plot but are worth mention due to the continual appearance of black dance styles made popular by the earlier minstrel

shows. In a musical that was so-called "racially unbalanced," there appears to be a genuinely abundant use of black music and culture. Choreographer Sammy Lee included such period dances as the shuffle, vaudeville dance, and cakewalk which transformed the way dance was viewed in the musical ever since. Not until the 1940s, with Agnes De Mille's choreography in *Oklahoma!*, would the integration of dance, character, and plot in a musical come to fruition (Smith, 1981).

Film

One single event had an enormous impact on the entertainment habits of the American public and the facilities providing entertainment like the show boats and legitimate theatres. On Oct. 6, 1927, the first full-length talking picture, with both music and dialogue synchronized on disk, *The Jazz Singer* was unveiled and the Broadway stage would feel the results over the next few decades. Hollywood films served a wider market with distribution of film spreading over many areas at once. Unlike the Broadway stage, where the consumer had to come to the product, the movies came to the consumer. The success of the development of talking pictures can be seen today with films costing millions to produce while being viewed by millions and making millions in the process (*Oxford American History,* 1966).

Summary

With the premiere of *Show Boat* on December 27, 1927, the genre of musical theatre in America came into its own, breaking the griping influence of European operetta. In response to the first research question of whether or not musicals reflect their contemporary society, many parallels with society and historical events can be witnessed in comparing the musical *Show Boat* with American society in 1927. For example, through innovations in transportation and industrialization, America was beginning a new period as an ever-advancing, newly mobile society. If not yet by air, with the completion of the first

nonstop solo flight from New York to Paris on May 20, 1927, by Charles A. Lindbergh, then by land with the 15,000,000th Model T Ford rolling off the assembly line. The first successful demonstration of television on April 7, 1927, the continued and growing popularity and reliance upon radio, and the introduction of the first full-length talking picture, all led American entertainment decisions in new directions (*Oxford American History*, 1966). The premiere of *The Jazz Singer* on October 6, 1927, would forever alter life in the legitimate theatre as well in the lives of the American people.

The second research question deals with whether musical theatre comments on conditions of ongoing concern to society. *Show Boat* deals with issues such as racism and addiction which remain as social problems at the time of this writing, 1994. Racism was rampant in 1927. Segregation of blacks and whites was socially accepted between World War I and World War II (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). Characterizations in *Show Boat* mirror racial inequity with Julie being fired and ostracized for her mixed parentage. In 1993, the "Coalition to Stop Show Boat" was formed in Canada to call attention to racist attitudes and the questionable portrayal of blacks in a revival of *Show Boat* which suggests that society of today is still grappling with issues introduced through the artistic medium of musical theatre in 1927. Addiction, prohibition, and women's rights are also major issues throughout the plot of *Show Boat*, which continue to stand as a pedagogical tool on these issues for future generations.

Unity is achieved in *Show Boat* through use of music and dance. Songs which became instantly popular depicting romance, life on the river, and life on the stage along with a colorful mix of period tunes from the late 1800s and the contemporary ragtime rhythms sweeping the nation in the 1920s remain a legacy of the times. Familiar dance styles from the late 1800s and the early 1900s are incorporated into the plot of *Show Boat* giving the audience another way to relate to the lives of the characters. This marriage of popular culture, historical accuracy, and timely social conditions elevates *Show Boat* to a lasting place in the history of American musical theatre.

The 1930s—*Of Thee I Sing* —1931

Introduction

Of Thee I Sing premiered on Broadway in 1931 and was chosen for this study because it was unique in that it was the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and became the first musical play in print. *Of Thee I Sing* deals with issues of social relevance, for example, politics, satirical social reaction to political situations, and comments on the corruption of society in the 1930s caused by crime and political interference.

The 1930s

"Wall Street Lays an Egg" headlined *Variety* on October 29, 1929, announcing to the world that the United States stock market had crashed. The result was a decade awash in poverty, crime, breadlines, and "Hoovervilles" (Mattfeld, 1952). In September of 1931, 305 banks closed due to panic in the streets and by October, 522 banks had failed (*Oxford American History*, 1966). All in all, the crash of the stock market may have contributed to the failure of some 2,300 banks (Mattfeld, 1952).

Emerging from this bleak existence rose a one-hundred-and-two-story monument to progress and prosperity. The future of America lay in its industry and with the opening of the Empire State Building, on May 1, 1931, in New York City, that prosperous future had an icon. The building became the tallest in the world, rising 1,449 feet above the New York skyline. Henry Ford's Motor Company in Detroit, Michigan, rolled its 20,000,000th automobile off the assembly line on April 14, 1931 (Mattfeld, 1952).

Production History

With the coming of the new decade in society, a new decade in the history of the American musical theatre was also dawning. In 1927, *Show Boat* had boldly dealt with real issues of society. In *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), musical theatre commented on society with satirical wit and humor during a time when wit and humor was sorely needed.

"...*Show Boat* told one sprawling story through music, whereas *Of Thee I Sing* was a story told around a series of sketches, the whole punctuated by song and dance" (Mordden, 1976, p. 116).

As an overt social comment satirizing politics of the day, the new musical *Of Thee I Sing* was an instant hit. The inspired plot was by one of the great American writers for stage and screen, George S. Kaufman, aided by Morrie Ryskind who provided the political thoughts and ideas. The lyricist was none other than Ira Gershwin with his brother George Gershwin's music as his stimulus (Mattfeld, 1952). *Of Thee I Sing* premiered at the Music Box Theatre on December 26, 1931, and ran for 441 performances. This was a significant number considering the depressed economy, but *Of Thee I Sing* spoke to the common man in 1931 and brought some needed warmth into the souls of a people whose world as they had known it was changing irrevocably.

The theatre seemed to be the only good thing in a society in ruin: "Even in 1930, [at] the beginning of tin-roofed Hoovervilles, more than 233 productions got on the boards. During those years, 40 to 50 'book shows,' musical revues, musical entertainments, [and] operettas were put into rehearsal and produced annually" (Dachs, 1964, p. 290). Mordden wrote that *Of Thee I Sing* "...was one of the most profitable shows of its time, enjoying an eight-month national tour...[and]virtually sold out performances in New York, a strikingly unusual situation for 1931" (Mordden, 1976, p. 116).

The Pulitzer Prize

On May 2, 1932, George S. Kaufman, Morrie Ryskind, and Ira Gershwin were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for drama for the musical play *Of Thee I Sing* (Mattfeld, 1952). This was the first time the prize had been given to a musical production raising it above its competition such as Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Robert E. Sherwood's *Reunion in Vienna* and Philip Barry's *The Animal Kingdom*, all presented in the same

year. Controversy and debate surrounded the announcement as Burns Mantle of the *Daily News* described:

> *Of Thee I Sing* is the most intelligent, the most consistent, the most timely satire of American politics that native theatre has yet entertained. But by no conceivable stretch can it be classed as a play in the accepted sense of that term. Strip it of its lyrics and its music and there will be little left of the prize-winner but a half-hour of farcical and satirical sketches. (Mordden, 1976, p. 117)

One wonders why a prize-winning musical like *Of Thee I Sing* is not constantly in demand of revival or why events and issues in the drama would not be relevant today. Certain stereotypes in the musical could be related to political figures in any generation but Lehman Engel summarized the lack of revivability of a musical so pertinent and alive with social comment in its day:

> In *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) most of the comedy comes out of contemporary political situations. It worked well enough in its own time to win the Pulitzer Prize.During the run, events in the news kept the plot alive: Today, it is meaningless, and the show, because it is built squarely on comedy, cannot be revived. It is significant that—and this is surely an important indication of modern-day artistry—the songs, including the lyrics, are not dated. The lyrics are universal and therefore enduring. Only the "comic" dialogue is entirely dated, and *Of Thee I Sing*, once funny because of it, is now impossible to revive because of it. (Engel, 1967, p. 112)

Its author, Kaufman, became personally involved in the 1952 revival but the musical was deemed a failure for the very reasons outlined so eloquently above by Engel (Goldstein, 1979).

Plot

"...the scene that greeted the eye at [the] rise [of the curtain] was a torchlight parade set to George Gershwin's music against a cityscape of skyscrapers, churches, and speakeasies...marching crowds were holding up banners in support of Wintergreen for president and singing the slogan 'He's the man the people choose—Loves the Irish and the Jews'" (Goldstein, 1979, p. 202). This was the jubilant awakening of what would proceed as an evening full of familiar yet not-too-real stereotypes and a few recognizable

characters. John P. Wintergreen is running for president of the United States on the platform of "love." He has vowed to wed the winner of the national beauty contest but instead falls in love with a newspaper columnist named Mary Turner. His reasons for marrying her are simple: "Not only is she beautiful, but, 'Some Girls Can Bake a Pie...'" (Goldstein, 1979, p. 202).

After he wins the election, with a ballet box stuffed by himself, he is confronted with his first scandal in office. The beauty-contest winner, Diana Devereaux, is upset at being pushed aside and sues. She also happens to be of French descent as the French Ambassador points out in song: "She's the illegitimate daughter of an illegitimate son of an illegitimate nephew of Napoleon" (Mordden, 1976, p. 114). This, of course, almost causes a national crisis with France and nearly brings on a war with France and Wintergreen finds himself being impeached. Things are not going well until it is announced that his wife is pregnant prompting the forgiving Senate to rethink their strategies "...since motherhood is if anything more inspiring to the American people than love. The Wintergreens have twins, and everything ends happily" (Mordden, 1976, p. 114).

Of Thee I Sing is not as light-headed as it sounds in a plot summary. The underlying messages referenced and satirized all branches of government "...and did so on the grounds of the venality, the egomaniac, and (in the instance of the Vice President) the sheer stupidity of those at the top. On the other hand, they had been careful to avoid alluding to any real officeholders, past or present, with the exception of a mild reference to Coolidge" (Goldstein, 1979, pp. 196-197).

Musical Style

Gershwin mixed the formalities of operetta with the rhythms and tendencies of popular songs of the day in the score for *Of Thee I Sing*. In this way, Gershwin helped bridge the gap between the European-inspired operetta and the new American ragtime and jazz

rhythms so popular during the 1930s in Tin Pan Alley. John Mason Brown of the *New York Post* dubbed it "a new and welcome departure in the world of entertainment...a musical comedy which dodges nearly all the clichés of its kind" (Mordden, 1976, p. 115). It seems fitting that George Gershwin conducted the orchestra at the New York premiere for *Of Thee I Sing* on the evening of December 26, 1931, at "8:20 sharp" (*New York Times*, 1931).

"Seldom on the musical-comedy stage had songs and dialogue been so well integrated...George Gershwin's lively music never failed to provide support for Kaufman's rapid pacing of the action" (Goldstein, 1979, p. 201). *Of Thee I Sing* became the first American musical play to have a published libretto which continued to sell out into its seventh printing (Goldstein, 1979; Mordden, 1976). The fact that *Of Thee I Sing* resembled operetta was due to the fact that the "art of arguing about public issues by means of laughter" (Smith, 1986, p. 161), perfected by Gilbert and Sullivan, was just what the plot called for in *Of Thee I Sing*.

In the song "The Senator from Minnesota," Vice President Throttlebottom addresses the senators, in an almost recitative fashion, in the midst of a roll call while he ponders as to the Senator's significance: "The country thinks it's got depression...Just wait until we get in session...and you'll find out what depression really means" and he continues to describe their business with rhythmic continuance: "To get business into tangles, we can guarantee more angles, than the town of Boston guarantees in Beans" (Gershwin, 1931, pp. 31-32). The song "Wintergreen for President" contains phrases from popular American songs of the day including "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here" and "It's a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" (Sherr, 1965).

Composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein thought the parallels between Gilbert and Sullivan and the Gershwins' *Of Thee I Sing* so great that he compared the first-act finales of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* and *Of Thee I Sing* on a 1950 presentation of the "Omnibus" series for television entitled "American Musical Comedy" (Bernstein, 1959).

Music appreciation students today are able to learn about the Depression, the Gershwins, and European operetta style all through one highly entertaining source—American musical theatre.

Historical Events

Historical events of the 1930s read like a thrilling movie script in a flag-waving society of prohibitioners looking for the good life. The crime and corruption, led mainly by figures like Alphonse "Scarface" Capone, continued well into the 1930s. Prohibition gave the Mafia and career gangsters a career but for Capone, in 1931, the tax man was his downfall. After taking in over $105,000,000 in 1927, Capone was indicted in 1931 for income tax evasion. He was convicted on Oct. 17, 1931, and sentenced to 11 years in prison and was "estimated to have netted $105,000,000 in 1927 alone" (*Oxford American History,* 1966, p. 145). This disruption of law and order was admirably illustrated in *Of Thee I Sing* which is not necessarily supposed to be about anything but "love." "...the play successfully lampooned hush-hush scandals, nonsensical debates, party politics, under-the-counter deals, political campaigns, and ridiculous bids for votes" (Laufe, 1969, p. 32).

If one could find a common thread throughout *Of Thee I Sing,* it is unqualified "Americana." It happened that in 1931, Congress was voting on what the national anthem for the United States should be. On March 3, 1931, an act of Congress declared "The Star Spangled Banner" to be the new national anthem for the United States of America (Mattfeld, 1952). It is ironic that such a significant act by the Congress in 1931 occurred in the same year as a Pulitzer-Prize winning musical about the American government was presented.

It is also ironic that the original plot idea for *Of Thee I Sing* centered around "...a presidential campaign in which the major issue was the choice of a national anthem" (Goldstein, 1979, p. 195). This earlier work was to be entitled *Tweedledee*, recalling

Lewis Carroll's "Tweedledee and Tweedledum" characters in *Alice In Wonderland*, in the hopes that one could not distinguish between either political party as one cannot really distinguish between Carroll's farcical characters. Kaufman and Ryskind wished for a plot with more romantic possibilities and scrapped the anthem idea (Goldstein, 1979). Finally, it is ironic that as the characters in *Of Thee I Sing* celebrate the joy and celebration of the birth of healthy twins, infantile paralysis was a widespread disease in many areas in 1931 (Mattfeld, 1952). None the less, musical theatre was on the breaking edge of historical occurrences, using history to both entertain and educate its audience.

If *Of Thee I Sing* stands for love, then there is no greater love than the preservation of a national treasure of historic significance. The United States is a country built on tradition and blood ties. And at one of the nation's lowest times, the preservation of heritage, whether satirized on the stage, or dedicated by a President, is an act of love of country. On June 17, 1931, the rededication, by President Herbert Hoover, of Abraham Lincoln's remodeled tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois, and the transference of the remains of the Mayflower's leader, Miles Standish, to a metal casket and proper burial in Duxbury, Massachusetts, can be seen as an act of patriotism (Mattfeld, 1952).

Social Conditions

"A lampoon of national politics...the new musical offered more wry comment [on society] than the Broadway audience was accustomed to hear on the tendency of the major parties to let trivial side issues dominate their campaigns and the habit of officeholders to seek self-aggrandizement" (Goldstein, 1979, p. 201). Even New York's mayor in 1931, Jimmy Walker, was mocked on the stage by Wintergreen himself.

The most obvious effect *Of Thee I Sing* had upon society of its day was the scandal that resulted from almost every aspect of the show. A major, almost racial, uprising produced by *Of Thee I Sing* in 1931 involved the France-America society. The France-America society was offended by the way the French were portrayed by the playwrights. "...a

complaint [stated] that the references to France in the play were so lacking in dignity as to be an offense against propriety... " (Goldstein, 1979, p. 203). Obviously, publicity like that was impossible to buy and kept audiences begging for tickets.

A second uprising occurred among drama critics concerning the Pulitzer Prize nod on May 2, 1932 to *Of Thee I Sing* (Goldstein, 1979). This helped to elevate the genre of musical theatre to a higher plane thereby opening doors for future daring innovations strikingly apparent in *Oklahoma!* (1943).

Yet another issue called attention to the musical theatre during the run of *Of Thee I Sing*. A lawsuit brought by radical poet, Walter Lowenfels, claimed the creators of *Of Thee I Sing* had plagiarized Lowenfels' yet unproduced play entitled *U.S.A. with Music* (Goldstein, 1979). Judge John M. Woolsey ruled the claim "groundless" and stated: "...the plaintiff cannot claim a copyright on words in the dictionary, such as the names of the seasons in the principal lyrics, or in the usual English idioms, or on ideas..." (Goldstein, 1979, p. 204).

Obviously, the musical theatre production *Of Thee I Sing* provided a comic look at the state of affairs in America during the Depression and gave telling social comment which today can be seen as a valued historical reference for the times.

> *Of Thee I Sing*...was the first real token of liberalism and a social conscience in the American musical theatre...[the writers and composers]...took a look at the calamitous state of affairs [the depression in America]. They did not like what they saw, and they thought it would be good to do something about it...With another election—and a crucial one—just around the corner, it was time, they felt for Broadway to develop a sense of political responsibility. (Smith, 1986, pp. 154; 160-161)

Fine Arts and Communication

Print

Of Thee I Sing reported on events of the time in its day as the comics do today in newspapers throughout the country. In the 1990s, late-night talk shows are not complete

without a satirical run-down of the daily activities of the President of the United States and his staff. One sees the beginnings of lampooning of Vice-Presidents with the treatment of Vice Presidential Throttlebottom in *Of Thee I Sing*.

Satire was becoming the craze in 1931, and fits well with the plot content in *Of Thee I Sing*. Candid-camera became a popular pastime in 1931 while the magazine, "Ballyhoo," saw its circulation soar. This magazine was concerned with the mockery of advertising and seemed to quench the thirst for the very foundation for entertainment in *Of Thee I Sing*, that being satire. The nation figured laughter was its best medicine in those troubled times (Mattfeld, 1993).

Music

Not all of society was consumed with the frivolous, for on December 25, 1931, the night before *Of Thee I Sing* opened on Broadway, the first complete broadcast of a live stage performance was aired on radio from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. The National Broadcasting Company brought Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* to a country in need of cultural diversion and beauty (Mattfeld, 1993). Experimentation had been on the rise since the American premiere, on March 19, 1931, of the avant-garde opera *Wozzeck* by Austrian composer Alban Berg who saw its first premeire in Berlin in 1925. This performance of *Wozzeck*, conducted by Leopold Stokowski at the Philadelphia at the Academy of Music, marked the first of two performances in America in 1931, the other being at the Met on November 19, 1931 (Mattfeld, 1993, p. 471).

Dance and Film

Innovation to parallel that of the musical theatre and the concert stage was to be found in the choreography of Martha Graham. Her *Primitive Mysteries*, premiered in 1931, introduced her and a new style of dance to hungry audiences (Mattfeld, 1993). At the same time, Walt Disney was making the first technicolor film, *Flowers and Trees*, propelling

cinematic art forward into the future just as *Of Thee I Sing* had done for the future of musical theatre.

Summary

Of Thee I Sing was a monument to progress in 1931 during a time of total and utter depression of heart and pocketbook. Its run of 441 performances through days of breadlines and applesellers, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and becoming the first musical play in print, *Of Thee I Sing* is a testament to the ability of the creative spirit to reach the audience. Be it by truth, satire, drama, or comedy, the creators of *Of Thee I Sing* struck a chord that society needed to hear.

Of Thee I Sing did reflect contemporary American society in 1931 by providing straightforward social comment satirizing politics of the day but, rather than glorify the rampant social corruption caused by bootlegging and gangsters, the plot of *Of Thee I Sing* focused on love rather than the corruption in the streets. *Of Thee I Sing* contains conditions of ongoing concern to society in 1931. It challenged the audience to laugh at the effects of the Depression in America in the 1930s by illustrating real problems of governmental corruption and ineptitude through humor and music.

The future of America was unsure, but the future of musical theatre was assured. It spoke to people by involving the people it spoke to: "What transformed the '30s was that the president of the United States became part of our struggle. How simply and directly he spoke to us from the beginning: Relief, Recovery, Reform...he acted in a dazzling 100 days: banking reform, farm credits, the National Industrial Recovery Act..." (Tillie Olsen, *Newsweek*, 1994, p. 26). "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" (1932) became the song of the people for a country in need not knowing what the future would hold for them (Mattfeld, 1993). Musical theatre continued to speak to those people and preserve their heritage and daily struggles in song for future generations to ponder and sympathize with their struggle, if only for a few hours in a darkened theatre.

The 1940s—*Oklahoma!* —1943

Introduction

In 1943, the musical *Oklahoma!* influenced a change in the artistic style of the American musical theatre. The integration of music, book, dance, and design with plot, in Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's musical *Oklahoma!*, provided a new role model for the future of the musical on Broadway. The musical *Oklahoma!* reflected the 1940s by illustrating life in rural America during World War II. Americans were suffering from a continuing economic depression and *Oklahoma!* allowed them to escape from the real world for a time.

The 1940s

The 1940s in America proved to be a pivotal time in the lives of the American people, due to the effects of World War, and forever altered their beliefs and habits. No less important was the maturation of what is now known as the classic American musical. In its infancy in the 1920s with *Show Boat*, the musical was considered a musical play with strong tendencies toward operetta style evidenced by the music and plot. With *Of Thee I Sing* in the 1930s, Gershwin seemed to take a step back to the European style of operetta while retaining the "popular" aspect of theatre music. With the musical *Oklahoma!* in 1943, the form and impact of the musical on the American psyche would change forever. "If the thirties were...*the* decade for durable songs of quality, it was the 1940s and 1950s which had the largest percentage of great shows which have endured *as shows*" (Jackson, 1977, p. 45). The state of Oklahoma, which achieved statehood in 1907, inherited a theme song from the musical *Oklahoma!* that lives in the memories of Broadway audiences as well as Oklahoma natives. The state, in 1943, witnessed a renewed feeling of community and national pride due to the attention focused on it by *Oklahoma!*.

Production History

The success of this unique integration of book, music, dance, and design was demonstrated in *Oklahoma!*—the first collaboration of the musical team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Add to the team the innovative choreographer, Agnes De Mille, with her unique vision of American frontier life and activity, and there was born a new art form. Thus began the "golden age" of the American musical on Broadway. *Oklahoma!* opened on March 31, 1943, at the St. James Theatre in New York and enjoyed the longest run of any musical to date (1948) with 2,212 performances on Broadway (Jackson, 1977; Hischak, 1993). Joseph P. Swain places the number of Broadway performances for *Oklahoma!* at 2,248, possibly including out-of-town previews (Swain, 1990). In 1947, *Oklahoma!* was presented at the Drury Lane Theatre in London and ran for 1,543 performances. The Hollywood film version is often seen today on cable television (*Turner Network Television*, 1994). In all, *Oklahoma!* returned over $100,000,000 on original investments, and became an instant hit, and propelled the newly formed team of Rodgers and Hammerstein forward in their successful work in musical history (Hischak, 1993).

Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals worked because of the formula for plot that they frequently used in their most successful musicals like *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific* (1949). The typical plot of a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical usually centered around two sets of couples, one romantic and one comic, an antagonist to add some spice, and a family matriarch to provide level-headed advice (Hischak, 1993).

In the case of *Oklahoma!*, the unsuccessful 1931 play by Lynn Riggs entitled *Green Grow the Lilacs* provided the stimulus. The action is set in "midwestern Indian territory" with the plot formula containing conflicts between the "farmer" and the "cowboy." Curly is the lead cowboy, happy to be alive, and greatly optimistic about taking his girl, Laurie, to the box social later that evening. In fact, this whole story centers around a box social and the events surrounding it.

Plot

The story opens with the matriarch, Aunt Eller, alone on the stage churning butter. Normally, flashy opening chorus numbers were anticipated, but *Oklahoma!* was different from the start. Agnes De Mille recalled that monumental occasion:

> ...the curtain went up on a woman churning butter; a very fine baritone came on stage singing the closest thing to lieder our theatre has produced. He sang exquisitely with his whole heart about what a morning in our Southwest was like. At the end, people gave an audible sigh and looked at one another—this had seldom happened before. It was music. They sat right back and opened their hearts. The show rolled. (Mordden, 1976, p. 188)

Laurie and Curly enter and have a brief disagreement over how they are getting to the box social prompting Laurie to accept the invitation of the slippery ranchhand Jud Fry instead. Will Parker, a rodeo cowboy, and his girlfriend Ado Annie enter to complete the formula and add some more information to the story as well as some comic relief. Will has just returned from Kansas City, where all is modern, while Ado Annie has been in distress over which man to marry, Will, the rodeo cowboy, or the feisty Persian peddler, Ali Hakim (Bordman, 1992). In her words: she "cain't say no" to either one.

After attending the box social, Curly and Laurie realize they are meant for each. They must fend off Jud, the ranchhand, whose knife is trained on Laurie as she stands trapped atop a fiery haystack. In a struggle with Curly, Jud falls on his own knife, is pronounced dead, and Curly is vindicated of any implication in his death.

He and Laurie are married and, as Hammerstein likes it, a happy ending is had by all, with the full cast singing the title song as the newlyweds assemble on the porch. The show is as fresh and complete as a ripe row of golden corn. As Hischak states: "*Oklahoma!* pushed Broadway toward a more rural, innocent kind of musical. For the next twenty years, musicals, by and large, would shun urbane wit for more honest type of characters and situations" (Hischak, 1993, p. 186).

Musical Style

The music in *Oklahoma!* does not merely accompany the story or provide interesting interludes to the action. It is the key element in the progress of the dramatic action and characterization of the players on the stage. When comparing the difference between *Show Boat* and *Oklahoma!*, Deems Taylor observed that:

> The score of *Show Boat* contains twenty musical numbers, all different—a feast of lovely tunes that punctuate the action without necessarily advancing it. It is almost *too* tuneful. The score of *Oklahoma!* comprises just twelve basic musical numbers. But these twelve are not just...reprised. They are woven in and out of the story, sometimes under dialogue, sometimes quoted briefly, at others repeated in various guises....(Taylor, 1953, pp. 172-173)

Hammerstein's lyrics grow out of the drama of the play. When a comic element is needed, the lyrics reflect the comic thoughts of the character. Dramatic emotion is dealt with in much the same manner with the thoughts and feelings of the characters involved with the continuing drama of the plot. Richard Rodgers conceived of musical expressions for the dramatic action in his musicals with unequalled ease and craftsmanship. For example, he composed "Oh What A Beautiful Mornin" for *Oklahoma!* in ten minutes time. Oscar Hammerstein commented on their collaborative efforts:

> This is the annoying part of our collaboration. It takes me [Hammerstein] a week, and sometimes three weeks, to write the words of a song. After I give them to him [Rodgers], it takes him an hour or two and his work is over. (Hammerstein, 1949, p. 17)

Much of the music in *Oklahoma!* reflects the romanticism of the nineteenth century European compositions with their chromaticism and vivid imagery of events through music (Swain, 1990). "What is remarkable in *Oklahoma!* is that he [Rodgers] succeeds in retaining a folk-song flavor in many of the numbers while refusing the frequent cadences that such a flavor might suggest" (Swain, 1990, p. 81). Characterizations are heard in *Oklahoma!* in the style of music given to each character. Curly's songs are filled with folk-song charm while Laurie's music is of a more romantic, lyric nature. Will's songs are in a more up-beat folk-song style, while Ado Annie's songs contain an adolecent quality with

simple accompaniments. In sharp contrast to all of these is Jud whose only song is composed as a funeral durge (Swain, 1990).

Historical Events

During the 1940s, some of the most vivid and abrupt changes in the history of American civilization occurred, reshaping society forever. America at war, concentration camps, Adolph Hitler, and eight million Americans unemployed in the continuing depression, feared for safety of loved-ones abroad fighting for freedom—all these things affected American life in 1943, from the plains of Oklahoma to the boroughs of New York City. Radio, magazines, and newsprint were the only contact for the citizens on the homefront to keep abreast of events here and abroad (Brinkley, 1994).

Escape from current events might be found in the company of neighbors or a good book, but for New York theatre audiences, witnessing the musical *Oklahoma!* in 1943 provided an escape far removed from the lives they knew. One might question whether events and activities in the musical *Oklahoma!* mirrored American society in ways they were not aware of. Musical theatre has the ability to convey common characters in common situations while simultaneously reaching and comparing many different socio-economic levels, intelligence levels, and age levels. Americans were searching for something to help them reminisce about the way it used to be when all was at peace. *Oklahoma!* helped them realize some serenity and a sense of nostalgia, if only for a moment.

World War II

American history was the focus, as it was with *Show Boat* and most of the musicals contained in this study. For many on the East Coast, this may have been their only opportunity to "visit" the great American Southwest. In 1943, World War II was continuing. At the Casablanca Conference on January 14, 1943, President Franklin

Delano Roosevelt and his ally Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain met to discuss the "unconditional surrender of Germany, Italy, and Japan" (*Variety Music Cavalcade*, 1957, p. 546). Benito Mussolini, Premier of Italy, resigned on July 25, 1943, ending hostilities with the United States on September 8, 1943. On December 24, 1943, General Dwight David Eisenhower was appointed as the Supreme Commander of the American forces in the invasion of Europe (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). The two-year-old war had cost the American people $8,000,000,000 by 1943.

Industrialization

In 1943, a postal-zone numbering system was implemented in 178 cities by Postmaster General Frank C. Walker to expedite mail delivery (*Oxford American History*, 1966) and, on October 16, 1943, Chicago's first subway was opened to the public (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). In *Oklahoma!*, this testament to progress and efficiency in moving mail as well as people is echoed in the character Will's excitement about modernization in the song "Kansas City." Upon his return from the rodeo in Kansas City, Will tells about the fascinating contemporary people and things to be found in the big city with the refrain "Ev'rythin's up to date in Kansas City" (Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1943, p. 39).

Telephones, skyscrapers, and "gas buggies goin' by theirsel's" were a few of the reasons Will figured that Kansas City had "...gone about as fur as they could go!" (Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1943, p. 39). One must remember that *Oklahoma!* is set in the early 1900s so these modern conventions would be quite new to those living away from the progress of a larger metropolitan area. On the other hand, in the 1940s and specifically in 1943, such innovations were changing the way Americans lived and worked paralleling the plot of the musical.

It is ironic that during 1943, rationing of gas, sugar, etc., became a commonplace factor in the everyday lives of Americans while *Oklahoma!*'s opening scene is in a meadow

abundant with corn. "The corn is as high as an elephant's eye..." (Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1943, p. 17) is the description Curly gives of his homeland, symbolizing the optimism of better times ahead.

Social Conditions

The Working Woman

In 1943, women were being called upon to provide much needed support for armed forces abroad. Whether it be as a riveter on an airplane assembly line or as a member of the newly formed women's groups for the Armed Forces—"Wacs," "Waves," "Spars," or "Wasps," women were being given more opportunities to serve the common good outside the home (*Variety Music Cavalcade*, 1957). Parallels in *Oklahoma!* are numerous. Specifically, the plot of *Oklahoma!* centers around the women in the story, first, Laurie's dilemma of who is to take her to the box social, Curly or Jud, and, second, Ado Annie's question of who she should marry, the peddler or Will. Again, as Parthy in *Show Boat*, Aunt Eller provides the quiet and constant voice of reason throughout their agonizing (Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1943). Specifically, the character of Ado Annie modeled a new kind of women for the musical stage and stood as an icon for modern American women in the 1940s. More important, Rodgers and Hammerstein were looking at the future role of the woman in society and gave that vision to their characterization of Ado Annie in the 1940s.

Racism and Social Standing

Racism was still a problem in 1943 evidenced by the June 20 race riots in Detroit, Michigan. Over a period of two days, 35 died and more than 500 were wounded. Other riots of the same year occurred in Mobile, Alabama; Los Angeles, California; Beaumont, Texas; and Harlem in New York City. The song from *Oklahoma!* which opens Act II entitled: "The Farmer and the Cowman" subtly addressed this societal violence. As if

calling a square dance, the barker asks why everyone cannot get along: "One man likes to push a plough, The other likes to chase a cow, But that's no reason why they cain't be friends" (Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1943, p. 142). The refrain suggests world peace or at least local peace: "Territory folks should stick together, Territory folks should all be pals..." (Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1943, p. 143). The differing strata of society in *Oklahoma!* is also evidenced by Laurie, who seems upper-middle class as compared with Curly who is barely getting by. Finally, Jud, who lives in a smokehouse on Aunt Eller's property, constitutes the lowest class in the drama.

High moral standards and good, clean American values prevail in *Oklahoma!* with the innocence and purity of Laurie and Ado Annie. On the other hand, the lure of the big city for Will and the depravity and lust displayed by Jud signify differing strata of society. There were not any racial conflicts in *Oklahoma!* because the social conflict arose between occupations rather than heritage. "*Oklahoma!* turned out to be a people's opera, unpretentious and perfectly modern, but of interest equally to audiences in New York and in Des Moines" (Smith, 1981, p. 198).

Suggested Symbolism

All of this activity contradicts the plot of *Oklahoma!* on the surface. Although, due to the serious concentration on the war and effect of World War II, this writer wishes to suggest that the war was symbolically represented in the plot of *Oklahoma!* in the following ways. First, the conflicts between the "cowmen" and the "farmer" could be seen as representing the conflicts between the Allies and the Axis powers during World War II or the racial conflicts between blacks and whites in America. Second, Laurie's innocence comes in direct conflict with the worldliness and corruption and fear Jud elicits from her. These characters' lives are representative of the peace and serenity of American life before the attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor throwing the country into a state of flux and introducing an element of fear into an otherwise "safe" society. Third, the matriarch

character Aunt Eller might be seen as Lady Liberty representing the past as tranquil and inviting but keeping her torch lit and her mind and heart open throughout the musical, to all who pass by her door.

Fine Arts and Communication

Music

A vast amount of material was developed relating to the war which presented thoughts and ideas to society through the performing arts in 1943. For example, the most popular songs in 1943 dealt directly with the war providing telling social comment on life behind enemy lines or sorely needed emotional buoyancy for those on the homefront. Songs dealt with longing for home like "I'll Be Seeing You," a 1938 Sammy Cahn/Irving Kahal song popularized in 1943, and "You'll Never Know" by Mack Gordon and Harry Warren from the Academy Award winning film *Hello, Frisco, Hello* (*Variety Music Cavalcade*, 1957, p. 546). Other songs portrayed life in battle such as "What Do You Do in the Infantry?" by Frank Loesser and "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer" by Harold Adamson and Jimmy McHugh (*Variety Music Cavalcade*, 1957, p. 546).

Musical Theatre

Some musicals did deal directly with the war in 1943. *Something for the Boys* by Cole Porter "...was a wartime show boasting one of Porter's most winning scores..." (Mordden, 1976, p. 196) and Hammerstein's *Carmen Jones* featured a translation of Bizet's opera *Carmen* with a contemporary setting of a parachute factory in America during World War II and an all-black cast. Its 502 performances and two return New York engagements during the 1940s attest to its relevance to audiences of the time (Hischak, 1993).

America needed something big, optimistic and memorable. Many households boast living World War II veterans who saw *Oklahoma!*, and subsequently "bought and kept the

original-cast record" (Pasqua, 1993, p. 408). The production played to over 1.5 million servicemen through overseas USO tours (Pasqua, 1993).

Film

Motion pictures were probably the most sought-after and widely available form of entertainment during the year 1943. They served as a valuable source of relaying information of major battles from the front by way of newsreels illustrating the events. Irving Berlin's *This is the Army* was based on the 1942 flag-waving Broadway extravaganza of the same name. The film *Stage Door Canteen* was studded with famous Hollywood personalities. Both films supremely illustrated the conditions of war as well as the support and pride Americans had for their warriors. One of the most famous testaments to the war was the film *Casablanca* which centers around the German's march into Paris in 1940 (Brinkley, 1994).

Dance

The insertion of a "dream" ballet at the end of Act I in *Oklahoma* was not a new concept. George Balanchine was the first to use ballet on Broadway in the plot of a musical in *On Your Toes* (1936) and established the practice for others to follow (Rosenberg, 1993). Dream ballets had appeared in the musicals *I Married an Angel* in 1938, *Pal Joey* in 1940 and *Lady in the Dark* in 1941 (Hischak, 1993). Agnes De Mille choreographed *Oklahoma!* after her successful choreography in 1942 of Aaron Copland's ballet *Rodeo* (Sadie, 1980).

Agnes De Mille's vision of Laurie's struggle with herself as to which date to accept to the box social in *Oklahoma!* differs from these previous examples in many unique ways. Integration of book, music, and dance was not a new idea either, but in the hands of De Mille, dance became an important element for storytelling because it *did* tell the story through movement and pantomime (Smith, 1981). De Mille's combination of traditional ballet and actual western styles of dance from square-dance to lively hoe-down steps to

show-girl flirtations were woven together with reminiscences of the songs in the first Act. Playwright/Director Arthur Laurents made the following observation of Agnes De Mille's contribution to the metamorphosis of *Green Grow the Lilacs* into *Oklahoma!*:

"...[Hammerstein] left out the heroine's sexuality. Agnes restored it in the dance. That's what justified the whole relationship with Jud; you'd never know it from the book of the show, but she [De Mille] did it in her ballets" (Rosenberg, 1993, p. 134).

De Mille (1980) described how her ideas for the dream ballet fit in with Rodgers and Hammerstein's vision of the story:

> The ballet...showed what was going on in her mind and heart, her terrors, her fears, her hopes; so in fact the happiness of her life, her life itself, depended on the choice. And the first act, which normally would have ended with a bland and ordinary musical comedy finale, ended starkly with the murder of the hero. The audience was caught on the suspense of the girl's terror. (p. 188).

The dances illustrated by De Mille in *Oklahoma!* were a definite reflection of and introduction to a society that few in New York may ever have otherwise witnessed. The fact that this American-bred choreographer, De Mille, was educating her audience in American dance forms through the American musical attests to the ability of the musical to teach, inform, and preserve American art at its best.

Summary

With the creation of the musical *Oklahoma!* in 1943, the artistic style of the American musical theatre was forever changed. *Oklahoma!*'s integration of music, book, dance, and design propelled the musical forward into the future. Through the genius and foresight of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Oklahoma!* provided a model for generations of musical storytellers to emulate. Character and plot were successfully developed and expanded through carefully positioned musical numbers which succeeded in propelling the action forward while making the audience fully aware of a character's successes, struggles, goals, and desires.

The musical *Oklahoma!* reflected its times by instilling a pride of community in the state of Oklahoma, and America, through song. During this time of World War and continuing economic depression, Americans needed to reflect on their roots. *Oklahoma!* provided the needed reminiscence of more genial and stable times past, and symbolically reflected the events of the day. *Oklahoma!* dealt with ongoing conditions of society in 1943, specifically, power struggles, varying social strata, and the expanding role of women in society. *Oklahoma!* illustrated the constant struggle for power between the farmer and the cowman and magnifyed the contrasting strata of society exhibited by the economic differences between Laurie, Curly, and Jud. Finally, the powerful character of the women in *Oklahoma!* reflected the woman's role in society as it was in 1943 and gave women powerful role models for the future. Power struggles between the axis and allies in Europe, the varying economic conditions of Americans, and the new opportunities for women in the workforce were all current conditions of society in 1943.

The arts in 1943 America reflected conditions abroad during World War II through songs, plays, musicals, and films whose subject matter dealt directly with the war, whether through personal accounts of war or longing and sorrow for loved ones abroad. The title song from *Oklahoma!* gave that state an anthem and a sense of national pride and place, while the choreography of Agnes De Mille brought the flavor of the American Southwest to the theatrical stage.

After World War II, American life changed forever. Progress would be seen in every aspect of society and moved civilization forward at an accelerated pace. The musical theatre became a voice of the people and reflected the changing times while, in the real world outside the theatre door, nuclear warfare provided a new threat. With the bombing of Hiroshima, on August 6, 1945, the world as Americans knew it was coming to an abrupt end.

CHAPTER III

AN EVOLVING SOCIETY

The 1950s—*West Side Story* —1957

Introduction

West Side Story premiered in 1957 and was chosen for this study due to its introduction of tragedy and modern dance into musical theatre production. Through the talents of Jerome Robbins, Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, and Stephen Sondheim *West Side Story* provided an integration of elements of plot, character, and action using new musical harmonies, with jazz and latin influences, and modern dance. *West Side Story* reflected contemporary society in 1957 by portraying conflict between recent Puerto Rican immigrants to New York City and the existing neighborhood youth. Social issues of racism, juvenile delinquency, poverty, and gang violence, contemporary to 1957 American society, were dealt with openly in *West Side Story.* At the date of this writing, 1994, these issues are still of immense social concern.

The 1950s

Americans in the 1950s saw changes in their world they had only previously imagined through tales of fantasy. Spacemen, rockets to space, air-raid shelters in the backyard, and rock and roll altered the American psyche and lifestyle. Along with this alteration in society came an abrupt shift from musical comedy to dramatic musical tragedy in the continuing evolution of the Broadway musical.

Production History

West Side Story, which premiered at the Winter Garden Theatre on Broadway on September 26, 1957, ran for only 734 performances, but introduced its audience and the world to new experiences in sight and sound in the musical theatre. Plot, character, and

theme combined to tell the story with the addition of modern dance. What critics and audiences witnessed on September 26, 1957, was arresting to say the least.

> While the 1950s had seen a couple of exceptionally written superhits (like *Guys and Dolls* [1950] and *My Fair Lady*), *West Side Story* was the first musical blockbuster to shatter new ground since *South Pacific* (1949). *West Side* was a little too advanced for its audiences, who seem to have been uncomfortable with the subject matter.... (Suskin, 1990, p. 697)

The fact that *West Side Story* dealt with gang violence by delinquent youths of differing cultures in the corrupt inner canyons on New York City's West Side was a direct reflection of America's inner city society. *West Side Story* displayed the poverty, juvenile delinquency, oppression, and prejudice of the big-city which was evident in the community and was a growing threat to society in 1957. "During the first half of the '50s, teenagers showed the same low, unalarming profile they had presented in the '40s, but by mid-decade the first dark shoots of rebellion began to sprout in the big-city slums" (*This Fabulous Century*, 1970, p. 234).

John Chapman named *West Side Story*, in his review in the *Daily News* "...a bold new kind of musical theatre—a juke-box Manhattan opera. The various fine skills of show business are put to new tests, and as a result a different kind of musical has emerged. The manner of telling the story is a provocative and artful blend of music, dance, and plot" (Suskin, 1990, p. 695). Others respond to *West Side Story* with this same awareness of change in the format of musical theatre. After seeing *West Side Story*'s premiere, John McClain, critic for the *Journal American* , wrote "*West Side Story* is something quite new in the theatre, and it is just great" (Suskin, 1990, p. 696). Ethan Mordden described *West Side Story* as "...hold[ing] classic status as a breakthrough music drama..." (Mordden, 1976, p. 263).

Even Leonard Bernstein, composer for *West Side Story*, was not quite sure what to make of his new collaboration with director/choreographer Jerome Robbins, book-writer Arthur Laurents, and librettist Stephen Sondheim. Bernstein was quoted in a *West Side*

Story log in New York on January 6, 1949, as stating: "Street brawls, double death...it's all much less important than the bigger idea of making a musical that tells a tragic story in musical-comedy terms...can it succeed?" (*Findings*, 1982, p. 144). Musical tragedy was a new departure for musical theatre and it did expand the possibilities for the future of musical theatre in America. "Bernstein, Robbins, and Laurents proved that the conventions of musical comedy were much more flexible and expressive than the public, producers, and most critics had thought—that a 'musical tragedy' derived from 'musical comedy' was possible" (Smith, 1981, p. 235).

Nineteen-fifty-seven, marks a year of dichotomy of lifestyle, moral issues, and societal value systems practiced side-by-side in American society and reflected in the musical theatre. *The Music Man* premiered on December 19, 1957, at the Majestic Theatre in New York City and gave American audiences what they expected from musical comedy. The setting was a suburban small town in Iowa as opposed to the mean city streets of the urban setting for *West Side Story*. The familiarity and accessibility of the character types in *The Music Man* directly conflicted with the racial mix illustrated through the elements of love and hate between the characters in *West Side Story*. It is also interesting to note that *The Music Man* ran for 1, 377 performances, compared with 734 for *West Side Story*. One could suggest that Americans were unwilling to let go of the security of the past for the uncertainty and corruption of the future.

Plot

Director and choreographer Jerome Robbins got the idea for *West Side Story* from the tragic Shakespearean drama *Romeo and Juliet*, but *West Side Story* is set in modern times with the conflict arising between Puerto Rican and Italian/American families in the inner city. Due to the rivalry in the 1950s between the immigrant Puerto Ricans, recently arrived in New York City, and established American street gangs in the "slums of mid-Manhattan's West Side New York City [Robbins] made Juliet a Puerto Rican immigrant, Maria, and

Romeo a second-generation American, Tony" (Smith, 1981, p. 234). Obviously, the creators of *West Side Story* were not afraid to have their audience look in society's mirror - the musical stage, and face the truth of the streets.

West Side Story begins with a "Prologue," a purely musical introduction, danced with a mixture of styles from jazz to ballet, which illustrates the frustration and ongoing warfare between rival gangs—the Anglo "Jets" and the Puerto Rican "Sharks." Each is trying desperately to achieve an identity and feeling of belonging while defending his "turf." Riff, the leader of the Jets, and Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks, meet for a "war-council" at a dance at the school gym, which in this case is "neutral territory." The connection to Romeo and Juliet is more vividly seen in the characters of Maria, Bernardo's sister, and Tony, Riff's Polish-American friend, and ex-Jet.

Tony and Maria fall in love "at first sight" at the dance which infuriates the rival gangs and heats up the racial tension in the drama. After Tony confesses his love for Maria, on her balcony, in this case a fire-escape in the projects, he departs and promises to see her the following day. The secondary romantic leads in the drama are Bernardo, leader of the Sharks, and his girlfriend Anita who is an adviser to Maria. In a poignant declaration of life in America, the Sharks, Anita, and Bernardo launch into a song full of irony about being an immigrant in American society. In the song, life in Puerto Rico is described in such a manner: "Always the hurricanes blowing, Always the population growing...And the money owing, And the babies crying, And the bullets flying" (Laurents, 1957, p. 51). Anita believes that America is the place for her: "I like to be in America! O.K. by me in America! Everything free in America," while her friend Rosalia provides the voice of reason: "For a small fee in America" (Laurents, 1957, p. 52).

At midnight, the same evening, the opposing gangs meet at Doc's drugstore where Tony works. In this musical, Doc is the patriarch figure, trying desperately to calm the tension between the groups, while the only other adults in the play, policemen and a school principal, are only subjects of ridicule by the gangs. As the talk of a fight or "rumble"

commences, the reason is all but forgotten as a list of weapons is shouted out at a fever pitch: "...Sticks, Rocks, Poles, Cans, Bricks, Bats, Clubs, Chains," with Tony finally ridiculing the proceedings with anger: "Bottles, knives, guns! What a coop full of chickens...Afraid to get close in? Afraid to slug it out? Afraid to use plain skin?" (Laurents, 1957, p. 68). They all agree to a fair fight between two chosen representatives, but prepare to be tricked.

The next day, Tony and Maria meet at the bridal shop where she works and enact a fake wedding ceremony which is immediately followed by one of the greatest culminations of music and plot achieved on the musical stage. Bernstein and Sondheim created a quintet between the major players in the drama depicting their collective, while differing, emotions of the night ahead. Swain's description of the "Tonight" quintet is superb:

> The dramatic purpose of the quintet is to present the five principal characters anticipating the coming evening in a way that summarizes their fated courses in the drama...[and] by dramatizing this inextricable intertwining of love and hate in consistent musical motives and symbols, the quintet summarizes the progress of the tragedy just before the fatal moment. It is the musical-dramatic climax of the first act and the greatest operatic ensemble ever composed for the Broadway stage. (Swain, 1990, pp. 228; 234)

When knives appear at the rumble under the highway, the proceedings turn into a dance depicting the battle between Riff and Bernardo. Bernardo kills Riff while, in shock, Tony, who was sent by Maria to stop the rumble, takes Riff's knife and kills Bernardo. The police siren signals the others in the gangs to leave and they disappear into the shadows with Maria's brother, Bernardo, lying dead at the hand of her boyfriend, Tony.

Anita tries to finally convince Maria that she must get rid of Tony: "A boy like that who'd kill your brother, Forget that boy and find another! One of your own kind, stick to your own kind" (Laurents, 1957, p. 125). Maria makes Anita see the strength of her love and sends her to Tony with a message that Maria will meet him and they will get away. Anita delivers the message to the drug store and is assaulted by the Jets, again illustrated in dance, out of revenge for Bernardo killing Riff. In anger, and with revenge, Anita tells

them that Chino, Maria's fiancé, has killed Maria so Tony will never see her again. Tony finds out what Anita has said and runs out into the street begging Chino to shoot him also. Chino sees Tony just as Maria calls to Tony that she has come to meet him. Chino shoots Tony while Maria rushes to catch him as he falls to the ground. Maria picks up Chino's gun and speaks with newfound anger: "We all killed him; and my brother and Riff. I, too. I can kill now because I hate now" (Laurents, 1957, p. 143). The curtain falls on this new page in the history of musical theatre told through musical tragedy.

As Smith summarizes, Maria and Tony are "Romantic idealists brought down by the conflict with the violent reality of their families' hatred" (Smith, 1981, p. 234). *West Side Story* does contain elements previously discussed in this study. Racial issues and the integration of elements of musical theatre are seen in *Show Boat* (1927), while sarcasm directed toward authority and society is witnessed in *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), and finally, the integration of dance by Agnes De Mille to motivate and illustrate the action of the plot is evident in the musical *Oklahoma!* (1943). *West Side Story* continues all of these innovative characteristics of previous musical theatre productions and adds the element of supreme tragedy and illustrative dance mixing jazz and ballet. From this point on into the future, more musical theatre productions deal with controversial subjects of a sometimes questionable nature.

Musical Style

Leonard Bernstein changed the language of the musical theatre in his composition of *West Side Story.* He mixed jazz and the classical symphonic style with dissonant harmonies and motivating syncopated rhythm to create a wholly new musical theatre experience. Swain describes Bernstein's impact on musical theatre in 1957:

> ...the 'Prologue' establishes not only the significant melodic and rhythmic elements for the play, but also significant harmonic procedures and pitches, C, A, and

> F-sharp, which will unify the musical numbers in a way that no other Broadway composer has attempted. *West Side Story* is the first American musical play to be organized around a central pitch. (Swain, 1990, p. 217)

West Side Story is filled with "new" sounds, at least new by Broadway musical standards. Chromatic intervals, tone clusters, mixed meters, and syncopation provide an unsettled feeling and a motivation for the plot as viewed through Robbins choreography. "How striking these elements are, striking in the sense of being on the fringe of the Western tonal language" (Swain, 1990, p. 213). In her biography of Bernstein, Joan Peyser suggested why Bernstein composed *West Side Story*: "With *West Side Story*, he [Bernstein] wanted fun, money, and Shakespeare in a work that would reflect leftist values, with its emphasis on oppressed youth in the United States" (Peyser, 1987, p. 85). Obviously, Bernstein was aware of events in society and included them in his vision of *West Side Story*.

One unique element of musical integration in *West Side Story* is Bernstein's use of the interval of a tritone, which appears in Tony's song "Something's Coming" and is then inverted for the beginning of "Maria." This interval was woven throughout the entire score of *West Side Story* and was used as a kind of tragic leitmotif. "Bernstein does not use leitmotifs in the Wagnerian sense of symbolizing characters or emotions, but rather as a means to connect the musical parts in long chains" (Swain, 1990, p. 218). As Swain states, the tritone was "...the most famous example of a motivic and thematic integration so thorough that by it alone is *West Side Story* set apart from any preceding Broadway musical...[*West Side Story* has] a sound so particular that it seems impossible to mistake any of its songs for those of another play" (Swain, 1990, pp. 208-209). Brooks Atkinson's review from the *New York Times* gave his impression of Bernstein's music: "Although the material is horrifying, the workmanship is admirable. The astringent score has moments of tranquillity and rapture, and occasionally a touch of sardonic humor" (*New York Times*, 1957, p. 14).

Lyricist Stephen Sondheim provided much of the social comment taken directly from society in *West Side Story*. His reasoning for this new kind of musical tragedy was as he stated: "The public is anxious for out-of-the-ordinary musicals. The barriers are going down in both subject matter and form. That is what makes it a period of transition" (Dachs, 1964, p. 295).

Historical Events

Many of the thoughts and emotions portrayed on the stage in *West Side Story* reflect the historical events of the time. On the other hand, many events paint a picture of a life very different from the life in America that *West Side Story* was trying to represent. Author John Updike described life as he knew it in the 1950s: "The '50s in my mind's eye are a waxy blue-white, a shining cold-war iceberg drifting by in the wake of the khaki-brown '40s and the grit-gray '30s" (Updike, 1994, p. 36). Updike called the 1950s a "post-war" era and compared it to the 1920s in that respect.

> $10,000 bought a house, and a quarter bought a gallon of gas. You could walk most city streets without a qualm at 2 in the morning, and as to family values—boy, did we have family values! Divorce rates dropped, as did the age when people got married. Wives churned out new Americans at the highest birthrate in decades. (Updike, 1994, p. 36)

Marriage, happy homes, and the safety illustrated above by Updike, is all but a dream to the characters in *West Side Story*. This writer finds it interesting that audiences in 1957 could relate at all to *West Side Story*. One could speculate that the success of the film in 1961 appears to be related to a trickle-down of changes in society—changes not so foreign and forbidding by the 1960s.

In 1957, Americans were worried about being attacked by the Soviet Union. On August 1, 1957, "The North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) [was] established by the United States and Canada" (Linton, 1977, p. 387) because as Updike stated: "The danger of mutual annihilation [U.S. and U.S.S.R.] was real and dreadful enough, and

percolated through every psyche...the nuclear jitters coexisted with a private optimism and a shy, domestic hedonism...In the '50s, there was the nuclear family and...nuclear weapons, featuring the H-bomb" (Updike, 1994, p. 36).

Americans immediately began constructing bomb-shelters in their backyards. On November 25, 1957, Dr. Edward Teller "urged that the U.S. strengthen its heavy bomber bases as a safeguard against Soviet missile attack" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 580). The threat of Communism in 1957 was not dealt with directly in *West Side Story* but one could suggest a parallel between society's fear of Communism with the fear between the Jets and Sharks brought upon by racial prejudice.

An interesting irony in the area of transportation occurred in 1957. On April 7, 1957, the last electric passenger streetcar, which was put into service in 1888, made a final run, while a race was developing which caught America and the world by surprise (Mattfeld, 1952). The innovation of *West Side Story* for the American musical stage was mirrored in history when, on October 4, 1957, "first artificial man-made earth-orbiting satellite," *Sputnik I,* was launched into space by scientists from the Soviet Union which was immediately followed by a second rocket carrying a dog (Mattfeld, 1952). "Americans were stunned by the Soviets' technological progress, and politicians, scientists, and educators called for a major U.S. initiative to regain superiority in missiles development and space technology" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 576). Progress in space technology, with the launch of *Sputnik I*, occurred in the same year as progress on the musical stage took place with *West Side Story*.

The race for dominance over the Soviet Union in space accelerated in the 1960s under the leadership of President John F. Kennedy, but in 1957, the economy was not in good enough shape to handle such a challenge. For example, on April 13, 1957, "The U.S. Post Office suspended for one day regular mail delivery for 'lack of funds'" (Mattfeld, 1952, p. 633). The country was lapsing into a recession while crime and protests dealing with civil rights were on the rise.

The issues surrounding the civil rights movement would explode by dynamic proportions in the 1960s but were ingrained in the social conscience of Americans in 1957 (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). The foundation for *West Side Story* lies in issues revolving around racism and civil rights which were mirrored in historical events of 1957 American society. On August 30, 1957, in reaction to civil rights legislation, Senator Strom Thurmond set a "new filibuster record" by holding "the floor arguing against civil rights legislation for 24 hours and 27 minutes" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 578). In the 1950s, the civil rights movement was growing in strength out of issues of inequality and treatment of members of different racial groups which was exactly what *West Side Story* was portraying in 1957 (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). *Show Boat*, in 1927, also dealt with racial stereotypes and the treatment of such groups, but *West Side Story* dared to bare the ugly truth of conflict between the races in graphic detail. "...the national government followed rather than led in the civil-rights movement, which took its energy from inspired lonely defiers like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr" (Updike, 1994, p. 37).

Social Conditions

In *West Side Story*, the social tragedy lies in the fact that two groups of people from differing backgrounds cannot get along, namely the Jets and the Sharks, and that the love between two innocent people from differing backgrounds, Tony and Maria, becomes the battleground for others' prejudice. Social prejudice was a common element of society in 1957 and not such a foreign concept in American life as it was on the musical stage. When Anita tries unsuccessfully to deliver Maria's message to Tony at the drugstore, "...the social prejudice, the mutual suspicion and hate that motivate the gang warfare become...the causes for Anita's lie about Maria's death and thus of the disaster that follows. This projects the tragic flaw...directly onto society and makes *West Side Story* ...a social tragedy" (Swain, 1990, p. 207).

Social issues are at the heart of the plot of *West Side Story*. The point is no better detailed than in Riff's description of the life of juvenile delinquency he and his fellow Jets lead in the song "Gee, Officer Krupke": "It's just our bringin' upke that gets us out of hand. Our mothers all are junkies, our fathers all are drunks. Golly Moses, natcherly we're punks" (Sondheim, 1957, pp. 165-66). Obviously, these characters needed to feel a sense of family, and the gang provided that for them. A feeling of fellowship among peers seemed to be prevalent in 1950s society with "Elvis Presley and Alan Freed's 'rock n' roll' radio station offer[ing] teenagers a musical vehicle for their rebellious instincts, and an outsider style in word and deed was being developed by the 'beats'" (Updike, 1994, p. 37).

Rebellion against society and authority as witnessed in *West Side Story*, was in direct relation to an actual youth rebellion which occurred in 1957. On August 14, 1957, "Forty-one members of the United States delegation to the World Youth Festival in Moscow undertook, against remonstrance by the U.S. Government, a tour of Communist China at the invitation of the All-China Youth Federation...the State Department confiscated (September 18) their passports [on September 18, 1957]" (Mattfeld, 1952, p. 634). This incident was one of a growing number of youth misdemeanors and rising crime among the nation's youth in the larger cities.

What was considered "acceptable" language was changing during 1957. On February 25, 1957, the United States Supreme Court dealt with the issue of obscenity for the first time. Their ruling in the case of *Butler* vs. *Michigan* declared a Michigan law unconstitutional which banned the "...sale to the general public of material that might corrupt minors..." (Linton, 1977, p. 386). Society's protection of minors was losing ground while America's youth was beginning to develop a voice of their own.

The language of *West Side Story* mirrored society's slang: "...some of what was taut, slangy, and poignant in 1957 now sounds self-consciously preachy and histrionic" (Smith, 1981, p. 235). Phrases one has grown accustomed to in the 1990s were new and

descriptive of the changing society of the 1950s. John Updike quotes authors Lois and Alan Gordon whose *American Chronicle* lists phrases and "buzz-words" which developed during the 1950s: "...apartheid, H-Bomb, integration, mambo, spaceman, cool jazz, hot rod, panty raid, ponytail, TelePrompTer, drag strip, name-dropper, cookout, countdown, fallout, hip, headshrinker, stoned, etc." (Updike, 1994, p. 37). The slang in *West Side Story* is dramatized New York street-talk, but does mirror actual social change in 1957 and the type of language being used by America's youth on the street.

Racial discrimination and prejudice in 1957 were growing at an alarming rate. The strain on society was felt with growing concern for years to come. One incident, on September 2, 1957, appeared to have a major impact on the growing problem of racism in America (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). On September 2, 1957, President Eisenhower sent the National Guard and, on September 24, 1957, mobilized over 1000 Federal troops, "armed with rifles and bayonets," to Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, to quell an uprising of protesters as an attempt was made to desegregate the public schools (Mattfeld, 1952, p. 634). Other problems and uprisings concerning desegregation occurred in Nashville, Tennessee; Montgomery, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Wichita Falls, Texas in 1957. "...leaders of various faiths played important parts in the fight to implement the Supreme Court's decision to bar racial segregation in public schools[and]...the Vatican approved the move by the archbishop of New Orleans to desegregate church schools" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 577).

Desegregation became a major issue in society in 1957 and was the motivation for the plot of *West Side Story*. *West Side Story* was "influenced by the huge influx of Puerto Rican immigrants to New York's west side in the mid-50s..." (Keets, 1993, p. 104). This kind of warfare mentality and violence against non-whites in society was directly reflected in the musical *West Side Story* and was illustrated through differing beliefs of heritage and defense of one's "turf" by the Anglo and Puerto Rican gangs. One might even view *West Side Story* as an historical source of study for future generations to learn of the hatred of

the times and the "mood" of the youth movement in 1957. As Houghton states: "*West Side Story* is conceived as a social document...consequently, it becomes important to the contemporary play's message that a resolution of the gang warfare be effected, not as a postscript, so to speak, but by the hand of one of the play's protagonists" (Houghton, 1965, p. 11).

The younger generation in America in 1957 was losing the edge needed to keep up with the new "space race" and the need for supremacy America was searching for. "...[A] survey of 60,000 high school juniors and seniors [by] Dr. Ernest V. Hollis of the U.S. Office of Education discovered that 51% of students with an IQ of 133 or higher would not attend college because of the expense or because of a lack of goals" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 577). This lack of goals is an important and highly visible element in the plot of *West Side Story*. When Riff is discussing his situation at home in the song "Gee, Officer Krupke," he describes a homelife of bitter disappointments and one lacking in any kind of motivation: "My parents treat me rough. With all their marijuana, they won't give me a puff. They didn't want to have me, but somehow I was had. Leapin' lizards, that's why I'm so bad" (Sondheim, 1957, pp. 168-69).

This reflection of troubled youth is evident in even greater proportions in 1994, the time of this study. In retrospect, one could view *West Side Story* as a predictor of events and look to the arts of today as a forecast of things to come. In 1994, the problems of racial discrimination, prejudice, poverty, homelessness, and juvenile delinquency, so somehow foreign and distant to audiences in 1957 who witnessed those elements in *West Side Story*, are the very problems which are promoting extreme drop-out rates and juvenile crime at the highest rate in history.

Fine Arts and Communication

The 1950s ushered in a new look in the arts. Three-dimensional movies were entertaining Americans by providing them with an almost interactive feeling in the theatre.

In the visual arts, Jackson Pollock was creating a new kind of art, called abstract expressionism, described as "...revers[ing] the artistic current that had always flowed from Europe to these shores, by creating a global—some said an imperial–style" (Updike, 1994, p. 36). And, in the world of architecture, in 1957, the new Seagram building in New York City was said to be "sheathed in bronze" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 576).

Television

Watching television as a family was becoming a daily event. American audiences had many more chances to be influenced by the television that sat in their living rooms than by the Broadway stage which could explain why the lifestyle in *West Side Story* seemed so surreal (*Oxford American History*, 1966). "By 1960 some 70,000,000 TV sets were in use throughout the country, and television had become a serious rival of motion pictures as a form of entertainment" (*Oxford American History*, 1966, p. 777). Shows like *I Love Lucy*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and *The Pat Boone Show* all depicted the "typical" American family busy at home going about their daily tasks in a safe, secure environment far from the knives and gang warfare of the world of *West Side Story* (Updike, 1994, p. 36). Obviously, the characters portrayed in *West Side Story* led an entirely different life than the characters portrayed by television (*Oxford American History*, 1966).

Literature

In 1957, literary works dealt with current aspects of society. Nevil Shute's novel about nuclear annihilation, entitled *On the Beach*, appeared in 1957 along with *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. Kerouac's book reflected the atmosphere of *West Side Story* with his "semiautobiographical novel of the Beat generation in which [he] explored the use of jazz, sex, and drugs by young people" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 576).

Dance

"Preceding the idea that *West Side Story* was the mature culmination of the musical comedy from the point of view of dance was and is the idea that Agnes de Mille's dream ballet in *Oklahoma!* is the norm for the manner in which dance should be worked into a musical comedy" (Schlundt, 1984, p. 334). Jerome Robbins changed the way musicals were presented with his integration of plot, character, and action with dance. Previously, dance was used, as in 1927 in *Show Boat*, to add more flavor to musical numbers, or to fill time in the musical. In *Oklahoma!* in 1943, Agnes De Mille dared to portray a major element of the story, specifically Laurie's decision as to who should take her to the box social, in pure dance through the use of a dream ballet. With *West Side Story* in 1957, Jerome Robbins was combining what had been previously accomplished with dance on the musical stage and was allowing dance to become action as well as a story-telling vehicle. "...*West Side Story* is the first musical for which the composer himself [Bernstein] created significant and separate pieces of music for the dance sequences, rather than leave them for an arranger to patch together out of the song material" (Swain, 1990, p. 234).

Robbins described what parts of the plot were illustrated in dance:

> We tell everything, the dance hall incident, the killing of the men, the taunting of the girl in the drugstore, through dance...The "Prologue" tells that the Jets and Sharks have been warring for months. "The Rumble" shows who is killed and how. The "Taunting Scene" reveals what happens to Anita when she tries to give Tony Maria's message. (Hodgson, 1980, p. 4; Swain, 1990, p. 235)

Brooks Atkinson stated in his 1957 review for the *New York Times* after the premiere of *West Side Story:*

> ...the ballets convey the things that Mr. Laurents is inhibited from saying because the characters are so inarticulate. The hostility and suspicion between the gangs, the glory of the nuptials, the terror of the rumble, the devastating climax—Mr. Robbins has found the patterns of movement that express these parts of the story. (p. 14)

Summary

With the premiere of *West Side Story* on September 26, 1957, tragedy became a new force in the world of musical theatre. Jerome Robbins, Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, and Stephen Sondheim created a show which integrated the elements of plot, character, and action using new musical language and modern dance. Music and dance were used as never before to act-out certain scenes in the story previously told through dialogue. Echoing Agnes De Mille's work in *Oklahoma!*, with the evocative dream ballet, Robbins direction and choreography of *West Side Story* took audiences by surprise. *West Side Story* reflected contemporary society in 1957. The very real rival of American and Puerto Rican gangs warring on New York City's West Side reflected the wave of minority immigration into New York City. *West Side Story* was also not the kind of story audiences of musical theatre had come to expect, therefore it reflected change in American society and musical theatre of the 1950s.

Ongoing concerns in American society are reflected in the musical *West Side Story*. Issues of racism, juvenile delinquency and a growing crime rate among the youth of America, poverty, and gang violence were all vividly portrayed through song and dance and are still major elements of social conflict at the time of this study, 1994. *West Side Story* was based on the literary stimulus of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Previous musicals had been cast from literary models, specifically Edna Ferber's novel *Show Boat* for the 1927 musical *Show Boat* and the 1931 play by Lynn Riggs entitled *Green Grow the Lilacs* as the stimulus for *Oklahoma!* "*West Side Story*, like *Show Boat* (1927) and *Oklahoma!* (1943) before it, was a landmark piece that revealed new possibilities for the musical theatre and presented exciting ways to pursue those possibilities" (Hischak, 1993, p 268).

West Side Story was put on film in 1961 and won 10 Academy awards, among them a Best Picture Oscar, and it made the public further aware of the possibilities of "Latina performers [in the arts] such as Chita Rivera on Broadway and Rita Moreno in the film

version" (Keets, 1993, p. 104). Some also felt that *West Side Story* slandered Puerto Ricans by stereotyping them as coming from the "Island of tropical breezes...Island of tropical diseases" (*New York Times*, September 29, 1957, p. 83), while others felt that the plot had exalted gang violence to a popular level.

With *West Side Story,* there appeared to be a new direction for the musical theatre in America. The 1960s would bring about great changes in society and history reflected in the musical theatre. *West Side Story* paved the way for the presentation of important and pertinent issues of society and major historical events, some of which were not so easily accepted by audiences.

The 1960s—*Hair* —1968

Introduction

The musical *Hair* premiered on Broadway in 1968 and was the first American musical to use rock and roll music. The music, costumes, and attitude in *Hair* reflected contemporary American society of 1968 with its relevance to the continuing war in Vietnam. Social issues of ongoing concern in *Hair* ranged from rebellion against authority, to new fashion trends, increased violence, and rampant drug use among the youth of society. *Hair* also represented a culmination of dramatic theories of Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht with their descriptions of the *Theatre of Cruelty* (Artaud) and the *Theory of Estrangement* (Brecht). *Hair* reflected these theories while being labeled "journalistic theatre" or "Modcom" theatre as described by *Time* magazine which defined it as "the commercial exploitation of modernity without regard for dramatic art" (Wright, 1972, p. 94). The "rules" for such a "Modcom" production included that the work must: "be plotless; be lavish with four-letter words; belittle the U.S.A.; mock religions of all kinds; make drug-taking a must; be blatant about sex; deafen the audience; mingle with the audience; condemn Vietnam" (Wright, 1972, p. 94).

The 1960s

The 1960s marked a period of sweeping change in American history and society. Societal changes were illustrated in 1968 on the Broadway stage in the musical *Hair*. Rebellion against the established norm was evident in the 1960s both in society and in musical theatre. The Vietnam War caused the youth of America to rebel against authority, family, government, education, and business. This rebellion caused the 1960s to become "...a decade of protest and turmoil" (Horn, 1991, p. 7). Rebellion was also seen against the movement toward civil rights and women's rights. The youth of America was strongly involved in promoting togetherness, peace, love, and ecological preservation. "The '60s were more divisive than World War II, which drew people together for the war effort. The '60s drove people apart—husbands from wives, children from parents, students from teachers, citizens from their government...authority was challenged by the '60s" (Wills, 1994, p. 40).

Expression of views by the counter-culture youth of the 1960s was evident in their music, manner, dress, and length of their hair influenced by the Beatles with their "longer hair and other flamboyant affectations" (Horn, 1991, p. 9). "Children were kicked out of school, or kicked out of their homes, for the length of their hair" (Wills, 1994, p. 40). Verbal expression also changed dramatically from the more serene 1950s. Words that were normally thought to be profane came into common usage by the youth of society and on Broadway with *Hair*. "Wild talk was the currency of the day" (Wills, 1994, p. 40). An overall attempt to oppose and shock prevailed throughout the decade. "We never realized how much we were a society in uniform until some people showed up out of uniform" (Wills, 1994, p. 40). The nuclear family of the 1960s illustrated a drastic change in the family structure from the "Father Knows Best" model of the close-knit family unit of the 1950s and the pace of society increased allowing for greater change at a faster rate (Wills, 1994).

Amid this social insurrection, came a Broadway musical which illustrated the very historical and social changes currently happening outside the theatre door. The musical *Hair* told of the war in Vietnam, anti-establishment views of youth in America, drugs, civil rights, women's rights, sexual freedom, and free thinking through the voice of a new generation: rock music. Whereas other musicals in this study have dealt directly with social and historical events, *Hair* seemed to be on the leading edge of social change. Barbara Lee Horn, author of *The Age of Hair* (1991), interviewed New York critic Clive Barnes in New York City on April 19, 1990. Barnes felt that *Hair* provided the best summary of the late sixties on the American stage.

The theatre audience in the 1960s wanted its musicals to deal with issues of serious social content. Theatre offerings in the 1960s were involved with feelings, life-experiences, religion, and social movements. "Emphasis followed the do-your-own-thing existentialist-based mode of the late 1960s" (Pasqua, 1993, p. 412). The social issue of public nudity, both men and women, was blatantly illustrated in *Hair:* "In *Hair*, nudity added to the music" (Pasqua, 1993, p. 412). The use of nudity in a public performance of this type was a controversial issue in 1968 but, after much debate, was protected by First Amendment rights: "*Hair's* nudity helped to define permissible limits of free expression within the American theatre when the United States Supreme Court twice issued major decisions concerning First Amendment rights based on the show [in Boston and Chattanooga]" (Horn, 1991, p. 135).

Musical theatre productions and attendance at such productions witnessed a sharp decline from the 1920s, to the "golden age" of the musical in the 1940s and finally into the 1960s. "There are only a handful of musical productions each year, contrasted to the cornucopia of musicals in the 1920s and 1930s. Destructive, too, is the high cost of productions, which now hovers around the $350,000 to $400,000 mark" (Dachs, 1964, p. 286). The *New York Times* reported the fluctuation in Broadway theatre attendance from the 1940s to the

1960s fell from 11,500,000 in 1945 to 3,000,000 less by 1961 (Dachs, 1964). By 1979, Broadway witnessed the infiltration of musicals from England, specifically the works of Andrew Lloyd Webber, which took profits away from American musical producers and composers. Marguerite Cullman discussed the problem of musical production on Broadway in an article in *Show Business:* "We need a complete revolution in the method of financing and producing, and if we don't get it soon, we're going to find we're pouring all our money into England, rather than Broadway" (Dachs, 1964, p. 286).

Broadway needed to breath new life into itself and create a new audience for the future. *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) provided America with a satirical look at politics in the 1930s while "*West Side Story*...encouraged writers of the late 1960s and 1970s to hold a mirror up to life and expose its seamier side" (Jackson, 1977, p. 75). By the 1960s *Hair* took a radical and protest stance against society and government and a satirical look at the Vietnam War. Not only did it tackle the war, but other social issues as well. "Thematically, it is an anti-establishment vehicle that took dramatic and satiric aim at war, racism, sexual repression, and other societal evils...*Hair* is a reflection of the hippies and the sixties" (Horn, 1991, p. 1).

Hair, described in its program as "The American Tribal-Love Musical," came to Broadway in 1968 from its off-Broadway and nightclub beginnings in 1967 (Jackson, 1977, p. 76). In 1968, Tom O'Horgan's staging of the Broadway production introduced theatre audiences to a new Broadway experience from the music to the costumes to the "colorful [and] grandiose staging" (Hischak, 1993, p. 105). *Hair* opened on April 29, 1968, at the Biltmore Theatre and ran for 1,750 performances. The music for *Hair* was composed by Galt MacDermot with book and lyrics by James Rado and Gerome Ragni. Musical critic/historian, Martin Gottfried, described *Hair* as Broadway's first "concept musical" or musical with one main idea, presented at the outset of the performance, and illustrated and expanded throughout the evening's performance (Horn, 1991).

The staging of *Hair* did not offer the usual stage set audiences were accustomed to seeing. Instead, a bare stage without a curtain, greeted the audience to this new theatre experience with all backstage activity visible to the audience (Horn, 1991). *Hair's* set designer, Robin Wagner, described his concept of staging: "As far as the scenery, the lighting, the production...basically what we were doing was allowing the audience to be part of it. Showing everything" (Horn, 1991, p. 61). All that remained on the stage resembling a traditional set was some scaffolding, on which the "tribe," or chorus, displayed various motions, an Indian totem-pole and a "Crucifix-Tree" (Horn, 1991, p. 61). Practically everything on the stage was found in and around New York City environs: "...a rubber tire, a jukebox, a large electric eyeball, the head of Jesus, a life-size papier mâché bus driver behind a steering wheel, a Coca-Cola sign, and a neon marquee of the Waverly movie theatre of Greenwich Village" (Horn, 1991, p. 62).

The creators of *Hair* wanted to present "...picturesque physical activity and bold anti-illusionistic devices" instead of a traditional book musical which focused on character development and plot (Horn, 1991, p. 45). Instead, *Hair* contained a series of some thirty rock and roll songs, linked together, depicting a commune of "hippies" in the throes of expression of their view of society:

> *Hair*...was designed to feel spontaneous, the antithesis of the lacquered smiles, drill-team formations, rehearsed whoops and hollers of other latter-day musicals. It sustained its illusion of spontaneous fun, of joyous anarchy, without really becoming formless. Its snatches of dialogue made about as much sense...as the catch phrases that passed for social philosophy with the adolescents of the '60s. (Litton, 1981, p. 293)

As the dramatic elements and music progressed throughout the evening's performance, the audience was completely involved in the production from the opening sequence:

> The tribe entered back and forth through the audience, running and tumbling in the aisles, stepping on the backs of seats between the patrons in the orchestra, leaping on and off the stage, singing in the aisles, and swinging over the audience's heads on ropes. (Horn, 1991, p. 510)

Profits grossed by the numerous productions of *Hair* across the United States and Europe speak for its success and its timely arrival on a floundering Broadway theatre scene. *Hair* collected approximately seven million dollars over a two-year period and by May 1977, "[*Hair*] had grossed $65 million, which did not include collateral income from the rights to amateur production, souvenir programs, and record albums" (Litton, 1981, p. 294). As of 1991, proceeds from *Hair* had amounted to over $80 million from American productions alone.

Plot

The creators of *Hair* got their ideas from mingling with the hippie population in Greenwich Village in New York City. "A combined interest in the theatrical experience and the social concerns of the day resulted in a show that gave expression to hippie values, voice to hippie feelings, and stage to hippie activities" (Horn, 1991, p. 1). The plot was seen through "...LSD hallucinations of *Hair's* collective protagonists, a hirsute 'tribe' of dropouts" (Litton, 1981, p. 293).

Hair is devoid of any real plot. It takes place in Greenwich Village, on New York City's lower East Side, in the present, or in the case of the Broadway production, 1968. "There was a lot of score...but no story: a young man has been drafted and must go off to war, period" (Mordden, 1976, p. 310). The action in *Hair* centers around three main characters: Claude, a draftee; Berger, a hippie drop-out unwilling to go to war; and Sheila, a student attending New York University (NYU) who also opposes events in Southeast Asia (Horn, 1991). Central to the plot is Claude's contemplation over his being drafted and his sacrifice into fire of a lock of his hair symbolizing his "sacrifice to the establishment" (Horn, 1991, p. 67). Berger is the icon for hippie life and emerges as the hero of the drama.

With the song "Aquarius," the "tribe" introduces themselves followed by action illustrating their conflicts through song and movement. The "tribe" contains stimulating

characterizations such as: "Hud, the black hippie; Woof, the seemingly-gay or pansexual hippie; Jeanie, the spiritual-mystical, pregnant hippie; and Crissy, the lost-soul hippie" (Horn, 1991, p. 61). A major contrast to the action involves Claude's parents with their "parental" views on events which lie in sharp contrast to the hippie generation. "A strong 'whiff of campy homosexuality' permeates their [the Parent's] portrayals. Mom is played not by a middle-aged suburban-type female, but by three actors, one of them a young male in drag" (Goldman, 1969, p. 383). Parents and other figures of authority are the center of ridicule throughout the musical.

The dialogue continually changed during each performance of *Hair* at the whim of the performers providing a different experience for the audience night after night. The actors' roles were unconventional in the traditional sense of characterization: "Actors did not embody character in the traditional manner, which invited audience identification. Roles were fragmented, the cast was used as a chorus, and frequently actors moved from one role to another in a series of transformations, as dictated by the context" (Horn, 1991, p. 53). The dialogue in *Hair* challenged the audience with frequent use of language of an obscene, sexual, and sometimes profane nature. In the song "Initials" from *Hair*, this breakdown of suitable language is discussed.

Musical Style

Hair provided the new rock sound for Broadway audiences with some of composer Galt Macdermot's songs becoming instant hits. "Good Morning Starshine," "Aquarius," "Easy to Be Hard," and "Let the Sunshine In" can still be heard in the 1990s as representative of 1960s culture. *Hair* provided another first for the Broadway stage with an amplified band performing on a truck onstage, instead of the established "pit" orchestra, while the singers used hand-held microphones to be heard over the eight loudspeakers and amplifiers. Rock songs in *Hair* became "...nursery rhymes for a new generation" (Litton, 1981, 293). In

1981, the original cast recording produced from the musical *Hair* became the highest grossing musical-comedy recording for RCA records.

Historical Events

Hair depicted historical events literally as they were happening in 1968. The Civil Rights movement, war in Vietnam, politics and governmental corruption, the nuclear threat, and youth unrest and rebellion were all part of the drama of *Hair* (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). Songs, stage decoration, characterization, action, and dialogue in *Hair* all described and illustrated major historical events of the day.

The war was a bloody occurrence on the nightly news with controversial body counts of "ours" versus "theirs" mounting each evening. Anti-war demonstrations took place around the country and increased as the war dragged on. In *Hair*, all of this protest and ill-feeling about the war is blatantly exposed on the stage. A controversial scene takes place in which the American flag is supposedly desecrated by the actors during one of their "trips" on psychedelic drugs (Horn, 1991). This action was seen by many as unpatriotic, during a war which few supported, and in 1968 was a bold statement.

Hair was art in direct protest of this war and all it stood for. As Horn stated: "The show [*Hair*] was antiwar, never anti-American... [it] simply pleaded for awareness" (Horn, 1991, p. 90). In 1968, 30,000 U.S. servicemen were dead in Vietnam with 500,000 still serving. The "Tet offensive" (January 30-February 24, 1968), a enormous enemy attack involving the city Saigon among many others, prompted 300,000 more men to be drafted to counter such an offense. By February 16, 1968, "most graduate school and occupational deferments are suspended" (Linton, 1977, p. 408). The expense for the war in 1968 rose to an estimated $25,000,000,000 and by June 23, 1968, the war in Vietnam "became the longest war in U.S. history" (*American Facts and Dates,* 1993).

"The Vietnam debacle crystallized the youth's opposition to their government and to the American war machine" (Horn, 1991, p. 7). The final song in *Hair*, "The Flesh Failures," which accompanies Claude's death in Vietnam, poignantly illustrated the frustration and reality of death in war: "We starve-look at one another short of breath...wearing smells from laboratories, facing a dying nation of moving paper fantasy, listening for the new-told lies...let the sunshine, let the sunshine in..." (MacDermot, Rado, & Ragni, 1967, p. 154).

The war in Vietnam fueled the threat of nuclear war in the minds of American citizens in 1968. Younger Americans were particularly concerned with nuclear annihilation prompting them to feel further compelled to "live for the moment" (Horn, 1991, p. 7). Some Americans in 1968 felt compelled to engage in corruptive activities as their way of voicing their opposition to events in Southeast Asia. On January 5, 1968, indictments were issued to Dr. Benjamin Spock, distinguished pediatrician, Reverend William Sloane Coffin of Yale, and other antiwar activist for conspiracy in "aiding and abetting draft evasion" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 652). Obviously, it was not just the youth of America involved in protesting the war. Opposition to the draft and draft evasion was the central plot element in *Hair* with Claude's indecision of whether or not to serve his country in Vietnam—a war he does not believe in. In the song which ends the first act, "Where Do I Go," Claude and other male "tribe" members burn their draft cards while contemplating their futures.

Amid peace talks in Paris, which began on May 10, 1968, between the United States and North Vietnam, a tremendous wave of social unrest continued (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). In 1968, Democratic President of the United States, Lyndon Baines Johnson, announced his choice not to seek reelection. By November 12, 1968, Republican Richard Milhouse Nixon was elected to take his place. From August 26-29, 1968, during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where Hubert Humphrey was nominated to represent the Democrats in the upcoming election, massive riots broke out which were covered in vivid detail on television (*Oxford American History*, 1966).

Injuries resulted from the confrontation involving the anti-war activist Youth International Party (Yippies), newsmen covering the convention, protesters of the war in Vietnam, and police forces trying to quell the anti-war protest march (Linton, 1977). Such anti-war protests and youth uprisings are at the crux of the message of *Hair* and illustrate the anguish and disgust with the war as illustrated by real events in society.

Student uprisings, due to feelings of social alienation and a need for group acceptance, were a frequent occurrence in the 1960s and specifically strong in 1968. An event of racial conflict occurred at Columbia University in New York City from April 23-30, 1968, where students occupied campus buildings in opposition to the building of a gym on city property in Harlem "without participation of residents of the neighboring black community" (Linton, 1977, p. 409). The students were also protesting the fact that the University was "conducting research for the Department of Defense" (Linton, 1977, p. 409). Police had to be called in to quell the unrest and gain access to the buildings the students felt they had "liberated" (Linton, 1977, p. 409). *Hair* spoke to the youth of America and sympathized with their feelings of frustration in a world in which they felt alienated. In 1968, forty-six percent of *Hair*'s audience was under the age of thirty while a poll taken by the *Wall Street Journal* in 1969, calculated that: "...one half of *Hair*'s audience was between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five" (*Wall Street Journal*, April, 9, 1969, p. 18).

On college campuses around the United States, protests by students in demand of reform ranging from "...separation of universities from government defense research projects, greater student participation in college administration, increased enrollment of black and impoverished students, and introduction of black-studies programs," flourished across the country (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 653). Most of these protests ended in strikes followed by police intervention. Students were not the only campus protesters in 1968. On February 19, the first statewide strike by public school teachers, in the history of the United States, took place in Florida and continued until March 8, 1968

(*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). By September 9, 1968, public school teachers in New York City would also be carrying signs in protest.

Ironically, amid all of this unrest, protest, and anti-war sentiment, the economy was healthy: "Employment, salary, savings, personal consumption have never been higher" (Linton, 1977, p. 408). On June 13, 1968, the New York Stock Exchange set a trading record while unemployment continued to stay at a low count (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). Other progressive events in 1968 included the October 30 award of two Nobel Prizes in chemistry and physics to two Americans, Luis W. Alvarez of the University of California, Berkeley in Physics, and Lars Onsager for chemistry (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). 1968 also was a year of record organ transplants providing an antithesis to the death and mutilation of Americans in Vietnam.

Progress toward the future of America lay in its space program in 1968 (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). The space race, prompted by the U.S.S.R. and Sputnik and continued and promoted by President John F. Kennedy, was a forward-looking theme throughout *Hair*. On January 9, 1968, the space ship Surveyor 7 landed on the moon and proceeded to send back information and photographs for scientists to study (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). And on January 22, 1968, an unmanned vessel, Apollo 5, was sent up to test the Lunar Excursion Module (LEM) in Earth orbit (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). The quest for the moon had begun and by October 11, 1968, Apollo 7, the first manned Apollo mission, took to the skies providing the stimulus for what occurred from December 21-27, 1968:

> Three [American] astronauts aboard Apollo 8 [left] earth and orbit[ed] the moon 10 times before returning to a safe landing in the Pacific Ocean. The men [were] the first to view the far side of the moon. Parts of their mission [were] televised live, and excite[d] great public interest.(Linton, 1977, p. 409)

The characters in *Hair*, seeking to escape the world they live in, turn to psychedelic drugs which give them access to a more "spiritual" plane. The Space Program, which had earlier in American history been seen only through fiction, by 1968, was very real and had

given citizens in the United States new words in their vocabulary and new hope for the future (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). In *Hair* the singers use these new-found words while taking a drug trip during a song entitled "Walking in Space." Their "space" may be quite different than the scientific space exploration, but there are obvious references to celestial elements, as in the song "Aquarius": "When the moon is in the seventh house, and Jupiter aligns with Mars, then peace will guide the planets and love will steer the stars" (MacDermot et al., 1967, p. 5). In the song "The Flesh Failures," Claude and the chorus contemplate their futures: "Somewhere inside something there is a rush of greatness, Who knows what stands in front of our lives. I fashion my future on films in space" (MacDermot et al., 1967, p. 5). The song "Good Morning Starshine" offers an optimistic view of life and was described by Horn as "comforting correspondence between human beings and the unknown life in the stars" (Horn, 1991, p. 78). Venturing in space, by 1968, was becoming a real possibility and the possible peace that could come from that exploration was voiced in *Hair*.

Social Conditions

Hippies

Hair stands as an excellent didactic tool for the social conditions of the 1960s. It was a time of momentous societal change and is evident in every aspect of the production of *Hair*. The 1960s was a time of greater advantages for higher education due to the greater affluence of the country. A great majority of hippies came from affluent families with solid educational backgrounds. The term "hippie" grew out of an article by Michael Fallon, a newspaper columnist with the *San Francisco Examiner*. His article of September 5, 1965, "noted that local tourist buses had added the Haight-Ashbury district to their rounds, enabling sightseers to get a glimpse of the neighborhood's 'weirdo' residents" (Horn, 1991, p. 2). "The term *hippie* covered a vast array of bohemian [1940s] and student subcultures, and as with the beats [1950s] there was a hard core of artistic-literary

intelligentsia with an aristocracy of rock musicians and a vast following of lifestyle rebels" (Brake, 1980, p. 93).

Others in society began studying this rapidly developing segment of the population, akin to beatniks, citing diverse groups. Subgroups within the "hippie culture" were "drug groups, nudist groups, vegetarians, communes, Jesus freaks, Krishna devotees, and virtually hundreds of other subdivisions of the larger group called hippies" (Partridge, 1973, p. 10). Four outstanding characteristics of the "hippie" according to Kenneth Kenniston's analysis were: "...exclusive identification with members of their own generation; emphasis upon personalism and participation; ambivalence toward technology; and adherence to the principle of nonviolence" (Kenniston, 1968, pp. 272-285).

Youth in conflict was nothing new, as seen in this study in *West Side Story* (1957), with rebellion caused by adolescence described as part of the maturation process. (Horn, 1991). Wearing long hair became a symbol for the hippie movement of rebellion and personal statements of protest and individuality. Influenced by the British rock band the Beatles, "long hair stood for an advanced approach to unisex lifestyle, very much confusing gender distinction" (Horn, 1991, p. 9). *Hair* stands as a testament to hippies and their beliefs. It also gave its audience a glimpse into this segment of rebellious society.

The Civil Rights Movement

In *Hair*, the song "Easy to Be Hard" provides commentary on what became an issue still in conflict well into the end of the twentieth century. In a gospel-like oration, Hud's fiancé sings about ill-will between the human race: "How can people be so heartless, how can people be so cruel...how can people have no feelings...especially people who care about strangers, who care about evil and social injustice..." (MacDermot et al., 1967, pp. 76-77).

In 1968, the assassinations of Civil Rights leaders Martin Luther King and Malcolm X shocked society (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). On April 4, 1968, thirty-nine-year-old civil rights leader Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated by James Earl

Ray on a motel balcony, in Memphis, Tennessee, while King was speaking to "assist a strike [begun] on March 28 by black sanitation workers" (Linton, 1977, p. 408). Seventy-five thousand attended the funeral in Atlanta, Georgia, as riots and unrest continued and escalated due to the assassination.

The rebellion against authority, witnessed throughout *Hair*, was echoed in society through the assassinations of public figures in the 1960s. In November 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, while on June 6, 1968, Senator Robert Kennedy, campaigning for the Democratic nomination for president, was assassinated after making a victory speech in Los Angeles.

Racially motivated killing was more pronounced during the height of the Vietnam War years. "Children bombed in Birmingham. Civil-rights activists like Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman killed with impunity by racists. Black students killed at Jackson State (as white ones were at Kent State)" (Wills, 1994, p. 40). Ironically, *Hair*, a show commenting on the evils of society as witnessed by white rebellious youth, provided a positive voice in the racial unrest and quest for equality for blacks in society. It also, through song, made fun of the evils of racial injustice while educating the audience. Hud sings a song entitled "Colored Spade" in which he provides the audience with common slang currently in use (in 1968) to describe blacks in society: "jungle-bunny, jigaboo, pickaninny, cotton-picker..." (MacDermot, et al., 1967, p. 22). In *Hair*, a black character was describing the trials of being black in American society in the 1960s instead of a white actor speaking degrading words against blacks.

> *Hair* opened the doors for black actors and black audiences. The message was not black. The show related more to white suburban youth and their problems, but it was black kids who carried the show...*Hair* was the first racially integrated musical; one third of the cast was black. (Horn, 1991, p. 134)

Ebony magazine reported that "[*Hair*] was the biggest outlet for black actors in the history of the stage" (King, 1970, pp. 120-121). Coupled with this recognition of blacks in theatre came the first Miss Black America pageant held on September 11, 1968, and the

appointment of America's first black symphony orchestra conductor on February 15, 1968, with Henry Lewis becoming conductor of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993).

Riots and unrest between racial groups in the United States grew during 1968. On February 8, "Four days of student disorder in Orangeburg, South Carolina, culminated in the deaths of three black students in a clash between police and students at South Carolina State College...[due to] the barring of blacks from a local bowling alley" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 653). The assassination of Martin Luther King added fuel to the flame of unrest with race riots erupting on April 4-6, 1968, in more than 100 cities prompting constant intervention by Federal troops (Linton, 1977).

In an attempt to discourage a social crisis, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which "...makes illegal discrimination in the sale and rental of housing in all but single-family dwellings sold by the owner and apartments of less than four units where one unit is lived in by the owner. The act also makes it a Federal crime to cross a state line to incite a riot" (Linton, 1977, p. 409). On May 2, 1968, the Poor People's March on Washington, an event organized by the late Martin Luther King, was held and was led by Reverend Ralph Abernathy (Linton, 1977). The march has since been recreated and remembered well into the 1990s while racial tension still remains a constant cause of protest and death.

Women and Minorities

Women and minorities did not escape the discrimination of the 1960s. Women were more visible in the 1960s as activists for equal rights (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). Still struggling for equality in work and society, women in the 1960s were viewed as:

> ...second-class citizens on many college campuses and absent from the boardrooms, federal benches and political office...the greatest change in our

> lifetime—the women's movement, freeing the talents of half the human race—got its greatest boost from the people who became activists in the '60s. (Wills, 1994, p. 41)

Women were a prominent force in the musical *Hair* as they had been throughout the history of the American musical. If there was ever an arena where women were viewed and portrayed with respect, it was the musical theatre.

Other minority groups voiced their wish for equality in the 1960s. In *Hair*, minorities, women, and blacks all were presented in equal light. *Show Boat* (1927) viewed black characters as second-class citizens while there were not any minority characters in the 1943 musical *Oklahoma!*. *West Side Story* (1957) portrayed Puerto Ricans in a rebellious fashion, while *Hair* became the first musical to move toward racial equality in casting and appears to have influenced future musical casting and plot. "The civil-rights movement made profound changes in our [minorities'] lives...not only black-white relations...it set the pattern for others to demand their rights—women, gays, Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican-Americans, Asian Americans" (Wills, 1994, p. 41).

Drugs

Drugs are a focal point of society in the 1960s, prominently in use during the Vietnam War, and a constant influential factor in the musical *Hair* (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). Many songs including "Walking in Space" and "Hashish" are sung through a drug-induced state of conciousness. Drugs were a growing problem in 1968, partly due to rampant drug use by troops in Vietnam, with a "...rising use of heroin by middle-class and upper-class youth along with an increase in drug abuse throughout American society" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 653). Horn (1991) stated that in society as portrayed in the musical *Hair:* "Psychedelic drugs, like marijuana, peyote, and LSD, and other mind-altering substances were a part of the communal setting, taken not for fun and games but for the attainment of higher levels of consciousness" (p. 10).

Fashion

Fashion in the 1960s provided as radical a statement as the rest of the societal changes. Flowers, bold colors, stripes, beads, headbands, fringe, leather, and even the use of resemblances of the American flag were just a few of the innovative and shocking fashion combinations. Skimpy outfits including mini skirts and bikinis provided more rebellious comment on past fashion as a new means of self-expression. Men during the 1960s "...favored bold, extravagant fashions, and both men and women were wearing leather garments" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 653). Body painting became fashionable along with feathers in hair and ultimately—nudism. *Hair* is a social icon of the fashion of the day in 1968. Nearly every possible combination of 1960s attire was displayed throughout the run of *Hair* on Broadway. Fashion in the late 1960s may have been further influenced by *Hair* which served as an encyclopedia of the times.

Music

The recent thirtieth anniversary of the appearance of the British rock group "The Beatles" on the Ed Sullivan Show on February 9, 1964, reminded Americans of the great impact the Beatles had on society in the 1960s. Popular culture experienced an upheaval which has yet to be laid to rest. Rock and roll was around in the 1950s, but the Beatles brand of rock was different and permeated nearly every facet of American youth culture in the 1960s. "Rock was the music of the hippies...[they] turned [to it] as a mode of expression...music was an activity that could be shared...[rock music] provoked the establishment with its aggressive, deafening sound, pulsating rhythms, and associated drug use" (Horn, 1991, p. 10). The 1967 release of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was seen as a "milestone in the evolution of Western music, the youth

dismissed all other forms of music as antiquated and turned to rock—the music that joined together the youthful tribes of love" (Horn, 1991, p. 11). The cartoon video produced from *Sgt. Pepper's* is revered today (1994) as the first music video.

Broadway Stage

Other musicals on Broadway during 1968 provided audiences with a diversity of cultural and societal character. As an antithesis to the rock and roll and social rebellion of *Hair*, *George M!* opened on April 10, 1968, about the life of one of America's foremost patriotic composers. In 1968, audiences were "welcoming nostalgic entertainment" during a time of war in Vietnam which was supported by few Americans (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). Another quite different show of social poignancy appeared on April 16, 1968, with the off-Broadway production of *The Boys in The Band*, providing audiences with a candid treatment of homosexuality (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). Racial equality began to filter out from Broadway to other American venues with the establishment of new theatre companies—Negro Ensemble Company and Theatre Atlanta.

Literature

Social comment and current events provided subject matter for authors in the 1960s. The Vietnam War and politics figured prominently in books and novels of the day, the most striking being Norman Mailer's, *The Armies of the Night* which provided for the reader "a personal account of the anti-war demonstrations in Washington, D.C. in October 1967 that culminated in a march on the Pentagon" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 652). Mailer also wrote a personal account of the political conventions of 1968 in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago.* Racism was dealt with in *The Algiers Motel Incident*, by John Hershey, which recounted the murder of three blacks by police during riots in Detroit (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993).

Summary

Hair reflected contemporary society of 1968 in America by providing an accurate portrayal of the times. It lives as a testament to a point of great transition in American society and culture.

> As a revelation of the hippie lifestyle, the production shared in the universal appeal of an international movement...*Hair* was undeniably the *zeitgeist* of the times...a synthesis of despair and hope, *Hair* marshaled an uncompromising assault against the social evils of the day and held forth a vision of a humanistic epoch yet to come. (Horn, 1991, p. xiv)

Through television, Americans watched the carnage of the Vietnam War reenacted nightly in their living rooms. Parents became alienated from their children while the youth of America danced, some on drug-induced "trips," in brightly colored clothing to the music of "The Beatles" who provided a new brand of rock and roll. "Social analysts see as critical to the emergence of the hippie counterculture...the emotional configuration of the modern nuclear family" (Horn, 1991, p. 3).

The reflection of issues of ongoing concern to society were illustrated in *Hair* through new fashion, increased violence, rock and roll music, and rampant drug use—still of concern today in 1994. In 1968, Americans witnessed rebellion against authority and establishment as never before. In an attempt to control violence and youth corruption, the film industry imposed a rating system on films to regulate viewing by youth of various ages. The musical *Hair* (1968) illustrated, in precise detail, the cultural and social changes in society while using historical events as a theme and rock and roll as its voice. "[Music in *Hair*]...entice[d] the youngest crowd that any musical had enjoyed in two decades and enough to show that musical theatre could mine rock 'n' roll for enormous profits" (Litton, 1981, p. 294).

Hair was a milestone in the musical theatre in 1968 with its rock and roll sounds, its portrayal of the hippie generation, and their exposition of drugs, sex, governmental corruption, and rebellion against all things. "...*Hair* shattered the barriers between the

legitimate theatre and the world of contemporary rock, paving the way for the new generation's comments on its ambiance of pseudo-religion, race relations and the drug scene" (Jackson, 1977, p. 11). *Hair* reflected its society by introducing Americans to the evils of society. "The '60s, still carried like a virus in the system, have become the Enemy Within. Is there a crime problem? Drugs? The breakdown of the family? The collapse of our schools? Blame the '60s" (Wills, 1994, p. 40).

The 1970s— *A Chorus Line* —1975

Introduction

A Chorus Line reflected not only the society in which it was created, 1975, by dealing with major issues openly, but continued to reflect society for fifteen years—making it the longest-running musical in the history of Broadway. Drug use, divorce, and unemployment were on the rise in 1975 as Americans experienced relief at the final withdrawal from Vietnam by American troops. Dance took on a new meaning for the Broadway musical through the direction and choreography of Michael Bennett in *A Chorus Line* while the characters in this unique musical reflected the melting pot of American society, with many divergent thoughts and peoples coming together for the common good of the country.

The 1970s

By 1970, the war in Vietnam had frayed the nerves of the American public. The war was taking its toll on soldiers in Vietnam who rebelled against their situation through advanced drug use. The drug of choice was heroin over the more common marijuana. American G.I.s voiced their personal protest to the ongoing battles by writing obscene slogans on their helmets, wearing love beads around their necks, and brutally killing their own officers. Vietnamese refugees were accepted into the United States as the war drew to a close in Southeast Asia. In 1975, the war in Vietnam ended—or so American's thought.

The war in Vietnam still lives in the thoughts and souls of those who served and who are yet "unable to lift themselves out of it...they [have] stayed silent and [have known] years of grief and pain" (Emerson, 1994, p. 44).

Other violent assaults on society occurred early in the decade. On May 4, 1970, at Kent State University in Ohio, "National Guardsmen, in panic over a harmless [war] demonstration, opened fire, killing four students and wounding eleven" (Emerson, 1994, p. 44). The 1970s witnessed the horror of a terrorist attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics, the 1978 mass suicide of cult followers of the Reverend Jim Jones at Jonestown, in Guyana, and the taking of American hostages in Iran. These acts, among others, signaled a new era of threat to law and order in an emerging decade of mood rings, pet rocks, and "disco-fever" (Emerson, 1994, p. 42).

The first resignation of a President of the United States in the history of American government occurred in the 1970s. Early in the decade, the Watergate scandal, spying by governmental officials involved with the Republican party on the Democratic party, prompted President Nixon to admit to knowledge of the break-in and bugging of the offices (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). On August 9, 1974, President Nixon resigned his duties as President of the United States due to the Watergate scandal. Vice President Gerald Ford assumed the duties of President and immediately pardoned Nixon, much to the dismay of some Americans. Ford named Watergate America's "long national nightmare" (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 424). Economically, the 1970s saw an emerging recession coupled with increased unemployment. Divorce was on the rise as society, marked and wearied by war, was becoming more cynical in the face of an unsure future.

Production History

Into this world of mixed emotion, at the culmination of a devastating war for Americans and a growing cynicism throughout the country, came a musical that spoke the language of a new generation throughout its run on Broadway. The personal image of the characters in

A Chorus Line opened up new avenues of expression for characters in a musical. A character's inner emotions were brought to the surface as they described their life on and off the stage. *A Chorus Line* opened at Joseph Papp's Public Theatre in May, 1975, to standing-room-only crowds and moved to Broadway some 101 performances later. At its close, fifteen years later in 1990, it had won nine Tony awards, Drama Critics' awards, the Pulitzer Prize, and had become the longest-running musical in Broadway's history with 6,137 performances. Hischak (1992) called *A Chorus Line:* "...a phenomenon that few could foresee being so successful ...[it became] Broadway's greatest success story" (p. 48) while Litton (1981) praised it as "*The* hit of the decade" (p. 341).

A Chorus Line took dance and placed it center stage while using the dance sequence to the music of "One" throughout the show as a unifying device. It abandoned the existing Broadway musical tradition of reliance upon plot, character, lavish sets and costumes. *A Chorus Line* was not built around the stimulus of literature, politics, or rebellion. Rather, it looked inward to the Broadway stage itself for its spirit while elevating dance to the central figure of the drama. The emotional elements of *A Chorus Line* include suspense, as the audition for the chorus line commences, and intimacy, as the audience learns of each dancer's fears and inner motivation all providing a thought-provoking exploration of the depths of human emotion. Sorrow is felt when a dancer is injured and the others realize that the day will come when they will be unable to dance.

> We want all of them to win. But we know that can't be, which produces a unique mood for a musical, a suspension between the joy of watching twenty singers and dancers execute flashy steps and sing perky songs and the melancholy of watching the heartless process of elimination. (Litton, 1981, p. 342)

The set for *A Chorus Line* was comprised of a line of tape on the floor and some mirrors in the background—both of which are part of an actual dance studio. Unity in *A Chorus Line* was achieved through this one inspiration of Michael Bennett:

> Up until now the stage was bare. He [Bennett] drew a white line on the floor, and in that simple act was the epitome of Michael's genius. He galvanized everyone.

> There was a whole new feeling. Everything took on a depth and meaning that had not quite been there before. What he did was symbolize the show in one fell swoop. (Hamlisch, 1992, p. 149)

Dance became the central element for plot as never before in the history of the Broadway musical. Michael Bennett, choreographer and director, envisioned a play which evolved from and included dance as its central motivation.

> Having lived a dancer's life and endured the agonies of auditions from both sides of the footlights, he [Bennett] respected the gypsies and their absurd lives—their bone-wearing toil and the discipline of learning to dance and then keeping in shape, the overwhelming odds against getting into a show, the anonymity and unvarying regimen of chorus work, and the minuscule life-span of a dancing career. (Litton, 1981, p. 341)

Plot

A Chorus Line was conceived as a backstage musical with no real plot or character-types—just dramatization of recorded interviews with dancers using dance to dramatize their thoughts as they audition to be in a chorus line of a Broadway musical show. The show is centered around eighteen dancers auditioning for a space in the chorus line of a Broadway musical. While trying to persuaded Marvin Hamlisch to compose the music for his idea for a new kind of Broadway musical, Bennet said:

> I have these stories about dancers. I taped them. They talked to me about their lives. These ever-smiling chorus kids who spend their lives backing up the star in return for peanuts and bruised patellas. They talked about their childhood, their agony with their families, the problems of sex, being straight, being gay, their struggles with business, all of it. (Hamlisch, 1992, p. 138)

Bennett was trying to achieve the anonymity in the musical production that a member of the chorus would face in a musical performance. "No stars, no sets, just dancers" (Hamlisch, 1992, p. 138). Ed Kleban, lyricist for *A Chorus Line,* described the spirit of the play: "The main all-consuming thing about these dancers is how endlessly desperate they are for work. The job is the Holy Grail" (Hamlisch, 1992, p. 145). With lyrics like: "God I hope I get it, I really need this job, Oh God I need this job, Please help me get this job" (Hamlisch & Kleban, 1975, pp. 27, 29), *A Chorus Line* was destined to speak to

more than those involved in theatrical production. Marvin Hamlisch said that the role of the music, "...was never intended to stand out from the dialogue and the dancing. It [the show] was meant to be seamless...the score acted as a kind of 'train of thought'" (Hamlisch, 1992, p. 159).

One of the most important elements of the show was to find at its conclusion what it was all about in the first place. Marvin Hamlisch (1992) felt there needed to be: "...some sort of summing up...if these dancers had to stop dancing forever, would they still think it had all been worth it?" (p. 149). The answer came in the song "What I Did For Love" which spoke to everyone in every walk of life. With the final production number "One," the individuality of the performers, felt throughout the show, disappeared into a gold spangled chorus line—one for all and all for one. The dancers had:

> ...horrifyingly...materialized one by one in a phosphorescent apotheosis...the dancers who were so painstakingly individualized for us now submerged in a grim, callous, defiant 'big number.' It was scary, but all the same, one was moved because the characters worked as people...they had hope. Even the losers could go home believing in something (Mordden, 1976, pp. 331-332).

The universal appeal of *A Chorus Line* was summed up by Marvin Hamlisch (1992): "*A Chorus Line* is all about being on the line, all of us, auditioning all the time" (pp. 149-150).

Musical Style

The musical of the 1970s, much to the credit of the productions of Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber, staged opera-like settings in which producing popular song was not a major factor. As disco music, and the new dances it provoked, overwhelmed 1970s society, Broadway musicals were not contributing the wealth of popular song as had been the custom in previous decades. *West Side Story* (1957) began this trend toward fewer "hits" coming from musicals due to the shift of independent songs in musical productions, as in *Show Boat* (1927) and *Oklahoma!* (1943), to a web of songs tied so tightly into the musical fabric that, independently, the songs themselves did not create much

of a statement. "What I Did For Love," from *A Chorus Line*, was the only real "hit" to come out of Hamlisch's score. Since its debut, "What I Did For Love" has been recorded numerous times by many artists "in an age when show tunes are rarely recorded at all" (Viagas, 1990, p. 171).

The songs by Marvin Hamlisch and Edward Kleban "...seem improvised from every show tune that's ever been written. They itch to dance and blush with Broadway chauvinism. They offer the release into fantasy that makes the dancer's life bearable" (Litton, 1981, p. 342). The vamp for the song "One," which opens and closes the show, was described by the dancers as encompassing every emotion in the show. "In addition to backing up curtain calls, the song ["One"] is introduced earlier, to reveal their intense concentration while dancing. It evolved from the idea that the show starts as an audition and ought to end as one" (Viagas, 1990, p. 206). Character-types include those telling of how they got started in dance, how some made careers of dance, how some were frustrated by dance, and how some could not live another moment without—dance (Litton, 1981).

Historical Events

The Bicentennial Era, which began on March 1, 1975, celebrated the birth of American democracy, and ran through December, 1976 (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 428). The celebration sparked emotional remembrance for times past but as the country celebrated its birth, it was falling into further ruin.

Terrorism in America became a familiar occurrence on the nightly news from the beginning of the year to the year's end. First, on January 24, 1975, the "Historic Fraunces Tavern in New York City, the site of George Washington's farewell to his fellow-officers on December 4, 1783, [was] bombed by Puerto Rican nationalists" (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 427). As a result of the attack, four died and 44 were injured in the explosion. On December 29, 1975, another terrorist act occurred in New York's LaGuardia Airport amid a holiday rush. A bomb exploded in the baggage area injuring 75 persons and killing

eleven (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 433). In a year of such tragedy, *A Chorus Line* spoke to the American public with the song "What I Did For Love" which could be said to speak the thoughts of human emotion in such situations: "Kiss today good-bye, the sweetness and the sorrow...Kiss today good-bye, and point me toward tomorrow" (Hamlisch & Kleban, 1975, pp. 201-202, 204).

The horror of the Vietnam war subsided with the April 29, 1975, pull-out of American forces from Southeast Asia.

> Eight days after the resignation of President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam, and with the Communist forces in position to enter Saigon, President Ford order[ed] the complete evacuation of Americans from Vietnam. (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 429)

With this pull-out came an ironically tragic event. Although some 4,500 Vietnamese refugees and an estimated 400 remaining Americans were safely evacuated before the occupation of South Vietnam by the Vietcong, an United States Air Force C-5 aircraft crashed upon take-off as it was rescuing 300 Vietnamese children from Saigon with at least two-hundred dead as a result of the crash. "By April 14, about 1,400 Vietnamese children [were] evacuated by air for adoption in the United States" (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 428).

The fighting in Vietnam had come to an end on May 7, 1975, for Americans when President Ford "Declared the 'Vietnam Era' officially closed after more than a decade of recognized warfare" (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 429). Again, it can be observed that the song "What I Did For Love," from *A Chorus Line*, spoke to the veterans of the Vietnam conflict: "Kiss today good-bye, and point me toward tomorrow, We did what we had to do...Won't forget, can't regret—what I did for love" (Hamlisch & Kleban, 1975, pp. 204-205).

In 1975, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union possessed both positive and negative elements of camaraderie. Negative negotiations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union occurred on May 7, 1975, where "The Strategic Arms Limitation

Talks (SALT 2)...recess[ed] in a stalemate as U.S. and Soviet delegates fail[ed] to concretize the general areas of agreement reached in November 1974 at Vladivostok by President Ford and party leader Leonid Brezhnev" (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 429). On a more positive note, on July 17, 1975, the first joint space mission, between the U.S. Apollo and Russian Soyuz space programs, culminated in a handshake, 150 miles over the Atlantic Ocean, between U.S. astronaut Thomas P. Stafford and Soviet cosmonaut Alexsei Leonov. Another act of Soviet/American relations improving occurred on October 20, 1975, with "An agreement to sell between 6,000,000 and 8,000,000 tons of wheat and corn annually to the Soviet Union [by the U.S.], beginning October 1, 1976" (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 433). *A Chorus Line* contained the theme of everyone striving for one goal. In the case of the musical, the goal is a spot on the line in the chorus of a Broadway show. A suggested parallel in U.S.—Soviet relations and *A Chorus Line* is the striving for both countries to come together for a common goal—international peace. In *A Chorus Line*, the common goal is to create an image on the stage of one continuous line of dancers all in unison for the common good of the show. The 1975 handshake in space illustrated future events when in the 1990s the Cold War between the United States and Russia would finally subside.

The economy in 1975 witnessed an increasing recession and by February 3, the estimated national deficit climbed to $51,500,000,000 and increased by year's end. By March 29, 1975, "The largest tax cut in U.S. history became law when President Ford approved a bill that decreased the Federal tax revenues by $22,800,000,000" (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 428) and on June 6, the unemployment rate in the United States grew to 9.2%, which was the highest since World War II as New York City lapsed into bankruptcy on June 10, 1975. *A Chorus Line* spoke directly to a country searching for stability. The whole show centered on getting the elusive job in a sea of competition. In the opening number, a determined yet disillusioned dancer speaks the words of a frustrated and struggling artist: "Who am I anyway? Am I my résumé? What does he want from me?

What should I try to be? So many faces all around...I need this job. Oh God, I need this show" (Hamlisch & Kleban, 1975, pp. 28-29).

Social Conditions

"The social history of the 1970s took its toll on the aesthetics of love, dreams, faith, and community in the musical theatre just as it did with the hopes and dreams of American life" (Fraser, 1989, p. 32). Many of the societal battles of the 1960s for women's and minority rights, and racial unrest continued into the 1970s. These battles for equality and acceptance are reflected in the musicals of the period which portray a more cynical view of American life and a grim future for American society.

In the 1970s, the women's movement became an important force in society as their role became more defined. Women's rights issues, specifically in 1975, propelled forward with new momentum in a world of continued inequality. "Feminist thought delved into class, ethnicity, race, sexual identity, age and gender itself to seek meaning in the social world" (Pasqua, 1993, p. 374). The year began with a positive outlook and advanced role for women in society with the January 21 U.S. Supreme Court ruling stating that women may not be denied the opportunity to serve on a jury (*American Almanac*, 1977). On April 2, 1975, the Metropolitan Opera named its first woman conductor. Sarah Caldwell, who founded the Opera Company of Boston in 1957, was selected to serve during the 1976 opera season (*Facts on File*, 1975). By May 14, 1975, AT&T (American Telephone & Telegraph Co.) established "a campaign to implement a 1973 consent order requiring increased hiring and promotion of women and minorities. Government agencies participating [included] the Justice Department, the Labor Department...[and] the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission" (*Facts on File*, 1975, p. 342). In July of 1975, a U.N. sponsored conference of women, held in Mexico City, approved a plan to "promote equality of the sexes and enhance participation of women in national development" (Leonard, 1988, p. 548). And by September 28, Congress had authorized "$800,000,000

to aid in the future admission of women to the three service academies at West Point, Annapolis, and Colorado Springs" (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 432).

A Chorus Line contained numerous roles for women with strong character portrayals of those women. They discuss their trials of growing up in a world different than that of their parents, while pursuing a life in the arts which was misunderstood by many. In the song "At The Ballet," a trio of women, auditioning for the chorus line, tell of their childhood fantasies of love, beauty, and perfect marriages and their disillusionment of actual events in their own family and in the real world. "Daddy always said that he married beneath him...when he proposed he informed my mother he was probably her very last chance. But, ev'rything was beautiful—at the ballet. I was happy at the ballet" (Hamlisch & Kleban, 1975, pp. 49, 51, 62).

A Chorus Line included black, Puerto Rican, and homosexual characterizations, which directly represented the culturally diverse American society that existed in 1975. The divergence of race and culture in America was growing and with it was continued unrest and a continued struggle for equality. In April, 1975, Frank Robinson was named the first black manager of a major league baseball team (Leonard, 1988) while in the tennis world, Arthur Ashe became the first black man to win the Wimbledon tennis championship in England. In July, "the NAACP concluded its 66th annual convention by asking government agencies to safeguard the employment rights of minorities" (Leonard, 1988, p. 539) and, in September, Pope Paul VI named Mother Elizabeth Seton as the first saint of Native American decent (Leonard, 1988).

Among the positive steps for minorities continued the social unrest involving the integration of the public schools in America. On September 7, 1975, National Guard troops were sent into Louisville, Kentucky, to protect children in inner-city and suburban schools due to "a week of violent protest against the busing of children to maintain racial balance" prompting many arrests and an array of property damage (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 431).

A new segment of society was emerging in 1975 and was dealt with openly in the musical *A Chorus Line*. Homosexuality was brought into the spotlight with the honorable discharge, on October 22, 1975, of Air Force Technical Sergeant Leonard Matlevich who was "declared unfit for service on the grounds of homosexual practices, which he voluntarily revealed" (*American Almanac*, 1977, p. 432). In *A Chorus Line*, the character Greg reveals that he tried to be interested in girls but during adolescence found he just was not: "Being gay meant being a bum the rest of my life" he thought (Hamlisch & Kleban, 1975, p. 111). Obviously, *A Chorus Line* was attempting to represent this newly-emerging facet of society by including a character with which some in the audience could identify.

Fine Arts and Communication

Television

Musical theatre was joined by television in reflecting the diversity of culture and commented on discrimination occurring in society throughout the 1970s. Ratings of television shows, from the fall of 1974 through April 20, 1975, as reported by the Nielson rating service, placed Norman Lear's *All in the Family* as the top-rated show in 1975. The bigotry and racial tension apparent in *All in the Family* directly reflected historical and social events in 1975. *A Chorus Line* did the same thing for musical theatre with, for example, the Puerto Rican character Morales, explaining why she could not "visualize" snow in an acting-school exercise. In the song "Nothing," she sings of her frustration in an American society that did not understand her culture: "Ev'ryday I would try to feel the motion, down the hill...hear the wind rush...feel the chill. I'm feeling nothing...Maybe it's genetic. They don't have bob sleds in San Juan" (Hamlisch & Kleban, 1975, pp. 87-89). The lyrics above speak to the misunderstanding between races in American society.

Due to the expanded role of minorities in American society, many of the television shows in the 1970s, particularly in 1975, dealt with minorities in various social situations

as never before. Afro-Americans became the central focus in the number-two rated show, *Sanford and Son*, along with other top-ten rated shows, *The Jeffersons*, and *Good Times*. Hispanics were featured in the comedy *Chico and the Man*. Women's issues, from single motherhood, careers, and abortion, were dealt with openly on American television with women of strong character and new moral beliefs in shows such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Maude*, and *Rhoda*. With Vietnam finally over, the fifth rated show in America in 1975, *M*A*S*H* dealt with the Korean war which was by then all but a memory.

Summary

In response to the first research question, *A Chorus Line* reflected contemporary society in 1975, as Americans experienced relief at the final withdrawal from Vietnam by American troops. Drug use, divorce, and unemployment were on the rise while television reflected all of these prominent aspects of society. With more citizens and veterans of war looking for employment in 1975, "*A Chorus Line*...struck a nerve in everyone who had ever had to present themselves before strangers to get a job or pursue a dream that they longed for" (Hischak, 1992, p. 48). *A Chorus Line* reflected not only the society in which it was created, 1975, by dealing with major issues openly, but continued to reflect society for fifteen years—making it the longest-running musical in the history of Broadway.

Dance took on a new meaning for the Broadway musical through the direction and choreography of Michael Bennett: "The conformity of the dancers to one style made them anonymous, it also made them a single cooperative being. Whatever the frustrated ambitions, the self-pity, the desperation of the gypsies, their dancing took on a joyful meaning" (Litton, 1981, pp. 342-343).

In response to the research problem of whether a musical contains issues of ongoing concern to society, *A Chorus Line* spoke to all facets of society, women, gays, minorities, and the common man. Women, gays, and other minority groups were featured as individual characters with strong roles in the musical. Their common feelings of neglect

and misunderstanding were brought to the forefront of the plot in *A Chorus Line* and their emotions were dealt with candidly. Sammy Williams was one of the original Broadway cast members and summed up what *A Chorus Line* meant to its audience:

> Everyone related to it, in all walks of life...it could be a story about office workers, doctors, lawyers. Everybody has their story to tell you, and people relate to the emotion involved. What succeeded was the honesty, the simplicity, the magic it creates, the place it takes you. (Viagas, 1990, p. 233)

Through the simple act of drawing a line on the floor of the stage, Michael Bennett challenged the theatre audience to endure the passionate stories, which unfolded throughout the evening's performance, individual thoughts, which in the end, would meld into one common goal—to be anonymous. This reflected the melting pot of American society, with many divergent thoughts and peoples coming together for the common good of the country.

CHAPTER IV

EUROPEAN PREDOMINANCE

The 1980s—*Les Misérables*—1987

Introduction

The musical *Les Misérables* premiered on Broadway in 1987 and did not originate on the American Broadway stage. *Les Misérables* was chosen for this study because it is designed as a musical opera with continuous music thoughout the production. *Les Misérables* deals with issues of concern to American society through its portrayal of poverty and oppression among members of differing social strata. The musical also depicts feelings of national pride and patriotism in fighting for one's beliefs and goals. This devotion to nationalism was strong in America in the 1980s as well as many other parts of the world, for example, with the fall of communism, signified by the tearing down of the Berlin Wall in Eastern Europe, prompting the end of the Cold War.

The 1980s

The 1980s began with the November 4 election of a new Republican president, Ronald Reagan, replacing Democratic president Jimmy Carter after only one term in office (Bowman, 1984). "The Reagan revolution was a full-blown ideological response to the anemic liberalism of the Carter presidency that faltered in the face of runaway inflation, sluggish economic growth, the Iranian hostage crisis and the relative erosion of America's place in the global economy" (West, 1994, p. 48). In the 1980s, growth in America was seen in material wealth for the top one percent of society. There existed less concern for moral convictions and family values while more Americans were consumed with greed. During the 1980s, the U.S. witnessed the largest increase in military armament in its history (West, 1994). The decade ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall signaling the end of the Cold War and, for some, a move away from Communism. James Baker (1994),

Secretary of State during the Reagan years, summed up the decade: "Some critics call the 1980s the Decade of Greed. They're wrong. It was the Decade of Freedom" (p. 49).

Social conditions in the 1980s appeared to be a culmination of problems from previous decades encompassing "...increased crime, violence, disease, tensions over race, gender and sexual orientation, decrepit public schools, ecological abuse and a faltering physical infrastructure" (West, 1994, p. 48). During the course of the 1980s, it was reported that "nearly half of all black children and 20 percent of all [other] children grew up in poverty, trapped in a cycle of despair and distrust" (West, 1994, p. 49).

The drastic increase in Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) became a growing concern during the 1980s, and was especially devastating to the Broadway theatre community. Among the many theatrical talents lost to AIDS in the 1980s, the death of *A Chorus Line*'s creator, forty-four-year-old Michael Bennett, from AIDS on July 2, 1987, was a tragic loss for the future of American musical theatre (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). Women in the 1980s were gaining in their fight for equality with, for example, the appointment in 1981 of Sandra Day O'Connor as the first woman to serve on the United States Supreme Court (Bowman, 1984).

Technology advanced with the first successful flight of the space shuttle *Columbia* in April 1981. Unfortunately, on January 28, 1986, the *Challenger* space shuttle exploded after take-off killing its seven-member crew, including the first teacher in space, and grounded the space program until September 1988 (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993).

The creators of musicals in the 1980s turned to spectacle to bring audiences back to Broadway. Their competition was Hollywood blockbuster films with multi-million dollar special effects and fast-paced action on the screen. The producers of musical theatre on Broadway answered this demand with "...new technologically staggering musical megaspectacles..." (Rosenberg, 1993, p. 7). Beginning with Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* (1981), hit musicals on Broadway in the 1980s enjoyed a greater life-span than shows of previous decades. National touring companies and popularity have kept many of these

"book-spectacle-song" shows in production for years. For example, *Cats* (1981) is still running on Broadway as of this writing and has become

> ...the most profitable theatrical production in history...netting over the 1980s about $60 million and thereby surpassing *A Chorus Line*...by 1991, the *New York Times* reported that '[*Cats*] has been seen in New York by 5.4 million people and has taken in $210,348,000 at the box office'...[with] 21 productions worldwide [which] have grossed more than $1 billion....(Rosenberg, 1993, p. 59)

Greater demand for spectacle-oriented musicals escalated production costs, which during the 1980s ranged from four million to eight million dollars per production. These rising production costs were absorbed by the theatre audience at the box office. By 1991 for example, *Miss Saigon*, which cost a record ten million dollars to produce, commanded the top ticket price ever asked for a seat at a Broadway musical—one-hundred dollars. At that price, the patron could expect an experience worthy of their money.

Production History

What has been called the epitome of the "book-song-spectacle" is the musical *Les Misérables*. The stimulus for *Les Misérables* was Victor Hugo's book *Les Misérables* (1862) which was and is the "...classic tale of poverty, revenge, and love..." (Hischak, 1993, p. 146). Events in the story are based on Hugo's life experiences and actual historical events occurring in France during the time-period in which the story is set. The musical *Les Misérables* was created by French popular music composer Claude-Michel Schönberg and librettist Alain Boublil and was first staged as a musical pageant in France. Through the production skills of Cameron Mackintosh and his collaborators, *Les Misérables* moved to London and became a hit. By 1986, the advance ticket sales for *Les Misérables*' Broadway run escalated to $11,000,000 with a top ticket price of $50. *Les Misérables* opened on Broadway at the Broadway Theatre on March 12, 1987. Like *Hair* in 1968, *Les Misérables* brought younger audiences back to Broadway.

As of 1989, *Les Misérables* had "four tour companies in the United States and fourteen international companies report[ing] a net profit of $600, 000 a week, grossing $450 million worldwide" (Rosenberg, 1993, p. 65), and in 1994 is still running on Broadway and touring internationally as well as throughout the U.S. The musical production of *Les Misérables* on Broadway won numerous awards, among them, eight Tony awards, the New York Drama Critics' Award, Five Drama Desk Awards, and a Grammy award for Best Original Cast Recording (Behr, 1989, p. 162).

Plot

Les Misérables begins in 1823 in Montreuil-Sur-Mer and tells the story of the fugitive, Jean Valjean, unjustly accused of stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving child. In the eight years after breaking parole, Valjean has changed his name and identity to Monsieur Madeleine and has become a factory owner and Mayor of the town. Valjean is still being hunted by the prison guard Javert who is determined to catch convict number 24601—Jean Valjean.

A factory worker, Fantine, has an illegitimate child, Cosette, which she gives to Valjean to raise as she succumbs to illness. After escaping Javert yet another time, Valjean rescues Cosette, Fantine's daughter, from the Thénardiers, abusive care-takers with whom she has been living while Fantine was selling herself for money. She is unaware of her mother Fantine's death but trusts Valjean and goes away with him to live safely in Paris.

The scene changes to Paris in 1832 with the young revolutionary students in an upheaval over the eminent fall of their leader General Lamarque who favors the rights and needs of the poor. In the street, the Thénardiers' daughter, Eponine, runs into Valjean and Cosette, who have become high-class citizens, whereas Eponine is quite poor. Eponine is in love with a student named Marius who sees Cosette instead and immediately falls in love with her. Eponine becomes a messenger between Cosette and the student Marius in the midst of growing Revolutionary tension and threat of war.

The students prepare for war to avenge the death of General Lamarque. To portray the revolutionary times in France during the late nineteenth century sufficiently, in the book *Les Misérables,* Hugo combined the magnitude of the Napoleonic wars and the uprisings of the royalist period with the actual events occurring as a result of Lamarque's death. The students build a barricade as a defense against the inevitable. To escape Javert, who is still pursuing Valjean, Valjean joins the fight in the barricade as does Marius. As the revolution ensues, Javert, who has joined the students, is found to be a spy for the army and is given to Valjean to be killed. Valjean now repays Javert for allowing him to escape years earlier to care for Cosette by letting Javert escape from the barricade.

The failed revolution is seen in the death of all of the students, including Eponine, at the barricade while Valjean rescues the injured Marius knowing he is in love with his daughter Cosette. Valjean carries Marius down below the streets and crawls through the sewers. Valjean encounters Javert once more and pleads that Javert let him get Marius to a hospital and then he will go into Javert's custody. Javert's code of justice has been broken by letting the prisoner go once more and he cannot live with himself and commits suicide. Cosette and Marius finally wed as Valjean succumbs to an illness. Before he dies, he tells Cosette of her past then surrenders to his illness—joining the spirits of Fantine, Eponine, and those who fought for freedom.

Musical Style

Les Misérables is enacted through song and action without any dialogue. The musical is cast more in the form of grand opera with arias or songs connected together by recitative, or sung dialogue (Hischak, 1993). The music in *Les Misérables* is scored symphonically including full orchestrations for winds and strings to accompany popular-type songs which appeal to younger audiences.

Specifically, *Les Misérables* incorporates characteristics of eighteenth century opera buffa style of alternating recitatives, arias, duets, and ensemble pieces. Combined with this

style is the later romantic opera characteristic of continuous flow of music. The ensemble pieces especially provide the audience with a feeling for the many emotions and needs of the characters in *Les Misérables*. For example, in the first act finale "One Day More," the various couples, freedom fighters, and protagonists are gathered and are venting their emotions with music—all at the same time. It is very effective in conveying the confused atmosphere of a country which at any moment could be at war.

Historical Events

When *Les Misérables* premiered on Broadway in 1987, America was celebrating the 200th anniversary of the United States Constitution (1787) in Philadelphia. "On May 25 delegates from the 13 original states held a ceremony on Independence Mall" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 792). The American Constitution stands as a document of freedom and has been preserved throughout the centuries through battles and social struggles. Obviously, the spirit of the revolutionaries in *Les Misérables* is a direct reflection of all who have fought for freedom in America. As the students rally in *Les Misérables* in the song "Do You Hear the People Sing?" one hears the passion for freedom under threat of oppression:

> It is time for us all to decide who we are. Do we fight for a night at the opera now? Have you asked of yourselves what's the price you might pay?...Do you hear the people sing? Singing the song of angry men? It is the music of a people who will not be slaves again!...There is a life about to start when tomorrow comes. (Schönberg & Boublil, 1989, p. 178)

The melodic and rhythmic aspects of the song are reminiscent of France's national anthem *La Marseilles* and possibly other anthems for peoples in numerous cultures. This author wishes to suggest that this kind of song has an emotional effect upon the listener regardless of one's nationality.

International relations between America and other nations in 1987 were strained which further suggests how the theatre audience could identify with the nationalism and pride for one's country exhibited by *Les Misérables*. For example, on January 24, 1987, "three Americans were taken hostage in Lebanon...[they were] faculty of Beirut University College...at this time five other Americans were being held captive by Moslem terrorists" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 794). Terrorism was a growing concern for Americans at home and abroad. The fear and uncertainty brought upon the public by such acts and the anger at the taking of one's countrymen is echoed in the lyrics of *Les Misérables*: "Will you give all you can give so that our banner may advance? Some will fall and some will live—will you come up and take your chance?" (Schönberg & Boublil, 1989, p. 178).

On the other hand, the United States was moving toward more peaceful international relations in 1987 when, for example, on December 8 "the first treaty to reduce nuclear arsenals was signed in Washington by President Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail S. Gorbachev of the U.S.S.R." (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 800).

Social Conditions

"All over America, the *Les Misérables* companies have, almost always on their own initiative, raised funds totaling over $4 million for a variety of causes, humanitarian and ecological..." (Behr, 1989, p. 157). Causes ranged from the Lockerbie, Scotland Pan-American airline terrorist disaster, protection of the Amazon rainforest, raising funding to fight AIDS, and finally aid for the homeless. "No other play, in the history of the theatre, has generated such social concern, or raised so much money for charity" (Behr, 1989, p. 157).

The most poignant example of social comment *Les Misérables* made upon society occurred in 1989 during the move toward democracy in China. The crisis in Tiananmen Square profoundly affected many cast members of *Les Misérables* internationally because

their actions on the stage were in direct parallel to events in society, specifically the tragic confrontations between students of reform and government tanks. Dann Fink, a cast-member in the Los Angeles company of *Les Misérables*, described this relationship between art and society after Chinese army tanks had thwarted the efforts of non-violent student reformers in Tiananmen square on June 3, 1989:

> I have never in my life...felt a kinship with my work as strongly as I did this weekend. To witness the carnage and brutality as happened in Beijing, and then to walk on stage and be part of that same event, barely two centuries removed, was at once frightening, chilling, sad, disturbing, and yet exhilarating...I seemed united with their cause and cries as we played out for 1800 people exactly what we had moments before been watching on TV. It was the first time I have been devastated by the timeless *reality* of "Les Mis." (Behr, 1989, pp. 157-158)

The economy in the 1980s was of major concern. "The major *economic* legacy of Reaganomics was to increase the disparity between rich and poor and to downsize the American middle class...[and] resulted in waves of economic recovery...alongside a relative drop in the well-being of a majority of Americans" (West, 1994, p. 48). The code of the 1980s was to "...consume, acquire and merge rather than invest, research and innovate" (West, 1994, p. 48). The result was a high rate of inflation and the worst stock market crash in the history of the United States on October 19, 1987. The Dow Jones average fell 508 points closing at 1738.74, down 22.6% which was double the decline during the 1929 crash. The next day the Dow set a new record for trading volume and, by the end of 1987, closed up 2.26% .

Economic conditions in 1987 illustrated the differing strata of society apparent in the 1980s with great wealth for some and a growing number of homeless citizens in the nation's larger cities. Those with wealth flaunted their success, for example, real estate developer Donald Trump and his 1987 book entitled *The Art of the Deal* (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). The 1980s saw many tycoons emerge, among them, Sam Walton who founded the discount chain of *Wal-Mart* stores. In 1987, Walton was named the richest

man in America, worth the same amount that it would take by 1991 to fight AIDS—$8,500,000,000 (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993).

At the other extreme was the growing number of homeless living in the streets of America's cities. In March 1987, in Washington D.C. the "Grate American Sleep-Out" took place to "publicize the distress of the homeless in the nation's capital" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 792). Minority population increased in America in 1987, for example, the Hispanic population in the U.S. rose by 30% to 18,800,000 (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 794).

These differing levels of society have existed throughout history and are vividly pronounced in *Les Misérables* between the lowest-class poor of society, Fantine, the Thénardiers, Eponine, and the ensemble cast compared with the more middle-class students and freedom fighters and the upper-class situation of Valjean and Cosette. Evidence of these varied levels of society are echoed in the lyrics and action of the musical *Les Misérables*. For example, in one street scene, as Valjean and Cosette walk through the town, the poor in the streets accost them: "Look down and see the beggars at your feet. Look down and show some mercy if you can. Look down and see the sweepings of the street. Look down, look down upon your fellow man" (Schönberg & Boublil, 1989, p. 175).

Disease, specifically AIDS, became a definite threat to society in the 1980s. Specifically, in 1987, the estimated cost to treat AIDS by 1991 was projected as $8,500,000,000 (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). By March 20, 1987, the first drug to help fight AIDS, azidothymidine (AZT), was approved by the Federal Government . Although AZT is not a cure, it may prolong one's life at an estimated $10,000 per year, per person (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993).

The fighting human spirit evidenced throughout the musical *Les Misérables* could be seen as the struggle against disease, specifically in 1987, against AIDS. At the time of this writing (1994), the threat of AIDS is still of great concern, and the AIDS-related death toll

continues to rise (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). In *Les Misérables*, as the students prepare to fight for freedom in the barricade, they reminisce on better times and their uncertain future: "Drink with me to days gone by. Can it be you fear to die? Will the world remember you when you fall? Can it be your death means nothing at all?" (Schönberg & Boublil, 1989, p. 185). As of 1994, a cure for those fighting the disease AIDS has not been discovered. The struggle for life and liberty evident in *Les Misérables* may speak to those who hope to live, as the song says: "One day more! Another day, another destiny" (Schönberg & Boublil, 1989, p. 181).

Fine Arts and Communication

Art

International relations were improving between the United States and the U.S.S.R. in 1987 evidenced through an art exchange between the National Gallery of Art and the Hermitage in Leningrad. "...a temporary exchange of masterpieces was arranged with the National Gallery of Art, sending an El Greco to the Hermitage in Leningrad, which in turn sent a Titian to Washington" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 792). This breaking of barriers for the sake of art is significant. Specifically, it is possible through the fine arts, for many people of differing backgrounds to relate to similar feelings and emotions. The subject-matter of *Les Misérables* speaks universally of struggle, oppression, and fighting for freedom. People of the U.S.S.R. have seen the fall of Communism in their own lives and are still fighting a civil struggle for rights.

Musical Theatre

Les Misérables recreated events in the late nineteenth century and brought the style of grand opera to the Broadway stage. Americans in the 1980s witnessed a resurgence of revivals of past musical successes which all seemed to reflect a longing for nostalgia. The revival of *42nd Street*, first presented on film in 1933, played to great success in 1980

while a revival of the British musical of 1937, *Me and My Girl*, premiered on Broadway in 1986 and ran for 1,420 performances. Many of the new musicals on Broadway in the 1980s resembled those of the early years of the Broadway musical. Nostalgia was the focus of such musicals as Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1988), Cy Coleman and Larry Gelbart's *City of Angels* (1989), and Robert Wright and George Forrest's *Grand Hotel* (1989), which under the direction of Tommy Tune, took on a 1928 Irving Berlin flavor.

The popularity of revivals and reflecting upon times past was seen in the 1987 Grammy Award for *The Broadway Album* by Barbra Streisand. The public in the 1980s found Broadway again, whether it be for nostalgia or spectacle. The popularity of Broadway was improving, mostly with hits from abroad.

Summary

The musical *Les Misérables* answers the research questions posed in this study. First, in answer to the question of whether the musical reflects contemporary society, *Les Misérables* does reflect society in the following ways. First, it speaks of poverty and oppression. Many areas of the world, in 1987, were experiencing civil conflict and immense differences in social strata. In the United States, homelessness was on the rise in the nation's larger cities while the middle class in America was shrinking with the majority of wealth existing in the top one percent of society. Secondly, *Les Misérables* deals directly with fighting for ones beliefs and individual freedoms. In 1987, America was celebrating its 200th anniversary of its document of freedom—the Constitution. This directly parallels the freedom fight evidenced in *Les Misérables.*

The second research problem asked if musical theatre contains conditions of ongoing concern to society. As described above, *Les Misérables* deals directly with the actual uprising which occurred in the late nineteenth century with the death of General Lamarque and the barricades and freedom fighters who rose up to defend his legacy. Poverty is an

ongoing concern of society and may continue to be. *Les Misérables* deals directly with differing social strata and speaks to many people in all facets of society.

In *Les Misérables,* the students are fighting to save their country from oppression and preserve their freedom. In 1989, the world witnessed the pulling down of the Berlin wall which served as a monument to Communism since the 1960s in Germany. The Cold War with Europe ended and a new era of Democracy began for oppressed Communist countries. "[*Les Misérables*]...remains a show alternately carved and ripped out of the history of a nation and a people at the very limits of their own social and personal survival" (Morley, 1990, p. 1).

The 1990s—*Miss Saigon*—1991

Introduction

In the following discussion the musical *Miss Saigon* (1991) will be compared with historical events and social conditions of American society in 1991, the year of the musical's Broadway premiere. *Miss Saigon* was chosen because it was the first musical in the history of Broadway to charge $100 for a seat and its plot dealt with the Vietnam War which, in the 1990s, is still of social concern. Several parallels exist between the plot of *Miss Saigon* and society in the 1990s. In 1991, America went to war in the Persian Gulf, while America's last war, in Vietnam, was the focal point of the musical *Miss Saigon.* The role of women in 1990s society became more pronounced than in previous decades. Issues of ongoing social concern in 1990 involved problems caused by racial discrimination, increased crime, faultering schools, homelessness, and concerns of social welfare, such as health care. *Miss Saigon* deals with many issues of ongoing social concern in the 1990s as well as providing comment on American society during the Vietnam War era.

The 1990s

As of the date of this writing, 1994, the 1990s were already becoming a memorable decade. Americans were on the verge of experiencing the "information super highway," an interactive network of some 500 cable television channels accessible through television and/or the home computer. The ability to shop at home, order food, entertainment, or other services, without leaving home, promises an alteration in the way Americans live and interact in society. For Americans needing to escape life in the 1990s, there will be "virtual reality" which allows the consumer to feel detached from the day's stressful situations by taking immediate vacations to far-off places or escaping into worlds previously unattainable (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993).

Despite all of the innovations in entertainment and lifestyles, social problems continued to escalate well into the 1990s. Racism remained and continued to grow, fueled by the 1991 beating of black motorist Rodney King by white Los Angeles police officers. America witnessed the beating, through a home video reproduction, and public outrage in Los Angeles sparked riots rivaling those of the 1960s.

The 1991 war in the Persian Gulf brought Americans back their sense of pride for country and proved again the might of the American military. With the election of Bill Clinton, the first Democratic president since Jimmy Carter in 1976, national health-care reform became an issue while public education in America was failing. For example, in 1991, verbal scores on the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) fell to all-time lows and math scores on the SAT fell for the first time since 1980 (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). Crime among the youth of America was growing with street gangs using handguns, while drug-related killings were commonplace. They felt detached from society and turned to rap music which became the voice of this troubled generation, while drug-related crime among the youth of America continued to increase.

The Women's Movement in the 1990s gained new ground with more positions of equality for women in the workplace than in previous decades. With this expanding role in

the workforce came problems of identity and role definitions among male and female members of society. Sexual harassment of women in the workplace became a topic of heated discussion in the 1990s, from the Navy's Tailhook scandal, to the Capital Hill Senate hearing of sexual harassment charges brought upon Supreme-Court nominee Clarence Thomas by his former co-worker Anita Hill. Date rape among couples was reported more frequently with the previously defined rolls of males and females in flux.

Homosexuality in the 1990s was out in the open more than in any other decade. Broadway especially provided an outlet for free expression of alternative lifestyles in the 1990s with the productions *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, and *Angels in America* both dealing openly with homosexuality and AIDS (*Time*, 1994, p. 86).

Production History

Miss Saigon premiered on Broadway on April 11, 1991, and was created by the same team that produced *Les Misérables* —Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil. *Miss Saigon* is also set in the style of grand opera with continuous music using French Novelist Pierre Loti's story *Madame Chrysanthemum*, also used by Puccini for his opera *Madame Butterfly*, as the stimulus for the musical. Schönberg (1991) became interested in setting Louti's story when he saw a picture in a magazine of a woman saying goodbye to her Vietnamese child "...[who] was about to board a plane from Ho Chi Minh City Airport for the United States of America where her father, an ex-GI she had never seen, was waiting for her. Her mother was leaving her there and would never see her again" (p. 5). For Schönberg, this image was "The Ultimate Sacrifice" and, combined with Loti's story, immediately provided the backdrop for his musical ideas.

Miss Saigon is set during the final days of the Vietnam War in 1975 preceding the fall of Saigon. It has been suggested that "...postwar patriotism [from Vietnam] might turn audiences away from a show that essentially is *Madame Butterfly* set in 1975 Vietnam" (Dunn, 1991, p. 38). Schönberg (1989) stated that "...we are not trying to make a musical

about the Vietnam War...it's a tragic love story which has the Vietnam war as a background" (Laserdisc).

Miss Saigon set new records for the Broadway musical. First, it cost an estimated $10,000,000 to produce making it the most costly musical in the history of Broadway. Second, *Miss Saigon* had $35,000,000 in advance sales before opening on Broadway and finally captured the highest ticket price ever asked for a Broadway show—$100 for a seat, previously priced at $60.00 (Dunn, 1991).

Miss Saigon created controversy before it opened on Broadway. "On its way to Broadway, it [*Miss Saigon*] ran afoul of the performers' union, Actors' Equity, and assorted ethnic lobbying groups. Charges that [producer Cameron] Mackintosh had not sought out enough Asian Americans escalated into a probe of racial hiring practices on all his shows...[prompting Mackintosh to] cancel the Broadway engagement in disgust" (Henry, 1991, p. 72).

Obviously, *Miss Saigon* was finally produced by Mackintosh on Broadway, but more concern by Asian-Americans of the portrayal of their people caused controversy during the run of *Miss Saigon* in Minneapolis in January 1994. Asian-Americans protested the presentation of *Miss Saigon* due to its stereotyping of Asian women as "passive [and] seductive but disposable [by] an American man" (Steele, 1994, p. 1F). David Mura, founder of the Asian-American Renaissance group questioned the ability of "...demonized white...men who still control most of this country and its culture—to imagine the world through the eyes of the Other—the not white...not male, and not fully empowered?" (Steele, 1994, p. 5F). He believes that Asian women are not being viewed correctly and that if the tables were turned, and it was American women being so portrayed, that the portrayal would also be controversial and demeaning to American women.

Ironically, regardless of the disagreement between Actors' Equity and Mackintosh, *Miss Saigon* contains the most diversity of culture of any Broadway cast, past or present (Steele, 1994). Bill Connor, president of the Ordway production company, feels that *Miss Saigon*

"...is about U.S. guilt and responsibility...it would be naive to say that stereotypes aren't used...but here they're used to show America's portrayal of its responsibility in Vietnam" (Steele, 1994, p. 5F). Forums, protests, and discussions of historical, social, and cultural implications of *Miss Saigon* were held in Minneapolis during the run of *Miss Saigon* from January-March, 1994. Obviously, *Miss Saigon* touched a social nerve in that community and evoked greater thought into the depth of the impact of musical theatre upon society in the 1990s.

Plot

The plot centers around Kim, a reluctant prostitute in Saigon, and Chris, a Marine who falls in love with her. Kim is "managed" by a man called the Engineer who is more interested in money and what he calls "The American Dream" than events occurring around him. Chris intends to take Kim to America with him when his tour of duty ends but is unable to process the necessary paperwork before the mandatory pullout of Americans in 1975.

Three years pass and Chris's friend John informs him that Kim has had a child by Chris and wants to bring the child to the States to be an American citizen. Unknown to Kim, Chris has married and brings his wife, Ellen, to Bangkok, where Kim is now living after fleeing the Vietcong takeover of Saigon, to accept his responsibilities as a father. Kim, distraught over meeting John's wife, kills herself so her son will be raised by his father in America.

Musical Style

Many of the songs in *Miss Saigon* are cast in a slow ballad-rock style with poignant lyrics and symphonic orchestration. The continuous music links these ballads together along with numerous other pieces that reflect the musical style of the late 1960s and early to middle 1970s. The music also reflects the Eastern sound, using the pentatonic scale, in

many situations where Kim and her countrymen are speaking of their homeland and their struggle. For example, in the song "Don't Touch My Boy," the pentatonic scale is heard as the initial melody of the tune. The musical style of the 1960s can be heard in the opening chorus of "The Heat Is On In Saigon" which is accompanied by a rock beat and is orchestrated with electric guitar and drum-set. In it one hears a resemblance to the music of *Hair* with its electrified instruments and rock and roll rhythmic accompaniment. The softer ballads, orchestrated more symphonically with strings and winds, remind one of the more traditional ballads of Rodgers and Hammerstein in *Oklahoma!* (1943) and *South Pacific* (1949). The actual sound of a Huey Helicopter, which permeates many of the situations in *Miss Saigon,* brings a sense of atmosphere to the music that instruments alone could not evoke.

Historical Events

The United States began 1991 with apprehension over imminent war in the Persian Gulf, became euphoric when victory was quickly achieved, but relapsed into apprehension again when an economic recession hung on and seemed to get worse. President George Bush and the United Nations announced a January 15, 1991, deadline for Saddam Hussein, president and self-appointed dictator of Iraq, to end his army's forced occupation of the city of Kuwait City or the United States and its allies would begin air attacks against his forces. The Persian Gulf War began on January 17, 1991, with air strikes on targets in Iraq and eventually troops on foot pushing Iraqis back to their borders (*World Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 1031). The war ended on February 27, 1991, with the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

Rehearsals for the Broadway production of *Miss Saigon* began twelve days after the Persian Gulf War began. "[The] creators [of *Miss Saigon*] emphasize that *Miss Saigon* is not about politics...a fear that political seriousness might turn audiences off—and that an unflinching look at bad memories from Vietnam may be widely inappropriate just after the buoying triumph of the Gulf War" (Henry, 1991, p. 74). *Miss Saigon*'s pertinence to

current events in 1991 was obvious. "...it [*Miss Saigon*] remains stunningly relevant by the standards of Broadway, and triumphantly Broadway in meeting the standards of relevance" (Henry, 1991, p. 74).

Not only did *Miss Saigon* relate to the war in the Gulf, it still touched a nerve with veterans and those who lived through the war in Vietnam. Even in 1994, the Vietnam issue is still debated. Bill Clinton's lifting of the thirty-year trade embargo on Vietnam in February 1994, in exchange for "more progress, more cooperation, more answers on [2,238] missing servicemen" (Walsh, 1994, p. 34), caused veterans to protest that Vietnam for them and their missing comrades was not a dead issue.

In 1989, Richard Maltby, Jr. (1989), who translated Boublil's French lyrics for *Miss Saigon,* gave his thoughts as to the continued effect of the Vietnam war upon the collective American psyche:

> America had never lost a war...there was something dying for America much bigger than just the end of an event or a war that they had officially pulled out of 2 years before [in 1975]. This was the end of a vision of America, of a dream of America, of its invincibility and of the perfect morality that we clothe ourselves in all the time. It came to an end brutally on that day. So this moment in time that's part of the background of this love story [*Miss Saigon*] has a reverberation in American history that just needs to be pointed out from time to time. (Laserdisc)

America also made many unfulfilled promises to the people of Vietnam and then left them to struggle against the Vietcong invading Saigon in 1975. In particular, in *Miss Saigon*, this feeling of abandonment is seen during the airlift of American G.I.s during the fall of Saigon with numerous Vietnamese pleading for a spot in the helicopter: "The chopper's on its way there's room for you all, they're climbing over the wall, get back! They'll kill who they find here! Don't leave us behind here!" (Boublil, Maltby, Jr., & Schönberg, 1991).

In 1991, during the Gulf War, many promises to oust Saddam Hussein by the Allies did not come to fruition, paralleling the situation in *Miss Saigon*: "...all promises made to Vietnam by [the] West [were not kept]" (Henry, 1991, p. 91). This writer wishes to point

out the wealth of information about the Vietnam War presented through *Miss Saigon* and its relevance to events in 1991 and its use for the future to teach about the Vietnam conflict.

During 1991, many military events occurred which closely parallel the plot of *Miss Saigon.* The United States government closed forty-four military installations which resulted in the elimination of some 80,000 military and 37,000 civilian positions. In the late 1970s, after the Vietnam War, veterans returning from the war were looking for work, some severely disabled. On February 6, 1991, an act to benefit Vietnam War veterans who were exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange was proposed. In 1994, there were more disabled homeless Vietnam veterans jobless on the streets than anyone knew (*NBC News*, February 24, 1994).

Miss Saigon contains themes of "war, revolution, self-sacrifice, social injustice, [and] racial inequity" (Simon, 1991, pp. 76-77). War, revolution, and social injustice have been discussed. Self-sacrifice is an obvious theme in *Miss Saigon* in the sacrifice Kim makes, by killing herself, for the good of her son. In the song, "I'd Give My Life For You," one hears the unending bond between mother and child evident in nature and society for centuries: "You didn't ask me to be born...Why should you learn of war or pain? To make sure you're not hurt again. I swear I'd give my life for you" (Boublil et al., 1991, p. 70). The December 1991, *Scientific American* (December 1991) reported that "Single women with young children are the fastest growing part of the homeless population. The physical and mental suffering of these families is great" (p. 66). *Miss Saigon* and its portrayal of the giving of children by their Asian mothers to American G.I.s during the airlift painfully illustrates this need for finding a better life for one's child.

In *Miss Saigon,* Kim becomes a refugee of war during the American pull-out when she is unable to convince the American G.I.s at the base in Saigon that her "husband" Chris is supposed to take her with him. She flees with many of her countrymen to the safety of Bangkok. In October 1991, Vietnam reluctantly agreed to accept the return of refugees who fled the Vietcong invasion of Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, when Americans pulled

out in 1975 (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993, p. 395). Those finding refuge in camps since 1975 in Hong Kong were estimated at approximately 100,000 (*World Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 1029).

Racism in America was still a societal problem in 1991 with the number of interracial marriages tripling since 1970. The United Church of Christ in January 1991, stated that racism was a growing problem in the United States and that it "permeate[s] most of our institutions...and [racism] underlie[s] the economic and social differences between whites and blacks" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 837). The demographics of American society were changing to a melting pot of cultures in 1991: "American Indians tripled to 1,800,000 since 1960, Asian Americans increased by 107.8% and Hispanics by 53.0% since 1980" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 832).

In *Miss Saigon*, racism is dealt with by the Vietnamese army unwilling to accept the children of American servicemen and their Asian women. After the war, John, Chris's Marine buddy, becomes an advocate for these interracial children left behind in Vietnam. In the musical, a film is shown on the stage of some of these children who do exist and were not claimed by their American fathers. There were 20,000 of these children left in Vietnam who were often "...abandoned by their mothers, tormented into quitting school and hounded from the work force" (Henry, 1991, p. 74).

John sings the song "Bui-doi" to describe for the audience the life of these forgotten children: "They're called Bui-doi, the dust of life, conceived in hell and born in strife. They are a living reminder of all we failed to do. That's why we know deep in our hearts that they are all our children too" (Boublil et al., 1991, pp. 76-77). The musical *Miss Saigon* also provided poignant commentary and education for Americans as to some of what was left unfinished after the Vietnam War: "Like all survivors I once thought when I'm home I won't give a damn. But now I know I'm caught. I'll never leave Vietnam. War isn't over when it ends. Some pictures never leave your mind. They are the faces of the children, the ones we left behind" (Boublil et al., 1991, p. 75).

Racism was also seen in the character of the Engineer, himself an Amerasian male who longed for the "good life" America could provide. Instead, he felt hindered by the life he is forced to live in Vietnam: "Why was I born of a race that thinks only of rice and hates entrepreneurs? Me, I belong in a place where a man sets his price and you pay and he's yours. I should be American, where ev'ry promise lands" (Boublil et al., 1991, pp. 65-66).

The Engineer speaks of "The American Dream" in *Miss Saigon* which, in 1991, was all but a memory. "What's that I smell in the air, the American dream. Sweet as a new millionaire, the American dream. Pre-packed and ready to wear, the American dream. Spend and have money to spare..." (Boublil et al., 1991, pp. 88-89). During 1991, unemployment rose to 7.1% while industrial production dropped 1.9% and the sale of new homes experienced the third straight year of decline. The workforce in America in 1991 laid off 161,000 workers from major industries while General Motors alone laid off 70,000 employees. This American dream provides a "...tragic social commentary about what the West symbolizes to the Third World...not peace and freedom so much as money and security" (Henry, 1991, p. 91). Unfortunately, money and fortune were not to be gained by many in 1991. *Miss Saigon* only helps to point out that material wealth is usually the result of ones birthright and how "...whole peoples' opportunities [are] thwarted through accidents of birth...[and] the sheer randomness of how riches are distributed on this planet" (Henry, 1991, p. 91).

Social Conditions

Social structure of society in the 1990s changed with alternative lifestyles, such as homosexuality, and couples living together, more prominent than in past decades (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). Approximately one out of four babies in the United States was born out of wedlock while in 1991 alone some 5,500,000 children under 12 were going hungry (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993). The song "Bui-doi," discussed above,

could be suggested to reflect not only the neglected children of war in Vietnam, but the neglect of children in 1991 in America as well. Critics of the musical felt the producers of *Miss Saigon* were trying to make money off the suffering of others with the blatant portrayal of children on the screen during the performance of *Miss Saigon.* One critic stated: "I am not sneering at genuine human misery, only at its overinflated and underfelt commercial exploitation [in *Miss Saigon*]" (Simon, 1991, p. 76). It is important to allow musical theatre the chance to educate its audience to social injustice of the Vietnam War "...when fathers are found in [the] US. only 2% show interest" (Henry, 1991, p. 74).

The Women's Movement came to the forefront of social interest in 1991. Sexual discrimination was prohibited in 1991 for federally funded school athletics programs and participation of women in high school sports activities rose from 7% to 36% while 335 of the participants in NCAA activities in the nation's colleges were female. Unfortunately, "women held only 31.3% of high-level state and local government positions while occupying 43.5% of lower-level jobs...[and] 61% of women had met with some form of sexual harassment at work" (*American Facts and Dates*, 1993, p. 832).

Women in *Miss Saigon* are seen, first, as prostitutes for the American G.I.s. Kim, on the other hand, emerges as a character of great depth and conviction for what she believes in and those she loves. Women in musicals have throughout this study retained a high level of sophistication and intelligence and with *Miss Saigon* the strong character of a woman doing what she must for her child provides telling social commentary on the struggles women must face during wartime.

Many social themes run through the plot of *Miss Saigon.* First, the cynicism of society is seen in the character of the Engineer while optimism for better times is seen in Kim. "[The Engineer]...is a man driven to sleaziness by circumstance, a man born to command business but victimized by his race, nationality, time and place" (Henry, 1991, p. 73). Second, the Engineer's desire for wealth exhibits the lure of Capitalism while Kim and her countrymen live in squalor and poverty. For example, at the end of the musical, the

Engineer is the one who handles Kim's child, not Chris. The Engineer sees one final way to achieve the "American Dream" by using the child as his ticket into America.

The fate of Kim's child is left unspoken and stands as a testament to the fate of all Amerasian children left behind after the war. "*Miss Saigon* succeeds because it is poignant musical drama rather than mere stage spectacle and it is one of the few megahits to have substantial content and integrity (Hischak, 1993, p. 169).

Fine Arts and Communication

Along with the general recession, the Broadway theatre did not prosper during the 1990-1991 season. A total of twenty-eight productions were mounted drawing an estimated audience of approximately 7,360,000, a decline from 8,030,000 in 1990, while ticket sales fell from $283,000,000 to $267,000,000 for the 1991 season. The recession also caused museums to provide shorter hours for their patrons and to close many main galleries due to lack of security personnel.

Summary

The Vietnam experience for America will not soon be forgotten. *Miss Saigon* stands as a reminder, educator, and informer as to the atrocities of the war in Vietnam and the continued affect it still has upon the American psyche. In an interview with Dr. Roger Weed, in 1994, this writer was able to gain valuable information into the continued inner effect the Vietnam War had upon its participants. Dr. Weed was a first lieutenant with the 498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) in 1967 in the South Vietnamese cities of Nha Trang and Qui Nhon. Dr. Weed was impressed at the accuracy and reality of the events depicted in *Miss Saigon* and their presentation in the music. Weed (1994) stated that "many people my age and older, remember the end of World War II and many of us wanted to relive the experience. As a nation we thought we had saved the world from evil.

People of my age went to Vietnam with that same thought...an Infantry Lt. Colonel [said] 'don't knock it, it's the only war we got."

Miss Saigon not only affected Americans involved in the war but the Vietnamese as well. *Miss Saigon*'s director Nicholas Hytner felt that the musical "...has no political sophistication—operas never do. Music plays to the heart. It asks an audience to understand that every massive world event has an effect on small people" (Henry, 1991, p. 74).

In response to the research questions posed in this study, the first question asked if musicals reflect their contemporary society. Rehearsals began for *Miss Saigon* fifteen days after America and its allies declared war on Iraq in 1991. Obviously, the fact that *Miss Saigon* was set during the Vietnam War, which involved American soldiers defending the rights of the people of South Vietnam, directly parallels America sending troops to defend the people of Kuwait in the Persian Gulf in 1991.

Secondly, when questioning whether a musical contains conditions of ongoing concern to society, again the answer is yes. Racism and single-parent families continue to dominate society in 1991 and *Miss Saigon* deals with both issues. Racism is seen through the character of the Amerasian Engineer who wishes to live in America, a place he sees as the land of opportunity. The children of American servicemen and Asian women, left behind in Vietnam after the war, are painfully introduced to the audience and Kim ultimately kills herself for the good of her Amerasian child.

In April 1966, the American forces going to Vietnam were given this statement as to their mission abroad: "The reason that you are here is for the business of helping a brave nation repel aggression. This is your official job and it is a vital one not only for the preservation of freedom in this one country but for the survival of freedom everywhere" (Weed, 1994). The same speech was given to U.S. troops involved in the Persian Gulf War by General H. Norman Schwarzkopf in 1991. In the case of Vietnam, it was politically incorrect to "like" the war (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993). No parades

were given to returning veterans of Vietnam. In 1991, the entire country rallied behind the humanitarian aid of defense provided by American troops in the Persian Gulf and all were hailed when they returned. The producers of *Miss Saigon* educated the cast, most too young to remember the Vietnam War, on the history of the war and its people. As they were educated so are new generations. There are lessons to be learned about American conflicts abroad and *Miss Saigon* provides an accurate portrayal of events which in turn could teach future generations about a tragic time in American history (*Oxford Politics of the World*, 1993).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate parallels between historical events, social conditions, musical style, and trends in the fine arts and the media in American society, with selected Broadway musicals. A representative musical was examined from each decade, from 1927 to the present. The study began with *Showboat* (1927), which marked the first successful integration of topical musical numbers, poignant drama, character development, and social conflict, and ended with *Miss Saigon* (1991) which, as of this writing, is still running on Broadway.

The selection of musicals for this study was based upon a musical's influence on the given decade in which it first premiered on Broadway. Criteria for selection included a musical's unique or innovative contribution to the form and structure of musical theatre, longest run figures, the introduction into the genre of uncharacteristic music or dance, and a musical's overall impact on the style and structure of musical theatre production. The plot of each musical was analyzed and summarized. This study also included an explanation of musical style inherent in each musical. The information gathered from the selected musical was then compared to actual historical events, social conditions, and trends in the fine arts and in the media occurring during the year of its premiere on Broadway. Conclusions were based upon the exploration of the interaction of the arts and society in an effort to determine the effect arts and society have upon each other.

This study investigated the following questions: (1) Did musicals reflect their contemporary society? (2) Does musical theatre contain conditions of ongoing concern to society, such as women's rights, racism, and war? This study was also concerned with the didactic elements of the musical upon American society and what can be learned from the drama portrayed in the musicals.

Musicals Reflect Society

In response to the first research question of whether musicals reflected their contemporary society, in all cases this study found that many parallels existed between musical theatre and American society from 1927 to the present. In 1927, the year *Show Boat* opened, advancements in industrialization evident in American society in the 1920s, affected the life of the show boats on the river. Advancements in transportation and industrialization, specifically Henry Ford's automobiles and assembly line, Americans were becoming a more mobile society, erasing the need for touring show boats as a form of transportation. Films, specifically talking pictures, were replacing live entertainment in society's spare time, thus replacing the need for the kind of live entertainment the show boats provided.

In 1931, Americans struggled during an ongoing economic depression while the musical *Of Thee I Sing* satirized the political system running the country at the time. *Of Thee I Sing* reflected its contemporary society by giving its audience some humorous satirical comment on life in America when their present conditions and future seemed bleak. Corruption caused by bootlegging of alcohol, anti-prohibitionist activity, and gangsters, like Al Capone, was pushed aside in the minds of theatre goers in favor of humor to lift their spirits.

It can be concluded that events in the musical *Oklahoma!* reflected America society in 1943 by reestablishing community pride, specifically for the state of Oklahoma, during World War II. *Oklahoma!* portrayed life in America free from the struggles of a country at war. With its box social, cowboys and farmers as a backdrop, *Oklahoma!* depicted life in America the way many wished it could have remained—simple and unencumbered. On the other hand, *Oklahoma!* symbolically reflected the events of the day. Results of this study suggest that through the struggle between the farmer and the cowman and their role in society, a parallel can be drawn between their actions in the musical and the actual role of the countries involved in World War II.

West Side Story reflected contemporary society in 1957 by interpreting the actual rivalry between American and Puerto Rican gangs warring on New York City's West Side due to a wave of minority immigration into New York City. By showing death between the gang leaders on the stage, *West Side Story* exposed its audience to musical tragedy rather than the established norm of musical comedy. For example, in 1957, the United States was concerned with the threat of nuclear war, specifically by the Soviet Union, and this fear of the unknown was paralleled by the unknown the rival gangs were facing when dealing with each other. The novelty of the emerging space program in the 1950s also was allied with the innovations brought upon the genre of musical theatre by *West Side Story.*

In 1968, with Americans involved in the Vietnam War in Southeast Asia, *Hair* reflected contemporary society by providing an accurate portrayal of the changing views and morals of society's counter-culture youth. Due to angst directed toward the conflict in Vietnam, the youth of America were rebelling against established norms of society including law and order, the draft, figures of authority, pre-existing dress-codes, and decent language. Rebellion was seen in an increased use of drugs, an affinity for rock and roll music, and Beatles-inspired long hair. *Hair* directly reflected this new hippie generation by reacting against established norms in the genre of musical theatre. *Hair* lacked an elaborate stage set, allowed the actors to dress in clothing found in New York City's Greenwich Village, which is where the story is set and its characters reside, and utilized electronic rock music with the band placed on the stage instead of the usual orchestra pit placement. All of this change was a direct reflection of society outside the theatre in 1968. Gerome Ragni commented that:

> The play [*Hair*] is not a putdown of the older generation. The kids (in cast and story) turn people on with love. It is a series of observations of today...it represents our liberation from racial prejudice, from old religious ideas of sin and guilt feelings, and especially liberation from hate. (Nadel, 1969, pp. 4-5)

With the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the musical *A Chorus Line* reflected contemporary society by giving Americans hope for the future. It still dealt with and

reflected problems of society like drug use, divorce, and unemployment through the metaphor of auditioning for a job dancing in a chorus line of a Broadway show. Since it was the longest running musical to date (1994) in the history of Broadway, *A Chorus Line* reflected not only the society in which it was created, 1975, but continued to reflect society until its close.

By the 1980s, *Les Misérables* reflected contemporary society by dealing directly with poverty and oppression. Americans, as with many other countries, were experiencing high unemployment and increased homelessness. Victor Hugo's book, *Les Misérables*, from which the musical was created, dealt with those very issues. *Les Misérables* also reflected the sense of defending freedom for the good of mankind and corresponded to the 1987 celebration in America of the 200th anniversary of its Constitution which detailed the rights and freedoms of the American people.

In 1991, America was involved in defending her freedom in the Persian Gulf against the dictatorial practices of Saddam Hussein. The musical *Miss Saigon* went into rehearsals just fifteen days after America and its allies declared war on Iraq. With *Miss Saigon* being set during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the parallels to 1990s society seem obvious. American soldiers defending the rights of the people of South Vietnam similarly reflects America sending troops to defend the people of Kuwait in the Persian Gulf in 1991.

Musicals Reflect Ongoing Conditions

The second research question dealt with whether musical theatre contains conditions of ongoing concern to society. As illustrated in Table 5.1, conditions of ongoing concern to society, for the purpose of this study, are defined as racism, poverty, class struggle, women's rights, minority rights, war, and addictions. All of the musicals in this study dealt with some or all of these social issues.

Table 5.1: Broadway Musicals (1927-Present) and their Relation to Current Events and Ongoing Conditions of Society in 1994: A Comparative Analysis

Rebellion	*Women's Issues*	*Addictions: Drugs, Gambling, Alcohol*	*Racism, Civil Rights and Class Struggle*	*Oppression*	*National Pride*
	Show Boat (1927)	*Show Boat (1927)*	*Show Boat (1927)*		*Show Boat (1927)*
					Of Thee I Sing (1931)
	Oklahoma! (1943)		*Oklahoma! (1943)*		*Oklahoma! (1943)*
West Side Story (1957)			*West Side Story (1957)*	*West Side Story (1957)*	
Hair (1968)	*Hair (1968)*	*Hair (1968)*	*Hair (1968)*		
	A Chorus Line (1975)		*A Chorus Line (1975)*		*A Chorus Line (1975)*
Les Misérables (1987)			*Les Misérables (1987)*	*Les Misérables (1987)*	*Les Misérables (1987)*
	Miss Saigon (1991)		*Miss Saigon (1991)*	*Miss Saigon (1991)*	*Miss Saigon (1991)*

In 1927, *Show Boat* dealt with issues such as racism and addiction which continue to be of social concern at the time of this writing in 1994. Racism in *Show Boat* was seen in the occupations of the various characters, for example, black characters served as the show boat's crew, while white characters were cast as stars and owners of the show boat. A major plot conflict involved a white woman of mixed racial blood being banished from her job on the show boat. This type of discrimination still exists in 1990s society while racial oppression remains the cause of many social conflicts. For example, in 1993, the "Coalition to Stop Show Boat" was established to call attention to racist attitudes and the questionable portrayal of blacks in a revival of *Show Boat* in Canada. Addiction to alcohol and gambling are major issues in *Show Boat.* In the 1990s, help-groups such as "Alcoholics Anonymous" and "Gamblers Anonymous," continue to help people with these ongoing addictions. The increasingly active role of women in society in the 1920s, during the beginnings of the women's suffrage movement, was reflected in *Show Boat* with most of the strong roles in the musical being played by women. In the 1990s, women are continuing to find their place in society with increased appointments to high-ranking positions in business, education, and government.

In 1931, *Of Thee I Sing* dealt with conditions of ongoing concern to society through its portrayal of how Americans handled the stress of the economic depression. The musical provided a look away from society's problems and took a satirical look at America's government and governmental process. For example, New York's own mayor at the time was parodied on stage. With their future unsure, the American public needed some relief from breadlines and cardboard housing. *Of Thee I Sing* focused upon the positive and the humorous in society rather than trying to educate the public to the ills of corruption and crime, rampant in the 1930s due to rebellion against prohibition and an increase of gangster violence on the city streets.

Oklahoma! dealt with ongoing conditions of society in 1943, with its view of class conflict between characters of varying social strata and its handling of the continued

expanding role of women in society. *Oklahoma!* illustrated the contrasting strata of society in America in the 1940s through the portrayals of its characters. In the 1990s, there are very differing levels of financial means among the American people, from the very rich to the increasing number of homeless on the streets. Women's roles in the 1990s increased in quality while the women characters in *Oklahoma!* reflected a stronger female presence and character for the musical stage. As women's roles in society were developing, their roles were also expanding in the genre of musical theatre.

West Side Story reflected many issues of ongoing concern to American society through its portrayal of racism, juvenile delinquency, and the growing crime rate among the youth of America in the late 1950s. Gang violence, prompted by racial tensions among Puerto Ricans and New York's inner city youth, was the focus of *West Side Story* in 1957 and is an increasing problem among the youth of America in the 1990s. Gang-related crimes in the 1950s were contained in the inner-cities but by the 1990s are spreading to the suburbs as well. Juvenile delinquency is dealt with among gang members in *West Side Story* who spoke of their troubled upbringing, dropping out of school, and rebelling against authority, all of which continue to plague America's youth, with the drop-out rate rising in American society in the 1990s.

Hair reflected ongoing issues of rebellion, drug use, and alternative musical taste which are all still of concern today in 1994. For example, in *Hair* many of the male characters burn their draft cards in protest of the war in Vietnam. In the 1990s, rebellion against government and authority is seen in an increased use of guns by young Americans who use crime and force to voice their own beliefs. Although different forms of rebellion, the youth of America in 1968 as well as the 1990s use conflict as a form of rebellion. The use of rock and roll music in *Hair,* as the voice of the 1960s generation, parallels the use in the 1990s of rap music as a means of expression for America's youth.

In 1975, *A Chorus Line* addressed differing groups of society including women, gays, minorities. Alternative lifestyles, such as homosexuality, became more apparent in 1970s

society. *A Chorus Line* paid attention to those with alternative lifestyles and reflected the ever-changing demographics of American society. Many thoughts were expressed on stage, during a performance of *A Chorus Line*, which is allied with the many opinions existing in society, regardless of the decade. In 1975, when *A Chorus Line* premiered on Broadway, America was finally pulling its troops out of Vietnam. The country needed to pull itself back together for the common good of the nation and *A Chorus Line* provided as its focus the pulling together of many different individuals for the common good of the chorus line.

A major issue of concern to society in the 1980s was freedom and in the musical *Les Misérables* (1987) the struggle for freedom from oppression was seen in the fighting will of the students to save their country from governmental control. In 1989, the world witnessed the pulling down of the Berlin wall which served as an icon to the end of the Cold War with Europe prompting a new era of Democracy. *Les Misérables* dealt directly with the same kind of oppression faced by the Communist countries of Eastern Europe. By the 1980s, disease, specifically AIDS, and homelessness continued to be of growing concern to society. In *Les Misérables*, one of the main characters dies of a life-threatening disease causing her daughter to become homeless. Both of these events directly parallel ongoing conditions in American society in the 1980s and well into the 1990s.

Issues of racism and single-parent families continue to be of social concern in 1990s society and *Miss Saigon* deals with both problems. Racism was cited as a concern of Actors' Equity before *Miss Saigon* was allowed to appear on Broadway. In response, the producers of *Miss Saigon* hired more minorities than in past musical theatre productions. Racism continues to be a major concern and instigator of conflict in American society. Single-parent families continued to increase in the 1990s, while *Miss Saigon* was based on a mother having to care for her Amerasian child fathered by a U.S. serviceman during the Vietnam War. These children do exist and were left behind after the war. The musical *Miss Saigon* candidly exhibits the plight of these children while alerting its audience to their

ongoing struggle to survive, sometimes orphaned, in the 1990s. War continues to be of concern to society and *Miss Saigon* deals directly with the war in Vietnam and first premiered during America's war in 1991 in the Persian Gulf. In 1994, President Bill Clinton lifted a thirty-year trade embargo on Vietnam in exchange for information on servicemen still missing after the end of the war in 1975. Obviously, the Vietnam War is of ongoing concern to American society in the 1990s.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study substantiates the fact that the selected musicals contained in this study did reflect contemporary society at their time of production and they did deal with issues of ongoing concern to society. This author wishes to further suggest that the music contained in the selected musicals, whether it is classically conceived, popular ballads, ragtime, rock and roll, or evocative of another time period, did reflect contemporary or past musical trends in the history of music. The fact that all of these aspects, historical events, social conditions, and musical style are contained in one art-form, musical theatre, leads one to the conclusion that certain musical theatre productions can be used as an informative means of educating others in historical events, social conditions, and musical styles of the past.

It is further suggested that musical theatre could influence society by either conscious or subconscious means. Musical theatre productions might suggest or introduce issues and emotions to its audience that may or may not be significant to everyone witnessing the performance. This author wishes to point to the message in the musical *Oklahoma!*, one of nostalgia, as an example of a musical's influential ability. Obviously, differing audiences will bring different collective, preexisting experiences with them to various musical productions. With their varied subject matter and reference to issues of concern to society, as described in this study, it can be concluded that musicals could have an effect upon the viewer.

Recommendations

Musical theatre in the 1990s remains an influential force on Broadway with increased runs for popular productions, continuous revivals of standard musicals, numerous touring shows internationally and across America, and newly released recordings of vintage musicals, specifically the release of a soundtrack from *Of Thee I Sing* in 1994. Further studies dealing with the genre of musical theatre could include paralleling musicals dealing with war with actual events in society or musicals dealing with other social issues such as women's rights, racism, or minorities with historical and social events. An interesting study might entail an analysis of the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein, exclusively, and their reflection of American society.

It is hoped that in the future, musicals will continue to entertain while informing and educating their audiences of historical events, social conditions, and musical styles. This study confirmed that musicals do have the ability to reflect society.

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