West Side Story and The Music Man: whiteness, immigration, and race in the US during the late 1950s

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Abstract
West Side Story and The Music Man, the two biggest hits among Broadway musicals of the 1957–58 season, yield an odd sort of couple – wildly mis-matched yet interconnected nonetheless. They opened within three months of one another, appearing as starkly opposed views of a shared nation. I offer here a side-by-side reading of these two shows, with a special focus on a cluster of intersecting themes, including the insidious interconnectedness of racism and nostalgia; the strategy of focusing on Jane or Joe Citizen (or "the common man"); the targeting of youth and teen culture; and a shared subtext of fear (even paranoia) about outsiders. Together, they provide a window on the complexity of America in the late 1950s – on its diverse demographics and polarized politics, on the market segmentation of its myths, and on the ways in which racism, even seemingly non-overt forms of racism, can join hands with nostalgia.

West Side Story and The Music Man, the two biggest hits among Broadway musicals of the 1957–58 season, yield an odd sort of couple – wildly mis-matched yet interconnected nonetheless. They opened within three months of one another – West Side Story on 26 September and The Music Man on 19 December – and they appeared as starkly opposed views of a shared nation. West Side Story dug its heels into the gritty pavement of the here-and-now, confronting gang violence and racial prejudice against Puerto Rican immigrants as they negotiated the urban jungle. The Music Man, meanwhile, spun a gauze of nostalgia, traveling back to the imagined simplicity of the early twentieth century to evoke an America of racial purity and grass-root values.

Together, they provide a window on the complexity of America in the late 1950s – on its diverse demographics and polarized politics, on the market segmentation of its myths, and on the ways in which racism, even seemingly non-overt forms of racism, can join hands with nostalgia. Thus a clear set of binaries seems to separate the differing views they offer, pitting large north-eastern cities against small mid-western towns, Catholics of Puerto Rican birth against Protestants of the Great Plains, aesthetic risk-taking against stylistic conservatism, Eisenhower's America against the imminent emergence of Kennedy's.

There are surprising similarities too, even if different outcomes resulted. Both traded on paranoia about outsiders. In West Side Story, the newest

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1. I am grateful to those who contributed useful reactions during the discussion session at the "Musical Theatre in 1957" symposium, as well as at a subsequent reading at the University of Michigan. I am also grateful to Anna Rice, a Harvard undergraduate, who worked as a research assistant on this project; to Elizabeth Craft, a Harvard graduate student, who helped me prepare the manuscript for publication; and to Ryan Raul Bethagale, also a Harvard graduate student, who gave comments on the manuscript and helped clear permissions.
wave of immigrants took centre stage, while in *The Music Man* an edge of danger is embodied most obviously in the character of Harold Hill, an itinerant two-bit con-man: it also threatens through Marian the Librarian, who refuses to conform to traditional gender expectations. Both shows focused on the average man and woman on the street, from their storylines to their casting. Both placed a strong emphasis on youth, from the edgy teen gangs of *West Side Story* to the cherubic Winthrop Paroo in *The Music Man*. And both shared a social and political landscape shaped by race and contemporary politics, whether the launching of Spectra or the implementation of Brown vs. Board of Education.

Bundling these exposes an entrenched dichotomy in American culture – that is, the degree to which the myths and national identity of the United States rest on a tension between the urban and the rural. This notion was explored compellingly in *The Machine in the Garden*, written by the cultural historian Leo Marx, just six years after *West Side Story* and *The Music Man* – that is, nearly contemporaneously. It has since become a classic text in American Studies and in the burgeoning field of Eco-Criticism. Sketching the very coexistence of a ‘pastoral ideal’ (named in the book’s subtitle), on the one hand, and of industrialization, urbanization, and technological innovation, on the other, Marx poses these forces as persistent opponents in the history of our country. Marx opens his book with an excerpt from Washington Irving’s *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* from 1820, which might seem a mighty distance from *West Side Story* and *The Music Man*. It shows, however, just how deeply the roots of a mythology of rural rapture reach into the American psyche. Irving wrote:

> I mention this peaceful spot [that is, Sleepy Hollow] with all possible love; for it is in such little retired [...] valleys [...] that population, manners, and customs, remain fixed; while the great torrent of migration and improvement, which is making such incessant change in other parts of this restless country, sweeps by them unobserved. They are little nooks of still water which border a rapid stream.¹

(Marx 1964: 3)

Not long afterwards, Marx reflected on his landmark book, re-articulating its perspective on a theme energized by the rise of industry and the advent of the railroad in the nineteenth century: ‘The contrast between the new machine power and the native landscape served to epitomize a contrast between two styles of life, one relatively complex and sophisticated, the other simple, contemplative, and dedicated to the pursuit of happiness’ (Marx 1969: 86).

Thus, if taken separately, the two visions exemplified in *West Side Story* and *The Music Man* stood at odds. Yet together they symbolized the whole of a complex and contradictory nation. They also inserted race aggressively into the equation – an essential feature of the rural-urban split that did not take centre stage for Marx. I offer here a side-by-side reading of these two shows, with a special focus on a cluster of intersecting themes, including the insidious interconnectedness of racism and nostalgia; the strategy of focusing on June or Joe Citizen or ‘the common man’, as the language of an earlier decade would have put it; the targeting of youth and teen culture; and a shared subtext of fear (even paranoia) about outsiders. Racial issues inflect all these topics in varying degrees. One of my primary sources are the *New York Times*, the hometown paper of Broadway, which covered both productions extensively.

**Cultural anxieties in 1957**

In retrospect, the weeks immediately preceding the premiere of *West Side Story* appear as a turbulent stretch of time. On 30 August, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina launched a filibuster in the Senate that lasted over 24 hours – a record that has never been surpassed. He strove to thwart passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first in a string of legislative initiatives that led eventually to the historic Voting Rights Act of 1965. After the 1957 legislature made its way through Congress, school desegregation remained a crisis of the moment as starkly racist news reports emerged from the South. A *New York Times* article about Thurmond’s filibuster quoted Governor Marvin Griffin of Georgia as saying, ‘We’re not going to let a Federal judge tell us who can vote’, and then calling ‘for a full-scale revision of the state’s election laws’ (Anon. 1957b). Governor George Bell Timmerman of South Carolina proclaimed, ‘I don’t have any intention of cooperating’ with the Civil Rights bill (Anon. 1957b).

Meanwhile, on 19 September the first underground atomic test took place at the proving ground outside of Las Vegas. And on 4 October, five days after *West Side Story* opened, the Soviets successfully launched Sputnik 1 (Hill 1957; Anon. 1957d). Putting this satellite in space positioned the Soviet Union, as the *New York Times* put it, ‘ahead of the U.S. in the crucial rocket race’ (Anon. 1957d). The Russians, in turn, hailed the achievement as evidence of ‘the new socialist society’ (Anon. 1957d).

But the most striking coincidence of this brief span of time came when the visual integration of Little Rock Central High School took place the day before *West Side Story* opened. President Eisenhower sent federal troops to force the admittance of nine African American students, and news wires bristled with accounts of the confrontation. ‘Faubus Sees “Occupation”: Tension at School Eases: President Sets a Parley’, proclaimed a front-page headline in the *New York Times* on the day the show got reviewed (Anon. 1957c). A sub-headline for the same multi-part story stated: ‘Little Rock Calm: Negroes Escorted to Classes Again – No Crowds Appear’. The same coincidence of the Little Rock crisis and *West Side Story*’s review occurred in *Time Magazine* on 7 October 1957, where the federal troops sent to Little Rock were pictured on the cover and the review was inside.¹

**Art vs. entertainment, verisimilitude vs. nostalgia**

On a more local level, *West Side Story* and *The Music Man* were strong commercial and artistic rivals. *West Side Story* enjoyed instant success at the box office and garnered critical rapture, which put *The Music Man*, since it arrived three months later, in the position of competing with the acclaim of its predecessor. Furthermore, *West Side Story* was perceived immediately as not just another musical comedy but, rather, as a work of art. It was treated as a hybrid – a fusion of musical theatre, dramatic tragedy, dance, and opera – and critics embraced it as innovative. ‘Although the material is horrifying, the workmanship is admirable’, wrote Brooks Atkinson.
about the show's premiere, in a review captioned 'The Jungles of the City'. Its team was hailed as 'creative artists'. Atkinson continued: 'Pooling imagination and virtuosity, they have written a profoundly moving show, [...] an incandescent piece of work that finds odd bits of beauty amid the rubbish of the streets' (Atkinson 1957a).

Three months later, reviews of The Music Man were just as euphoric, yet their thrust couldn't have been more different. Contrary to the language used for West Side Story, Atkinson called The Music Man's score 'innocent' and its dancing 'rural and festive': 'Mr. Willson has given [the cast] lively, artless things to do. [...] [He] has a fresh slant on American. Although he does not take it seriously, he loves it with the pawkiness of a liberated native' (Atkinson 1957b). In other words, The Music Man was viewed as fun and entertaining. 'Art' – with a capital 'A' – did not enter the rhetoric it inspired.

The two shows, then, went head-to-head and both flourished commercially. Night after night, they laid out competing visions of the country: Seventy Six Trombones and Pick-a-Little-Talk-a-Little vs. Mambo and The Rumble. They spurred right through to the Tony Awards where, after an initial stalemate, The Music Man won 'Best Musical' by one vote:

The [Drama Critics] Circle members [...] were momentarily stymied in their initial attempt to choose the season's best musical. 'The Music Man' and 'West Side Story' were tied for top honors with nine votes each in the first round of balloting. Louis Kronenberger, who voted by proxy, had abstained on the grounds that no musical was worthy of the award. After a short deliberation during which John Chapman of The New York News volunteered to change his selection, it was generally agreed to conduct a second ballot. This time 'The Music Man' was declared the winner with ten votes as opposed to the eight of 'West Side Story'.

Yet even triumph for Meredith Willson in the Tony Awards activated unsettling, if implied, judgments; the Times, in the article quoted above, described The Music Man as 'a wise conflict of provincial life in Iowa' (Colta 1958).

These linkages, however, reached beyond box office competition and critical reception, and I argue here that, whether unintentionally or not, The Music Man became an antidote to West Side Story – at once a wistful escape from the social and political perils of the present and a comforting reassessment of old-fashioned musical comedy. There is no question that The Music Man traded in nostalgia, both in style and subject matter. This was already apparent in marketing for the show, as in a preview in the New York Times, where it was heralded as looking back on 'the gentle year 1912' (Anon. 1957g).

For some, this presented an artistic relief – a return to 'musical comedy, pure and simple', as John Chapman of the New York News put it. 'Bear in mind', he stated, this was a different creature from 'the folk operas, operettas, and tuneful tragedies which have enriched our stage' (Chapman 1957). He was clearly agitated by the fusion of genres that had characterized the theatre works of composers such as Bernstein, Gershwin, and

Woll, and his endorsement extended artistic nostalgia to broader themes in contemporary culture, hailing The Music Man for having 'the charm and innocence of a period when there were no wars or psychoanalysts' (Chapman 1957). A letter to the editor by one Jac [sic] Lewis of New York provided another example of the power of evoking bygone creative ideals:

If you are one of the many who like myself has been wondering what has become of the old magic of the Broadway musical theatre rush at once to the Majestic and watch Robert Preston's performance in 'The Music Man.' [...] Mr. Preston's grace and authority do much to restore my faith in American musical comedy.

(Lewis 1957)

Lewis singled out Robert Preston, and indeed his presence in The Music Man contributed mightily to constructing a sense of old-fashioned values. Andy Griffith, soon to be known for his role as Sheriff Andy Taylor in the television sitcom Andy Griffith Show, was the first actor to be offered the role, but he turned it down (Zolotow 1957). Robert Preston had a similarly wholesome persona. 'His gray-green eyes were as sincere as a Scout leader's,' rhymed a reporter (Schumach 1957b). Like Ronald Reagan, he had appeared in a string of cowboy movies, and accepted the role of Harold Hill with no previous experience in singing or dancing.

Most fundamentally, the nostalgic web of The Music Man emanated from Meredith Willson, its composer and lyricist, also the author of its book. The show evoked his hometown of Mason City, Iowa, and Willson played up its mythical grassroots qualities, stating at one point: 'The farther I get from Mason City by calendar, the faster I seem to be coming back to the old values and things we used to take for granted back home' (quoted in Oates 2005:89). Willson repeatedly articulated a similar theme in interviews. 'Innocent – that was the adjective for Iowa', Willson told Time Magazine right after the work's premiere. He continued: 'I didn't have to make anything up for The Music Man. All I had to do was remember' (quoted in Anon. 1957j). Up until this show, Willson had largely made his career in radio, working as a successful producer, arranger, and composer for a series of variety shows.

Yet even these bucolic images about an Iowa of yesteryear couldn't eclipse the inescapable present. The December of The Music Man's appearance, the country was in a 'Grey Mood', as Time Magazine put it in an editorial on 2 December. 'Added to post-Sputnik uneasiness about the nation's technological lead over Russia was unease about the economy. [...]Consumers are deeper in than they were in 1954, more troubled about the cold war, less confident about the Eisenhower Administration' (Anon. 1957b).

Thus, West Side Story dealt with a troubled time by placing a near-agitprop focus on race and immigration, teen violence and urban decay, The Music Man, meanwhile, sought to calm jitters through rhypodictic constructions of a simpler America.

**Populist visions and racial coding**

Yet, oddly enough, the two shows used related techniques for confronting a shared historical moment, albeit with differing results. This was
7. Elizabeth Wells, who is at work on a book about West Side Story, has continued as a 3a0 in conversation, and Deborah Jowitt's biography (1974) of Jerome Robbins includes a description of this talent of this search.

8. Kent (1930-91) grew up in Los Angeles, and early on he had a series of bit parts in movies. Then he moved to West Side Story, a jazz music.
either Meredith Willson or early radio, it is a challenge to speculate about his stance in relation to African American performers. One window on Willson within this realm appears in an interview that Eileen Southern conducted with the African American singer Billy Eckstine, where Eckstine talked of auditioning for Willson in Chicago at some point between 1939 and 1943, when Eckstine was touring with Earl Hines (Southern 1979: 182–98). Eckstine recalled:

Well, Meredith Willson heard me sing 'O, Holy Night,' -- we did the show on the radio -- and invited me to sing with his group. I went down there to the Wood Building, and there was this big choral group. They handed me a sheet of music and I couldn’t sight-read it. And I’m the only black there! (quoted in Southern 1979: 194)

During this period, Willson was working for the NBC comedy show 'Maxwell House Coffee Time,' and it appears that 'sight-reading,' not race, was the issue with Eckstine's audition. Yet Eckstine clearly encountered a segregated workplace. For Eckstine, this episode inspired him to learn to sight-read, and he tried out again for Willson 'about fifteen years later in New York -- meaning at some point in the mid-1950s. That time he got hired (Eckstine, quoted in Southern 1979: 194).

Whatever Willson's racial practices might have been on the air, the all-white signifiers of The Music Man are enshrined in its identity, and comparing it to Show Boat highlights just where it stood on race. A filmed musical from 1927 by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II, Show Boat featured miscegenation and the plight of African American laborers among its core themes. In some ways, The Music Man can be viewed as a sequel to Show Boat, The Music Man's vanguard scholar Harold Hill connects to Show Boat's Gaylord Ravenal, and both shows are set in an imagined rural past (although for Show Boat, that 'past' was much nearer in time; plus the plot line continues forward to the then-present). Radio enters this part of the story too. In the early 1930s, Meredith Willson worked for another Maxwell House show — this one titled 'Captain Henry's Maxwell House Show Boat' (Oates 2005: 56–7). The master of ceremonies for five seasons was Charles Winninger, the same man who played Captain Andy in the 1927 Broadway production of Show Boat and in the 1936 film. An ad for the radio show in the Saturday Evening Post in August of 1933 shows Winninger toward the left — and just to the right of the blackface character Mollases.

Another such figure named January flanked the photo on the right. Blackface figures were apparently common on the air, most famously Amos and Andy. Mollasses and January were played by Eddie Green and Ernest Whitman, both of whom were black, which complicates the story. Blackface also appeared in the stage version of Show Boat, as well as in the 1936 film. Yet both versions also featured African American characters — that is, Queenie and Joe — who did not don the mask and represented, albeit within racialized formulas, some of the struggles of the post-Reconstruction South.

In many ways, then, The Music Man conjured up a Show Boat purged of race. It fabricated a memory of an America that either avoided slavery altogether or eliminated 10 per cent of its population. Perhaps this was an inadvertent result of setting the show in Iowa, a state that continues to have only a small African American population. Whatever the motive, the show's racial parity is striking.

I wonder, too, if the spontaneous audience participation at the premiere of The Music Man might be read in part as an inadvertent gesture of white solidarity. The audience clapped in rhythm with the cast as they came marching on stage at the end, that New York Times credited this 'act of spontaneous audience participation' as 'a rare theatrical happening' (Calta 1957). Based on the demographics of Broadway at the time, that audience must have been largely white, and their applause became a means of merging with the cast and the reveries of yesteryear embodied in the show. It affirmed commonalities and community, and it has been absorbed into The Music Man's performance life, with audience after audience over the decades doing the same thing.

Youth culture and theatre vérité

Just as noteworthy, in terms of both whiteness and the pursuit of a Citizen Actor, was the hiring of 10 year old Eddie Hodges to play the role of Winthrop Paroo, kid brother of Marian the Librarian. Like the Buffalo Bills, Hodges was not a complete unknown, having already appeared in front of the camera on 'Name That Tune'. A native of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, he belonged to a children's choir there (Getl 1957b). That October, Eddie had been elected 'Junior Gospel Singer of the Year' by the 'American Gospel Singers'. The award was presented in Montgomery, Alabama (Anon. 1957). All this took place in a segregated South. Eddie, who went on to star in the 1960 film The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, had a fairly significant role in The Music Man, including the lisp-delivery of 'Gery, Indiana' (Internet Movie Database 1990–2009). Eddie, then, as 'Winthrop', was Southern, and pre-pubescent, yielding yet another symbol of unalloyed whiteness. His youthful presence signaled Protestant values and sexual innocence. This kid represented Little Rock before integration — an emblem of what used to be.

The prominence of Eddie's role in The Music Man reflected a growing emphasis on children during that particular Broadway season. 'Four Kids on Broadway', declared a headline in the New York Times; This season has been marked by an unusual number of shows in which children portray prominent roles' (Anon. 1958). These included 'The Dark at the Top of the Stairs' by William Inge; 'The Rope Dancers'; and 'Jamaica', an all-black musical by Yip Harburg and Harold Arlen, starring Lena Horne. Collectively, these shows represented a revival of the kid acts that had graced the vaudeville stage, such as the Nicholas Brothers, a brilliant African American tap duo, and a series of teen musicals, which continued to emerge over the next few years, including Bye Bye Birdie (1958). The Sound of Music (1959) and The Fantasticks (1960). Yet the scene for teens in the late 1950s and early 1960s was entirely different from that of the vaudeville era of the early twentieth century, when most kids had little disposable income. In the 1950s, many kids had money to buy the latest recordings, plus time to listen to them. Theirs was the era of Elvis Presley and other rising rock 'n' roll stars, who kicked into high gear the image of a screaming, hormone-pumping fan. By 1958, one-third of the American population was under fifteen (Lovensheimer 2009: 104.)
Even though the teens of West Side Story fit this same trend by responding to a freshly emergent youth culture, they ignored a much more volatile set of signifiers than the image of Winthrop. Tony was no Huck Finn. Alongside strife in the South over school segregation, New York was grappling with a growing Hispanic presence, and teen gangs in those immigrant neighborhoods were causing alarm. The heaviest concentration of Hispanics was in East Harlem— or as a demographer of the day put it, Puerto Ricans lived in ‘the main Negro district of New York City’ (Novak 1956). But the second largest such neighborhood stretched from West 122nd Street to West 155th (Novak 1956). Contemporaneous newspaper reports were chronicling the teen crisis that accompanied these new populations. ‘Five youths displaying their prowess before a gang of fifteen girls critically wounded a boy on the West Side last night’, read the opening of a New York Times story in March of 1956 (Anon. 1956). ‘Four youths were arrested last night in the aftermath of a afternoon gang fight in Washington Heights in which one youngster was fatally stabbed’, declared another the August before West Side Story appeared (Anon. 1957a). These articles are two of many from the time. The outbreak in teen violence that they chronicled was serious enough to spur a study commissioned by Mayor Robert F. Wagner (Powele 1957).

Thus like Marc Blitzstein’s The Cradle Will Rock of 1937, which appeared in an era of rampant anti-union violence, West Side Story’s plot line confronted a contemporary crisis, one that highlighted juvenile delinquency, street violence, new immigrants, and racial difference (Oja 1989). For Bernstein, West Side Story added up to ‘an out and out plea for racial tolerance’ as he jotted on his personal copy of Romeo and Juliet (Bernstein 1940: 3). The book for West Side Story sets the scene, by default, in the harsh light of the present, stating: ‘The action takes place on the West Side of New York City during the last days of summer’ (Laurents, Bernstein, Sondheim, and Robbins 1965: 134). The show unfolds in a brief and intensely charged two-day period, with each extending from 5:00 (or 5:30) p.m. to midnight. Rather than a traditional listing of scenes, the scenario is laid out like a countdown to disaster, with times of day demarcating the structure of the plot (i.e., ‘5:00 p.m.’, ‘5:30 p.m.’, ‘6:00 p.m.’). This too is reminiscent of the realistic edge of The Cradle Will Rock, which concentrated the action in one evening.

In searching for ways to depict the lives of these kids as realistically as possible, Jerome Robbins essentially did fieldwork to give them and their street life compelling authenticity, including a trip to a high school dance in Puerto Rican Harlem. While working on West Side Story, Robbins wrote to his colleague, the dancer Tanaquil Le Clercq, ‘They do dances that I’ve never seen before, evolving their own style and approach.’ Robbins had already established a comfort zone in choreographing shows depicting the exotic, especially with The King and I (the stage show appeared in 1951, and the film five years later), and he also had a history of conducting on-site research to observe contemporary social dance. This stretched back to his first collaborations with Bernstein in the ballet Fancy Free and the show On the Town (both in 1944), where
Thus they ask to be seen not as 'delinquents' but rather as figures who are born to lose.

This is hard-hitting stuff. Yet with a tempo designation of 'Fast, vaudeville style', the number essentially turns delinquency into camp, a device that was a favourite of Bernstein whenever the focus shifted to gender or controversial political topics (Lauren's et al. [1957] 2006: 172; Oja 2007). In 'Officer Krupke', the third verse makes an overt reference to cross-dressing and transgressed behavior. It also utters a plea for jobs and economic security. But the potency gets packaged in giddy theatre. As a result, this number simultaneously delivers a searing social indictment and lightens up the mood after the murders of Bernardo and Riff. The end of the number is just as deliciously devastating, concluding with a nasty step 'n' kick:

Gee, Officer Krupke,
We're down on our knees,
'Cause no one wants a fella with a social disease.
Gee, Officer Krupke,
What are we to do?
Gee, Officer Krupke,
Krup you!

(Enzens et al. 1965: 209)

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The Music Man provided no such vehicle for teenage anger. But it does include 'Ya Got Trouble', a septa-ring number in which Harold Hill addresses teen problems, such as the 'caliber of disaster indicated by the presence of a pool table in your community' (Willson [1958] 1986: 25). Once again, the message is coded; it might be carrying a pointed social reference, or it might simply be entertaining. In 'Ya Got Trouble', Harold Hill exhorts the parents of a small town to protect their children from vice:

I'm thinking' of the kids in their knickerbockers, shirt-tails, young ones.
Peekin' in the pool hall window after school.
Ya got trouble, folks, right here in River City.
Trouble, with a capital 'T' and that rhymes with 'P' and that stands for pool!

(Ya Got Trouble
from Meredith Willson's The Music Man
By Meredith Willson
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Instead of kids screaming obscenities at cops, 'Ya Got Trouble' features an adult who is trying to win the sympathy of parents and does so by singing

of the dangers posed by a world filled with 'libertine men and scarlet women and ragtime' (Willson [1958] 1986: 31). Sex, race, and licentious music all threatened. Here, as in West Side Story, this sinister message gets delivered in an upbeat package – in this case, a fast-paced pater, which builds into a choral affirmation of community resolve. Thus in The Music Man, social degradation hovered on the horizon; its coded language communicated a fear that middle-class whites could either identify with or ignore.

Outsider art

Yet another mode of reading West Side Story and The Music Man has to do with the ways in which each show confronts the notion of 'outsiders'. This concept has strong traction in the history of American culture, often with overtones of the maverick or the entrepreneur. It describes those who reject mainstream behavioral norms or haven't had access to them. It can be used clinically or descriptively, as a negative label or a catch-all. In a valorizing sense, outsiders have often been gendered as male.

The plight of 'outsiders' certainly captured public awareness after the Holocaust and World War II, with a strong reach into French existentialism. Some writers and activists of the day applied the term to entire aggrieved classes of individuals, instead of lone cowboys. African Americans, women, and new waves of immigrants all fit the designation, and West Side Story and The Music Man each dealt with the outsider problem, albeit from different perspectives.

West Side Story clearly took a class-based approach to outsiders – indeed, every single person in the show fits that description, with both gangs beaten down by poverty and prejudice. Collectively, they expose communities that struggle outside the economic and social mainstream, with violence against one another as a predominant dysfunctional strategy. At the same time, this very portrayal of Puerto Ricans has become the basis for recurrent protests within the Latino community. As the show has become ubiquitous in our culture – especially because of the 1961 movie and the omnipresence of the stage version in amateur theatres and schools – Latinos have repeatedly articulated resentment at the stereotyping embedded in the show's very existence. As one critic put it recently, 'There is no single American cultural product that haunts Puerto Rican identity discourses in the United States more intensely than the 1961 film, West Side Story' (Negrón-Muntner 2000: 83). Even though the film and show aimed to feature Puerto Ricans as people, rather than as exotic flavoring, they still traded on troubling essentialisms, and the lyrics of some numbers – especially 'America' – have grown in their capacity to offend as time has passed. One strain of this critique reaches back to initial reviews of the show – not so much for stereotyping Puerto Ricans but rather for drawing a murky distinction between film-shaking realism and the norms of Broadway entertainment: 'When it turns away from what is savage', observed Time Magazine, 'West Side Story proves more sentimental than touching. Yet in its attempt to give a topical horror story broad human appeal, the show at worst falls at times into cliché' (Anon. 1957).

With The Music Man, the designation of 'outsider' carried no such sense of an immediate threat. Since the show was bent on conveying the comfort of cultural stability, it offered audiences an opportunity to identify
with the 'insider' values of a strong but closed community. When a menace appears from the outside in the arrival of Harold Hill, it does so by calling up a standard trope in Broadway musicals - that is a trickster or miscreant, like Gaylord Ravenal, as already mentioned, or Jud in Oklahoma! But even the touch of 'outsiders' injected by Hill ends up as a triumph of assimilation. He is saved - converted, really - by female virtue and small-town values.

At the same time, the virtuous femaleness of Marian the Librarian embeds some complexity, for Marian is constructed from a bouquet of stereotypes: she is single (a 'spinster'), educated, and seemingly unconcerned with conforming to the expectations for women in her narrow-minded little town. In other words, she is a determined outsider. As one literary scholar has put it, Marian is 'subject to the onus of the single, intellectual, professional woman at a historical moment [i.e., the early twentieth century] when these traits in women were being systematically demeaned and linked to perversion' (Malinowitz 1999: 59). When The Music Man appeared in 1957, the women's movement was gaining steam alongside that for Civil Rights. Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex of 1949, which had reached the United States in an English translation in 1953, asserted that the stereotyping of women - and cultural expectations for them - bolstered the power of the patriarchy (de Beauvoir 1953). But many of the major landmarks in that arena in the few years in the future: FDA approval of birth control pills in 1960, the establishment of President Kennedy's 'Commission on the Status of Women' in 1961, the publication of Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique in 1963.

Thus it is hard to proclaim Marian the Librarian as an emblem of First Wave Feminism, since The Music Man focused on policing the status quo. Like the doomed family in Truman Capote's In Cold Blood of 1965, which was one of the creepiest books of the 1960s in terms of threat from the outside, the residents of River City sought to protect themselves against, as Capote put it, 'certain foreign sounds impinging on the normal nightly noises' (Capote 1965: 5). They guarded the sanctity of their community.

In conclusion, let me return to The Machine in the Garden of 1964. In it, Leo Marx writes of how 'rural values' had defined so much of America's most cherished myths. 'In public discourse, at least, this ideal has appeared with increasing frequency in the service of a reactionary or false ideology, thereby helping to mask the real problems of an industrial civilization' (Marx 1964: 7). The cultural tensions encapsulated in this statement are precisely the ones that bind West Side Story to The Music Man. After all, if any of us were to be charged with acquainting a visitor from another country with American culture and we had to make our case by choosing between the film versions of these two shows, which one would serve as most representative? There are many moments in American literature from the 1950s and 1960s where this puzzle of national identity and social values plays out.

One of them - The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety by Alan Watts, dating from 1951 - sounded a theme of cultural fragility that would be echoed by Leo Marx and others. An American interpreter of Zen Buddhism and a philosopher concerned with the pursuit of happiness, Watts explored 'man's quest for psychological security' and his struggle to find spiritual and intellectual certainty in religion and philosophy' (Watts 1951: 9). Here is an excerpt from Watts that illuminates themes with which West Side Story confronted its audiences, and from which The Music Man tried to shield them:

'Science and industry have so increased both the tempos and the violence of living that our packages seem to come apart faster and faster every day. There is, then, the feeling that we live in a time of unusual insecurity. In the past hundred years so many long-established traditions have broken down - traditions of family and social life, of government, of the economic order, and of religious belief. As the years go by, there seem to be fewer and fewer rocks to which we can hold, fewer things which we can regard as absolutely right and true, and fixed for all time.

To some this is a welcome release from the restraints of moral, social and spiritual dogma. To others it is a dangerous and terrifying breach with reason and sanity, tending to plunge human life into hopeless chaos. (Watts 1951: 14-5)

It's as though West Side Story responded to the first half of that concluding binary, vaulting past the 'restraints' of received 'dogma', and The Music Man addressed the second half, seeking to button down the hatches against all that might plunge the contemporary world 'into hopeless chaos'.

We're now more than fifty years past the appearance of these shows, and the world is a different place - or is it? In many respects, the tension between longstanding social codes and newly won freedoms has grown. The issue of outsiders - whether by virtue of race or immigration status or gender definition - continues to resound. There are multiple positions in relation to each of these debates, and as national politics demonstrate daily, the twain don't often meet. Maybe that is why West Side Story and The Music Man continue to have such resonance, both individually and as a pair. They're like the 'Red States' and the 'Blue States', with all the notions of divided social values and unresolved identity conflicts that they represent.

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Iowa Stubborn: Meredith Willson’s musical characterization of his fellow Iowans

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Abstract

The song 'Iowa Stubborn' from The Music Man provides a key to understanding the development and musical content of the work. Willson’s ‘Iowa Stubborn’ insistence on the organic development of songs from the narrative led him to use experimental techniques like ‘speak-songs’ and ‘words-without-songs’, some of which were by-products of his long career in radio. By creating a dialogic style of song based on stubborn pitch repetition and a small number of motifs, the composer, who by the early 1950s was Iowa’s most famous son, was able to characterize the stubborn natives of the Hawkeye state, both musically and lyrically, in numerous numbers in the score.

Iowans have a special affection for The Music Man, which has been embraced as a source of state pride and a musical ambassador to the rest of the world. It’s not because it’s set in Iowa; there is no similar feeling for Rodgers and Hammerstein’s State Fair, which also takes place in Iowa. It is because Iowans like myself recognize the characters. Meredith Willson always thought of the musical as a valentine to his native state, albeit one that did not idealize its inhabitants: ‘Some Iowans who have seen The Music Man in rehearsal have called it an Iowan’s attempt to pay tribute to his home state. I’m glad they feel that way because that’s what I meant it to be even though I didn’t try to rose-color up our Iowa-stubborn ways’ (Willson 1959: 16). We would probably feel differently about the musical if he had.

Iowans have a reputation for being stubborn, pragmatic, direct and sometimes contrary. Perhaps it is a result of the state’s agrarian roots; farmers have little choice but to confront unexpected conditions and nonetheless draw subsistence from the land. Though the state is blessed with rich soil and plentiful water, the weather (as Willson points out) is harsh – insufferably hot and humid in the summer and often frigid in winter – yet our relatives remained instead of seeking more moderate climates. Maybe it is because Iowa was settled largely by German, Scottish, Irish and Bohemian immigrants – ethnic groups that have their own reputations for intractability.

It may seem odd, but natives embrace these traits as a treasured part of their identity, behavioral quirks that establish a sense of statehood and unity. Besides, Iowa stubbornness can be an asset. It might, for