The Music Man and 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street: A Study of How Musicals Adapt to the American Morale

By

Andrea Redmount

An Honors Thesis

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Tyler Smith

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 2014

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2014
Musical theatre shows the ideals and the morale of those watching each show. In the 1950s, American morale was high for white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants. The population was booming, the economy was in great shape, and industry was on the rise. Shows like *The Music Man* followed a formula that was hugely popular. *The Music Man* also looks at the United States and shows the audience how wonderful life in America is. It hides the underlying tensions, such as Civil Rights issues and the Cold War, going on in the country through a light fluffy musical with relatively trivial problems. In the 1970s, American morale was low. There was an economic recession, and unemployment was extremely high. Americans did not trust their federal government anymore. Musicals were no longer at the forefront of popular culture. Some musicals were changing the musical formula, while others tried to hold on to the ideals of musical comedy laid out in the 1950s. *42nd Street* pretends to be a Golden Age musical even though it premiered in 1980. *42nd Street* is the ultimate escapist musical. It takes the audience away from their difficult lives and tries to show how well the American dream works. In the 1970s, there were other options of styles of musicals for people to go see, while in the 1950s there was only the Golden Age formula. In the 1950s the formula worked as was used over and over again. In the 1970s, a musical that was emulating the Golden Age had to be even more formulaic and fluffy to have success.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you Dr. Tyler Smith for advising this project. Thank you for constantly reminding me that I would be able to finish, I just had to take the work load one step and one day at a time.

Thank you Dr. Ed Krzemienski for your invaluable input on this project.
Included with the formal research paper are:

Pages from the *The Music Man* dramaturgical website

Pages from the *42nd Street* dramaturgical website

The *The Music Man* program note

The *42nd Street* program note
Each decade, particularly in the twentieth century, had its own distinct personality. The entertainment landscape of each decade is very telling of that personality. The most popular pieces of film or television show the values and the morale of the people consuming that entertainment. Theatre, particularly musical theatre, can accurately show the ideals of a decade. The 1950s in the United States were exemplified by stability, economic, industrial and population growth, and conformity. A musical such as The Music Man exemplifies the 1950s because it shows the United States at its most ideal and keeps the problems small and insular. In the 1970s, morale was low and people were disillusioned with the government and society. Even though the morale of the two decades are completely different, 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street was extremely popular even though it is similar in tone and in structure to The Music Man. The Music Man encapsulates the 1950s because it conforms to the desires and expectations of its audience while 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street offers an escape from the world that Americans were living in.

In the 1950s, the United States had just come out twenty years of chaos, and the population wanted the country to be constant and secure.\textsuperscript{1} Today the stereotype of the 1950s is that everything was easy and wonderful. Some aspects of American life were great. The economy was booming and employment was at an all-time high. However there were underlying tensions, such as the Cold War and Civil Rights issues, that most people were trying to ignore. The 1950s were a time where the country was booming economically, industrially, and through the population, but there were social issues that the government and the population tried to white wash and cover up.

\textsuperscript{1} Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 73
In the 1950s everything was growing. The economy was improving, the population was increasing, and industry was booming.\textsuperscript{2} This was the image of the United States that the American government wanted to show to the nation as well as to the world. The US was working to figure out how to function post-World War II. During the war, the United States had at least sixteen million men deployed all over the world, and American factories were producing about forty-five percent of the world's weaponry.\textsuperscript{3} By the time the war ended, Americans enjoyed the highest standard of living in the world. Income was distributed more evenly in the post war years than it ever had before. The United States had only seven percent of the world's population, but generated forty percent of the world's income.\textsuperscript{4} The gross national product grew from $200 billion to $500 billion between 1945 and 1960. Most of this increase came from government spending on building highways and schools, the distribution of veterans' benefits, and military spending.\textsuperscript{5} People also began leaving farms because technology was improving and there was not a need for nearly as many people to do the same amount of work. Former farmhands were moving into larger, industrial cities to get good paying factory work, which there was plenty of.\textsuperscript{6} The economy was stable, so more people were moving into the suburbs and having children. The population increased by 29 million people.\textsuperscript{7} Developers started building homes that were the right size for growing families. Buying one of these houses in the suburbs was often cheaper than

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[2]{\textit{The 1950s} Mowry, George E., and Blaine A. Brownell. \textit{The Urban Nation: 1920-1980}, p. 133-134}
\footnotetext[3]{Donaldson, Gary A. \textit{The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present}, p. 4-5}
\footnotetext[4]{\textit{The 1950s} Donaldson, Gary A. \textit{The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present}, p. 5}
\footnotetext[5]{Donaldson, Gary A. \textit{The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present}, p. 6}
\end{footnotes}
an apartment in a large city. Eventually people stopped moving out into the suburbs because it was cheaper, and started moving outside of cities because it was a sign of wealth and prestige. Poverty still existed, but most of the American public worked hard not to see it. They only wanted to see the prosperity of the country. The United States was growing rapidly and still remained stable. This is the image that entertainment and the government worked hard to show of the United States.

Part of the stability of the decade came from the election of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952. He was known for being moderate, and Americans liked him for it. He had a grandfatherly demeanor and a simplistic way of speaking that endeared him to a war weary public. He made himself appear like an everyday person while making important decisions for the country behind the scenes. Domestically, Eisenhower decided to keep some New Deal programs, such as security, while changing others. He completely privatized power. He felt that public energy was a form of socialism, and anything even slightly socialist was seen as bad and un-American.

Eisenhower changed the way that America was going to fight Communism. He ended the Korean War as quickly as he could, which raised American morale. He decided that instead of fighting small wars on the ground, the United States would become more aggressively nuclear. Eisenhower said “Rather than let the Communists nibble us to death all over the world in little wars, we will rely...on [our] massive mobile retaliatory powers.” This was seen as a warning to Moscow that the United States would use nuclear weaponry to stop Soviet Aggression.

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8 The 1950s
9 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 54-55
10 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 74-75
11 This source is biased towards Eisenhower
12 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 76
Eisenhower also came up with a new strategy to contain Communism called pactomania. The US signed mutual defense treaties with countries surrounding the Soviet Union and China, creating NATO, SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), and the Baghdad Pact. The Communist bloc was completely surrounded by democratic supporters. The Eisenhower administration embodied the ideals of the 1950s. He worked to make sure that the country kept growing, but he also promoted white washing. He got the United States out of the Korean War while allowing the Communist witch hunts. He worked to make the country stable while ignoring underlying social tensions in society.

There was friction hiding underneath the surface of the clean and prosperous American image. The idyllic stereotype of the 1950s existed for some, but the racial, political, and religious minorities lived a much harsher life. The Civil Rights movement started making its way into the forefront of American life. The Brown v. Board of Education case declared that separate educational facilities for African American children were unequal. Many white parents in the South started pulling their children out of public schools and enrolled them into all white academies. Over one hundred Southern Congressmen signed a document stating that they would do all that they could to protect segregation. Many people, particularly those in the South, wanted to ignore the plight of ethnic minorities in order to further the belief that everything in United States was amazing. The reality of the 1950s was that both the government and most of the population was terrified of the threat of the Soviet Union. The outcome of the Cold War was uncertain, and people did not know whether or not the Communists were going to attack.

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12 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 78
13 Kennedy, Sheila Suess Free Expression in America, p. 107
14 The 1950s
15 Kennedy, Sheila Suess Free Expression in America, p. 108
Joseph McCarthy rose to affluence out of the anti-Communist hysteria. He told Americans that Communists had infiltrated the government and were gaining power.\textsuperscript{16} He claimed to have a list of 205 Communists in the State Department, though when he was asked to produce names he could not name any.\textsuperscript{17} By the mid-1950s any kind of divergence from the mainstream could lead to questions of loyalty. Private businesses would investigate their employees, and the FBI compiled lists of possible Communist sympathizers. Thousands of Americans lost their jobs, and the idea of individuality, which Americans had prized so highly in the past became undesirable. The 1950s became an era of conformity and paranoia. People were afraid of being different in this era. Historian Richard Hofstader called the 1950s the period of "the Homogenized Society."\textsuperscript{18} The population was hiding from what scared them and only wanted to see the booming prosperity.

In the 1950s, the new medium of television became widely popular. Drama, comedy, sports, and the news were brought right into people's living rooms. Television changed entertainment, the conduct of politics, and advertisement in the United States. Television created a national popular culture. For the first time the same entertainment was being broadcast all over the country at the same time. Someone from New Jersey could make a reference about a television show, and someone in North Dakota would understand it. The TV united the country through a singular entertainment. It also became a major source of news of half of the country. The major genres that television created were the sitcom, soap operas, and game shows. Everyone had access to the same information, and families were able to sit down and watch

\textsuperscript{16} Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 86
\textsuperscript{17} Mowry, George E., and Blaine A. Brownell. The Urban Nation: 1920-1980, p. 198
\textsuperscript{18} Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 87
together. Soap operas became associated with bored housewives. Game shows were some of the most popular programming in the same vein that reality TV is popular today. The sitcom showed ideals and stereotypes of the American family. There were two parents with two or three children living in an idyllic suburb. The father worked and the mother was the perfect housewife. This is the image of American life that Americans wanted to see when they looked into the mirror. This is what America should be. Sitcoms showed the booming America, the ideals of the American nuclear family, and societal homogeneity.

The 1950s were not only a Golden Age for television, but also the Golden Age of musical theatre, and the mediums often blended. There were regular revivals of popular musicals on TV such as *Kiss Me, Kate, Peter Pan,* and *Annie Get your Gun.* Rodgers and Hammerstein even wrote *Cinderella* specifically for television and 107 million people around the country watched it. Like television, musicals often showed the United States as prosperous, traditional when it came to family values, and white washed, but musicals could bring up some social issues in a non-threatening way. In the decades leading up to the 1950s, musicals were split into two categories, the musical play and the musical comedy. Musical plays told heavier stories, and composers wrote music to evoke a time period or location rather than solely entertaining the audience. *Show Boat,* which premiered in 1927, is a musical play. It deals with issues such as miscegenation on a river boat from the 1880s to the 1920s. Musical comedies on the other hand told lighthearted tales that put much more emphasis on large scale dance numbers. Musical comedies were essentially a string of jokes tied together by song and dance. The songs had the sound and style of popular music at the time. *Anything Goes* is a musical comedy. This

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19 Donaldson, Gary A. *The Making of Modern American,* p. 55-57
changed in the 1940s and particularly 50s. The lines blurred. The stories were still lighthearted and upbeat to make the audiences happy while still dealing social issues such as domestic abuse in *Carousel* or the dangers of a totalitarian regime in *The Sound of Music*. Not all musicals dealt with heavy issues, but musicals were a way to bring social concerns into the public conscious in a non-threatening and familiar way.

1950s musicals all followed a formula. This was another way to make musicals feel safe to the audience because they knew how the show was going to be set up as soon as they walked into the theatre. There were two acts and the first act was always longer than the second act. The three most important songs were the act one opener, the act one curtain and the act two finale. The opening number served as an ice breaker and explained to the audience what their expectations should be for the show that they were watching. It would often explain the time, place, and character relationships as well such as “Tradition” in *Fiddler on the Roof* or “Comedy Tonight” in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. The act one curtain would involve some unanticipated event or further complicate the plot. This number was designed to make the audience come back after intermission and wonder how the plot would be resolved. Examples of this are “The Rumble” in *West Side Story* or “Everything’s Coming Up Roses” in *Gypsy*. The act two finale would resolve the plot as well as sum up the special meaning of the show. An example of this would be “Oklahoma” from *Oklahoma*!. There was also usually what is called the eleven o’clock number. This would be a show stopping number just before the finale. The rest of the songs would flesh out this basic frame. The songs could be categorized in several ways, ‘I Am Songs’ which define character and situations, ‘I Want Songs’ which drive the plot, and ‘New Songs’ which were usually designed to show off a certain actors strengths as
a performer. The formulaic nature of musicals was comforting. People were looking for stability in their entertainment in the same way that they were looking for consistency in politics and economics. This formula made musicals predictable, in a sense, and therefore safe.

The Music Man opened on December 19th, 1957, ran for 1,375 performances and is a classic Golden Age musical. The musical tells the story of the salesman Harold Hill who comes into River City, Iowa to con the citizens into buying instruments, uniforms, and instruction manuals for a boy’s band that he promises to lead. Hill has no musical talent and intends on taking these people’s money and leaving, but throughout the show, he falls in love with the town and its music teacher/librarian, Marian, and finds that he cannot leave. The plot is sweet and fun and seemingly plausible. The show is set in the fictional town of River City, Iowa in 1912. At the time, 1912 would have been seen as the idyllic, simpler time. The first stage direction even says “The Music Man was intended to be a Valentine and not a caricature...the humor of this piece comes from its technical faithfulness to the real small-town Iowans of 1912 who certainly did not think they were funny at all.” The musical takes itself seriously even though it is light and entertaining. It also loves 1912 and the United States. The world of 1912 River City Iowa is just as idyllic as the stereotype of 1950s America. River City has a population of just over two thousand people, and its problems are very insular. The musical is set only two months after the Titanic sank and no one in the play every mentions it. The sinking of the Titanic changed the way that people thought and felt about modernization, and no one in River City cares. The Music Man is set during an era when tensions were mounting in Europe, and these issues would probably have been in major newspapers all over the United States, but no one in the musical

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24 Willson, Meredith, and Franklin Lacey. The Music Man, p. viii
even alludes to these issues. The citizens of River City do not care about the outside world. They are much more concerned about the pool table in town and keeping, as Harold Hill says, “the young ones moral after school.”\textsuperscript{25} This is how a 1957 audience would have wanted to look at the United States. They did not want to focus on fear and unsteadiness of the world; they wanted something insular and innocent.

The Music Man fits in with the 1950s ideals of stability and growth. Harold Hill coming in to River City throws the town off at first, everything changes. By the end of the musical, not only is order restored, but the town is better off than it was before. Marian was not accepted by the ladies of River City because she was unmarried and she worked. When she and Harold become involved with one another, the ladies befriend Marian because she shows that she can take on a traditional female role. When she is career driven, she is seen as cold and unfeminine. When she starts to conform to what society wants her to become, she starts to fit in and is happier. There is also no poverty in this show. The mayor and his family are financially better off than everyone else, but otherwise, everyone seems to be on the same socio-economic level. Everyone is white, and middle class. Marian’s family is supposed to be poorer than the rest of town, but even they are able to afford a cornet, an instruction manual, and a uniform without issue. The Music Man told its audience that they would be better-off conforming to society’s white washing than maintaining their individuality.

There is no singular antagonist in The Music Man. The mayor could be seen as the antagonist because he does not trust Harold and does not want the town to change and go along with Hill’s ideas. However, the mayor is in the right because Hill is lying to the town and trying to steal their money. Another salesman named Charlie Cowell can also be considered an

\textsuperscript{25} Willson, Meredith, and Franklin Lacey. The Music Man, p. 19
antagonist. He only appears at the very beginning and the end of the show. Charlie wants to expose Harold as a crook so that the citizens of River City will punish Hill for his deceit. He causes Hill some grief when Charlie tells the entire town of Harold’s plot, but Charlie is not an issue for the majority of the musical. The person who should be the main antagonist is the show’s protagonist. This is done to show that even the most despicable people can be reformed. The lack of a central villain solidifies the safety of The Music Man. Life is so wonderful in River City that there is no real bad guy. The world is so insular, that even the people who cause the most grief are not really doing anything wrong.

The audience would have walked into the theatre expecting the Golden Age musical formula, and The Music Man gave it to them. There are two acts and act one runs about an hour and ten minutes while act two runs about forty-five minutes. The opening number, “Rock Island” establishes the world that the audience has entered into and introduces the main character. The song takes place on a train. Several salesmen are sitting together and arguing about why selling their wares has become so difficult. They also talk about another salesman Harold Hill. One of the salesmen describes Hill; singing that “He’s a music man. And he sells clarinets to the kids in the town, with the big trombones and the ratatat drums, and the big brass bass big brass bass.” He sells bands, which sounds ridiculous and is good at his job. The salesmen do not like him for this because “He’s a fake and he doesn’t know the territory.” and “He’s just a bang beat, bell-ringing’, big haul, great go, neck-or-nothing, rip-roarin’, ever’time-a-bull’s-eye salesman. That’s professor Harold Hill Harold Hill.” He does not follow the rules that the rest of them have spent their careers following. To them, he is a scoundrel and is giving them a bad name. The

26 Willson, Meredith, and Franklin Lacey. The Music Man, p. 7
27 Willson, Meredith, and Franklin Lacey. The Music Man, p. 7
28 Willson, Meredith, and Franklin Lacey. The Music Man, p. 7
audience has not officially met Harold Hill yet, and by the end of the opening number they know
that he is a traveling salesman who has been conning people all over the Midwest. "Rock Island"
spells out exactly who Harold Hill is; the song leaves very little open to interpretation.
Complicated rhythms and lyrics are used so the audience feels like they are figuring something
out, when in reality they are being spoon-fed exactly how they should feel about the character.
The opening number is designed to establish the world, and the opening number tells the
audience that the largest issue that they will be dealing with is a man conning his clients. There
will be nothing that pops out and surprises them; the world is completely set up for the audience
as soon as the curtain rises.

The act one curtain is "The Wells Fargo Wagon." The band instruments arrive and
everyone is excited. Marian starts the song ready to expose Harold as a fraud. She has found a
book in the library that says the conservatory that he claims to have attended did not exist when
he claims to have attended, and she plans to give this book to the mayor. She changes her mind
when her brother rushes up to her very excited about his new cornet. Her maternal instincts kick
in, and she cannot ruin her little brother's happiness. When the mayor asks for the book she
"tears a page out of the book." Then Harold approaches her and "Harold catches Marian's look
which is changing from gratitude to adoration." That is when the lights would come up for the
start of intermission. The audience would want to come back to find out how this romance will
bloom and if Hill's con will hold up. They would also want to know if Marian will expose
Harold, or if she will help him get away with tricking the town. For the first time in the show
Marian is taking on a traditional female role. In the beginning of the show she is a scholarly
woman who would rather work and read then settle down and get married. By this point she

29 Willson, Meredith, and Franklin Lacey. The Music Man, p. 70
30 Willson, Meredith, and Franklin Lacey. The Music Man, p. 71
shows motherly affection towards her younger brother, and she has found a man to potentially settle down with. In the eyes of the women in the play and people in the audience who adhere to traditional familial roles, this would make Marian more sympathetic. By the end of “The Wells Fargo Wagon,” the audience would know that Marian and Harold would end up together living happily ever after. There is no doubt about that. A 1950s audience would have loved that assuredness. They would come back from intermission wanting to know how their expectations were going to be met.

As was expected in a Golden Age musical, the Act Two curtain wraps everything up. The town forgives Harold for conning them when the boy’s band enters and, as the script says “He [Harold] gives the upbeat and leads the band in “Minuet in G” like it has never been played before—just barely recognizable. The River Citizens think it’s the greatest thing they ever heard.” 31 The entire cast sings together and the audience knows that everyone will live happily ever after. The world fell out of balance, but everything was set right by this song. In fact, things are better by the end of the play then they were at the beginning. The parents of River City love the band and they have stopped bickering with one another. The kids, particularly Marian’s little brother, are happy, and Marian and Harold Hill are happily in love. The people walking into the theatre in 1957 would have been expecting this formula and they would not have been disappointed. The setup of The Music Man was familiar and therefore safe. The audience’s world view was not challenged. Everything is happy, stable, and improving.

According to The Music Man, everything is okay. The most difficult problems that people have to face are small moral dilemmas. There are no villains and the larger world outside of the bubble that is River City Iowa does not even exist. This is what people wanted all of

31 Willson, Meredith, and Franklin Lacey. The Music Man, p. 115
American society in the 1950s to be like. *The Music Man* is one of the quintessential musicals of the 1950s. The show is light and fun, and the structure is predictable. The musical does not challenge the audience to view society any differently. The strong willed, independent woman settles down in the end. The con man sees the error of his ways. Everything is happy and there are no tensions that could spoil anything. This is how most middle class Americans wanted to view their country *The Music Man* was aware of what its audience wanted, gave it to them, and was rewarded for it. The show was the most popular musical in 1957 and won Tony Awards for best Musical and for Best Composer.\(^{32}\)

The stability of the 1950s fell apart the following decade. The social issues that Americans worked so hard to cover up all came into the forefront. There were protests about race, war, the treatment of women, and everything in between. The country went from being at peace and working hard not to go to war, to being involved in one of the most controversial wars in American history. In the 1950s musicals were showing audiences a world that they wanted to see. In the 1960s, musicals were showing the same world that they had shown the decade before. Audiences wanted to actually see the social issues that they were dealing with onstage and that is not what they were presented with. Musicals were losing affluence in popular culture. By the 1970s the country was no longer at war, but dealing with the mess that the previous decade had left in its wake. Broadway was not nearly as popular anymore, and musicals were desperately trying to find a new place in American culture. In the 1960s, musicals were still trying to deny that anything had changed. By the 1970s musicals adopted the changed and were trying to figure out how to deal with it in the same way that the American people were trying to figure out how to deal with the 1970s.

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The 1970s were a reaction to the turmoil of the previous decade. Economically, the country was not doing well, there was a major crisis going on, and people were losing faith in the federal government. The Watergate Scandal caused people to distrust the federal government, and people were questioning whether or not the United States was still the best country in the world. The American Dream was starting to seem unachievable because the economy was only barely growing and unemployment rates had not been so high since the Great Depression. This was only exacerbated by the energy crisis. The Arab countries that were part of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) were unhappy with the United States because the government backed Israel in a war that allowed Israel to take Arab lands. The OPEC countries decided to cut off all oil shipment to the United States, claiming that they wanted to save oil because it is a finite resource. The embargo was disastrous for the American economy. It caused inflation and the worst economic recession since the 1930s. Gas prices skyrocketed, and gas shortages became an issue because the government tried to institute price controls that gas producers tried to get around. Lines to get gas went for miles, and the rise in energy costs made the price of just about everything produced in a factory go up. Because of this and the federal government being able to do very little to help, many Americans were looking for less government interference with their day to day lives. The nuclear family of the 1950s was falling also apart because only about one in five families had a stay-at-home mother. A one income family could no longer make ends meet; a woman had to go to work. Many women also wanted to go to work because it gave them a sense of independence. The divorce rate also shot

33 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 207-208
34 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 204
35 The 1970s
up; by the mid-1970s, it was up to fifty percent. Because of this trend, single mothers made up about one third of the households living below the poverty line and forty percent of the county’s poor were children. The constant growth and prosperity of the 1950s was gone by the 1970s. The social issues that the 1950s had been trying so hard to hide bubbled to the surface a decade later. The 1970s were still dealing with the backlash. Where there was a sense of optimism in the 1950s, the 1970s were much more pessimistic, and the lack of solid leadership did not help matters.

While the 1950s were secure and growing and Eisenhower tried to exemplify that, the 1970s were in a malaise and the presidents of the era did not rally the people. The Watergate Scandal nearly destroyed the presidency. The office no longer held the same prestige or authority. None of the presidents elected in the 1970s held the office for more than one term. There was very little confidence in the national leadership. Gerald Ford took over the presidency in 1974 after Nixon resigned and he wanted to help the nation get back on its feet. He pardoned Nixon’s crimes and this upset many people. Ford wanted to avoid a lengthy and painful trial so the nation could heal and move on. However, pardoning Nixon probably lost him the 1976 election. Jimmy Carter was elected president because he seemed like an outsider. He promised to revive some of the family values from the 1950s, and Americans were longing for the stability and innocence of that time. He was not part of the political games of Washington. He was a born again Christian with limited political experience. Carter wanted to restore the presidency to its former glory, but he was inexperienced with the federal legislative process and

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36 Donaldson, Gary A. *The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present*, p. 204
38 Donaldson, Gary A. *The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present*, p. 205-206
was not able to help the country as much as he wanted to. He tried to fix the economy, but when he tried to stimulate the economy inflation would rise and when he tried to lower inflation the economy would get worse.  

On July 15, 1979 the president gave a speech chastising the American people saying that they had lost faith in themselves and abandoned their traditional values. He said "I want to talk to you right now about a fundamental threat to American democracy... The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will." Americans felt that Carter was blaming their economic woes on them and their lack of character. When it came to foreign affairs, the president had very little experience, but he found his calling in human rights. Carter did not fight with the Soviet Union as directly as Eisenhower or other presidents did. Carter believed that the United States was in the right, and that he did not have to fight the Russians. The right would eventually prevail regardless. Though, Jimmy Carter’s greatest diplomatic success was forging a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. One of his greatest failures was the Iranian Hostage Crisis. In January of 1979 there was a revolution in Iran. The previous ruler, the Shah, was overthrown by Islamic Fundamentalists. The Shah was one of the United States’ most dependable allies in the Middle East and the overthrow was a blow to American foreign policy. As a response to the United States government siding with their deposed leader, On November 4 a group of militant students stormed the American Embassy in Tehran. The students took fifty-three embassy workers hostage. They paraded the workers, blindfolded, in front of cameras and said that the Americans would be executed as spies in the

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41 Carter, Jimmy. Crisis of Confidence  
42 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 219
US government did not hand over the Shah, who was taking refuge in the United States. At first the American people rallied behind Carter, but very little progress was made on getting the hostages released. People began getting restless. After four hundred forty-four days in captivity, the hostages were finally released, on Carter’s last day in office. The Iranian Hostage Crisis was seen as a symbol of America’s declining power and influence. Americans were having a hard time trusting their government. There had not been a really strong leader in the presidency at all during the 1970s. Politics were no longer a rallying point for people in the United States, they had to look elsewhere.

Television had become the best way to unite the country. For the first time in history, Americans were relying on television more than newspapers for their news. News like the Watergate Scandal and the Iranian Hostage Crisis was reported into people’s living rooms daily. Television was everywhere and social issues could not be hidden as effectively as they were in the 1950s. Television shows began to change in this era. Networks were cancelling show like The Beverly Hillbillies, Green Acres, and other rural shows and replacing them with programs that Americans deemed as more sophisticated like The Mary Tyler Moore Show, The Odd Couple, and All in the Family. Television shows used situational comedy to encourage Americans to see their society reflected in characters like Archie Bunker. Television shows were also looking at issues that shows in the 1950s would not have even dared to touch. The show Maude explored abortion and woman’s rights, Good Times examined poverty, and One Day at a

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43 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 222-223
44 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 225
45 Donaldson, Gary A. The Making of Modern America: The Nation from 1945 to the Present, p. 222
46 Mowry, George E., and Blaine A. Brownell. The Urban Nation: 1920-1980, p. 281
*Time* celebrated single mothers. Sitcoms were getting closer to showing American life as it was. They still showed an idealized version of American life where situations would work themselves out in twenty-two minutes, but the characters in the shows were real flawed human beings. Miniseries like *Roots* and gritty dramatic series *Colombo* also became immensely popular. At the same time, much more innocent shows like *Little House on the Prairie* and *The Waltons* were becoming popular. With the advent of cable, people had more options available of programs to watch. In the same day someone could watch a gritty, dramatic crime show and a fluffy and escapist comedy. Television was no longer exclusively showing an idealized version of American life, but started showing a slightly happier version of the United States as it actually was.

The Broadway world, like the rest of the country was not doing particularly well. 42nd Street itself was not a place that most people wanted to be. The area was full of drug dealers, prostitution, and porn movie theatres. There was an attempt to clean up 42nd Street in the early 1970s, but as the economy got worse the area got worse. Most Americans were not focused on musical theatre as rock and disco had become the forefront of popular music culture. Musicals became more of a subculture in the 1970s. By 1979, it cost at least one million dollars to produce a musical, and there was no guarantee that the show would make money. *Sweeney Todd* for example opened in 1979 and was one of the most critically successful shows of the 1970s. The musical won seven Tony Awards including Best Musical and still lost money. There was no longer one formula for a musical. Traditional book musicals still existed, but they seemed old fashioned. The concept musical was rising in popularity. These are musicals that use dialogue,

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47 TV History
48 Maslon, Laurence. *Resurrection of 42nd Street*
49 Kenrick, John. *Storm Warnings*
music, and dance to further a theme rather than a plot. In fact, these musicals have no
distinguishable plots.\textsuperscript{50} Company, Follies, and A Chorus Line are examples. This is also an era
where the director became important. In previous decades, the composer and book writer had
most of the control over how the show was staged. In the 1970s, that changed. A script was
given to a director and the director would decide what the show was about and reflect that on
stage. The same show could be directed by two different people, and each production would be
completely different. Oklahoma! belonged to Rodgers and Hammerstein before it belonged to
anyone else. For the concept musical, artistic priority belonged to the director.\textsuperscript{51} Musicals were
once again split between the right-wing, older Golden Age style musical, and the left-wing, new
Concept Musical. The Concept musical embraced the times and put some of the issues of the
1970s onstage. The right-wing musicals attempted to recapture the Golden Age and the positivity
and optimism of the 1950s by being even fluffier and escapist than the musicals that were being
performed two decades earlier.

42\textsuperscript{nd} Street is a right-wing musical based on a 1933 film. The show opened on August 25,
1980. Although the show did open in the 80s, it opened before the election of Ronald Reagan
and was affected more by the world of the 1970s than the 1980s. 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street is the epitome of
escapist musical and attempted to recapture the innocence and fun of Golden Age of Broadway.
The story is about a young woman, Peggy Sawyer, who comes to New York in 1933 hoping to
make it into a Broadway show. Through her talent, hard work, and a little bit of luck, Peggy gets
into the show. After the star has an accident and breaks her ankle, it is up to Peggy to take over
the lead role. 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street is a reaffirmation of the American Dream at a time when the American
Dream was truly in crisis. The plot is even lighter and fluffier than The Music Man while still

\textsuperscript{50} Stempel, Larry. Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater, p. 517
being just as insular. 42nd Street is set in New York City instead of the middle of Iowa. The characters in 42nd Street mention the Great Depression, but the audience never actually sees them deal with economic hardship. The musical is focused on the show within the show and making sure that that is successful. The people in 42nd Street do not care that Hitler has just become Chancellor of Germany. They do not care about the dust bowl of the Midwest or the New Deal. The Great Depression is only mentioned because the characters could not possibly avoid it, and the biggest economic disaster in history is mentioned as reason that the show needs to be successful. 42nd Street focuses more on the fun songs and dances than anything else.

The plot of 42nd Street is completely implausible. There is no way that a person would go from having never stepped into a Broadway Theatre to starring in a show in a matter of weeks. 42nd Street says the exact opposite. Peggy could be any hardworking American that was given the right chance. Julian Marsh, the director of the show within the show, Pretty Lady, epitomizes the United States of the 1970s. He is jaded and sees the harsh realities of the world. He knows that he is not in the best shape economically or as a Broadway powerhouse. He even says “Okay, so the crash has got me down for the count, but I’m still Julian Marsh, damnit and “Pretty Lady”’s gonna put me back on top!” He desperately wants to be high and mighty in the world again. It takes Peggy’s youth, innocence, and trust to make Pretty Lady a success. In the same way, America needed its population to trust in the government and go back to the ideals of the 1950s to be the best country in the world again. 42nd Street tried to push, in a silly, virtually impossible way, that the innocence and values of the 1950s would bring the country back to its former glory.

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52 Stewart, Michael, and Mark Bramble. 42nd Street, p. 8
The Music Man has a clear antagonist compared to 42nd Street. The closest character to a villain is the original star of Pretty Lady, Dorothy Brock. She comes across as mean to just about everyone that she meets, but that is because she has given up everything for her career. She tells Peggy “For ten years the theatre has kept me away from the only thing I ever wanted.”53 Dorothy is jealous, and not particularly pleasant, but her actions are understandable. She also does not appear in most of act two. She has one short scene in the middle of the act in which she enters Peggy’s dressing room and tells her “When I started for the theatre this afternoon, I wanted to tear your heart out. I wanted to see you fail...I found I couldn’t hate you because you’re good. Maybe even better than I would have been.”54 By the middle of act two the primary antagonist and the protagonist have become friends. As flimsy of an antagonist as Dorothy is, at least she got in the way of Peggy’s dream to make it on Broadway. For half of act two, nothing prevents Pretty Lady from being a success. The main source of drama ends quite a while before the show does. The lack of a formal antagonist shows how fluffy a musical 42nd Street is. The conflict is not about people trying to attain goals, but about getting a show on its feet.

42nd Street emulates the Golden Age style formula that The Music Man followed. There are two acts, and the first act is longer than the second. The first few lines of the show are “Hey, did you see this, Julian Marsh is doing a show!” “It’s in Variety, Julian Marsh is doing a show!” “Jobs!” “We’re gonna work again!”55 These first few lines are so telling of the world of the show. The curtain has not even come up yet and the audience already knows that they are in the world of the theatre in New York and that these actors have been out of work for some time. The audience has only seen a curtain and a dark stage at this point, and they already have key pieces

53 Stewart, Michael, and Mark Bramble. 42nd Street, p. 70
54 Stewart, Michael, and Mark Bramble. 42nd Street, p. 70
55 Stewart, Michael, and Mark Bramble. 42nd Street, p. iv
of information about the show. Shortly after that, the curtain rises half way, showing only the dancers tapping feet. Then the curtain rises all the way to reveal a chorus of dancers in, 1930s workout clothes, at their dance audition. Unlike The Music Man, the opening number has no lyrics. This makes 42nd Street even fluffier than The Music Man. The 1950s musical at least made the audience work to figure out what the actors were singing about and to understand the language of the world. 42nd Street wanted the audience to focus on the dancing. Jumping into the plot does not matter yet. This opening song does set the tone and the world of the entire musical. The audience is informed that the characters are trying to be part of a Broadway show, and that the dancing and the visual spectacle will be more important than the plot. The opening number tells the audience that this show is more like a Golden Age musical than the Golden Age musicals.

The act one finale, in the case of 42nd Street actually gets the plot moving. Up until this point the musical was mostly exposition. Peggy bumps into the leading lady, who falls and breaks her ankle. Peggy gets fired and rushes out of the theatre. Julian Marsh steps out and addresses the audience directly saying “Miss Dorothy Brock has had an accident and will not be able to continue with tonight’s performance of “Pretty Lady.” Ladies and gentlemen—you tickets will be refunded at the box office. House lights!”56 The audience would want to come back for the second act to find out what happens. The entire first act had been building up that the show would not happen without Dorothy Brock in the lead. Act one ends with Dorothy Brock being unable to perform the rest of the show, and the Peggy is no longer in Pretty Lady. The audience would be wondering how the show will go on and if Peggy will achieve her dream of being in a Broadway show. Peggy is the protagonist of 42nd Street; she cannot possibly be out

56 Stewart, Michael, and Mark Bramble. 42nd Street, p. 50
of the 42nd Street plot for good. The audience would wonder how Peggy would get her job back and how Pretty Lady will go on. Something is finally happening with the plot, the stakes have been raised.

The final song in the show; the last piece of the Golden Age Musical formula is Julian Marsh alone onstage singing the final number from the show within the show. Peggy just did an amazing job as the lead of the show, and Marsh just congratulated her and asked her not to let the success change her too much. As she leaves, he looks out at the empty theatre and sings “Come and meet those dancing feet on the avenue I’m taking you to, 42nd Street.” It is a very quiet closing moment for a show that is all about big flashy dance numbers. That song encapsulates the whole idea of the show. The world outside of the theatre does not matter. The only thing that matters is the draw of the theatre. Marsh sings “Hear the beat of dancing feet. It’s a song I love the melody of 42nd Street.” Broadway had not been doing well financially before 42nd Street opened. This intimate closing number wants to remind the audience that the theatre is a beautiful thing and brings people together from all walks of life. While The Music Man closes by showing off how happy everyone is now that they have conformed completely to social norms, 42nd Street says something slightly different. The 42nd Street finale shows the most jaded character paying homage to what drew him to the theatre in the first place. This finale is asking the audience not to lose its innocence, because that is what keeps them and this country going.

42nd Street had to be even more like a Golden Age musical than The Music Man in order to thrive on Broadway. In the 1950s there was only one style of musical. An audience would have walked in expecting the aforementioned formula. A show that tried to do something

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57 Stewart, Michael, and Mark Bramble. 42nd Street, p. 82
58 Stewart, Michael, and Mark Bramble. 42nd Street, p. 82
different would not have been as popular or as critically successful. *The Music Man* had to be a product of its decade, because audiences did not want anything else. They needed the security of a happy-go-lucky, predictable musical because society was working to hard to make that simplicity a reality. By the 1970s that dream had fallen apart. The social tensions that the 1950s were trying so hard to hide had risen to the surface. Musicals such *Company, Follies,* or *A Chorus Line* were acknowledging and showing the hardships that Americans were actually facing. Golden Age musicals had not disappeared either. Revivals of older musicals had become increasingly popular. A fluffy musical like *42nd Street* had to be even lighter and happier than the musicals of the 1950s because it had a different goal from the Golden Age musicals. *42nd Street* was aware that the idealized world that it presented could never be a reality. *42nd Street* wanted to create an escape from reality as opposed to a vision of what reality should be. *The Music Man* was just like most of the other musicals being produced at the time. Its only real competition was itself. *42nd Street* was competing with hard hitting concept musicals and revivals of musicals from two decades earlier. *42nd Street* had to distinguish itself by being the ultimate escapist Broadway experience.

*42nd Street* was successful on Broadway. That success was due, in part, to the show’s producer David Merrick. Merrick was known for being a bit of a scoundrel and pulling any publicity stunt to get people to come see his shows. The morning that *42nd Street* opened, the director and choreographer, Gower Champion, passed away. Merrick was informed of this, but kept the information to himself. During curtain call Merrick came onstage and announced that Gower Champion had died. No one else knew. The stunt stunned the audience and the cast and

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59 Kenrick, John. 1970s III: Fosse, Bennett & Revivals
crew and landed him on the front page of the New York Times.\textsuperscript{60} Merrick's stunt proved that a Broadway musical could no longer be successful on its own. *The Music Man* was extremely popular in 1957 on its own because musical theatre was at the forefront of popular culture. By 1980, musical theatre was more of a subculture, and something drastic needed to be done to keep a Broadway show in the public eye.

*42\textsuperscript{nd} Street* ran for nine years and 3,486 performances. The show is fun and upbeat. It allows audiences to escape the real world for a while and just enjoy the bright lights and flashy dances. *42\textsuperscript{nd} Street* also had critical success. It won Tony Awards for Best Choreography and Best Musical.\textsuperscript{61} The musical gave audiences an escape from reality while also reminding the audience of an age where life seemed easier and the American Dream seemed to work. There were plenty of other styles of musicals that people could go and see that were showing a more realistic portrayal of American life. *42\textsuperscript{nd} Street* showed that sometimes audiences and critics alike do not need to see their plight on stage, but need to be reminded of how wonderful life was decades earlier.

One musical cannot completely encapsulate the entertainment ideals of any given decade. One musical cannot be the sample size for an entire decade. However, *The Music Man* and *42\textsuperscript{nd} Street* are absolutely products of the era in which they were written. *The Music Man* showed American audiences the United States that they wanted to see. The world was simple, the problems were small, and as long as people behaved as they were expected to, everyone would be happy. *The Music Man* also followed the formula that every musical was expected to follow. *42\textsuperscript{nd} Street* was different; it showed a version of America that could no longer exist. The United

\textsuperscript{60} Stempel, Larry. *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater*, p. 447
States could no longer white wash its issues because those issues had made their way to the forefront of society. Because of that, morale was suffering. There was a plethora of options of different forms of entertainment. Audiences could see their problems unfold onstage in Concept musicals or heavier dramas, or they could go see a revival of *Gypsy* or *My Fair Lady.* *42nd Street* allowed audiences to look at the United States through nostalgic lenses by imitating shows like *The Music Man.* Morale was higher during the Golden Age, so *42nd Street* tried to recreate that spirit even though the idealism and innocence of the 1950s was gone. *The Music Man* let Americans see the America that they wanted to see. *42nd Street* let Americans escape into an American that they wish they could see.
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The Music Man was written by Meredith Wilson and premiered in 1957. The town of River City is based on Wilson's home town of Mason City, Iowa, but in 1912. He idealizes the town, everything in Wilson's version of Mason City is simple and quiet and happy. Harold Hill's line of "Well, you got trouble my friend, right here, I say trouble right here in River City," comes from an editorial in the Mason City Globe Gazette worrying about the young people hanging around the pool hall in town. That is the biggest problem facing Wilson's River City; a pool hall. Then one man comes into town and changes the lives and ideologies of River City in the span of a weekend. How is this possible? How could one stranger have that much influence over a town of people who have known each other for most of their lives?

Television and radio did not exist in 1912, so information moved and change happened much more slowly. Most likely, the biggest event that had happened in recent River City history was the death of Miser Madison. Even with the death of that extremely wealthy and influential man changed nothing but Marion's job. Very little happens in this town. A stranger like Harold Hill would both scare and intrigue the population of River City. Hill also charms the town with his charisma, and is able to do the seemingly impossible, he brings the Wells Fargo Wagon into town.

In today's world, a man like Harold Hill would not be able to have that much influence on a town. Everyone would know who he is and about his con before he made it into town. Charlie would be able to send out a tweet, and everyone would know about Professor Harold Hill. Wilson's River City is extremely innocent and sheltered, so one charming stranger would be able to change how a town sees the world.
SMALL TOWN AMERICA

A Midwestern town like River City town in 1912 was made up of a cluster of houses: a church, a few stores, a one room school house, and little else. Stores were usually opened at least twelve hours a day, especially over the summer. Towns were designed to be service centers for farmers, who made up the majority of the population. They would buy items that they could not produce themselves and sell anything they had a surplus of.

These towns were not particularly wealthy. The banker, the judge, the doctor, and maybe some merchants would be the richest people in town. Teachers, clergy, and small business owners would make up the middle class, unskilled laborers and the town drunk made up the lower class. The idea of the welfare state did not exist yet, so people who were struggling relied on the charity of their neighbors. The line "But we'll give you our shirt, and a back to go with it if your crop should happen to die," was a reality and a necessity for the poor and farmers during a poor harvest.

Most people barely participated in local government, let alone national government. The town’s governmental system was very informal because everyone knew each other. There was no need for the same formalities of a city’s local government. Usually, the only paid government employee was the policeman. There was only one, because there was very little serious crime in these towns.

Saturdays were the big day for entertainment. People would pack picnic lunches to be eaten in the park where there would be some form of concert. Many people formed bridge clubs or played some form of cards, and these card games were taken very seriously. Local stores such as a cafe, the barber, or the blacksmith’s shop were places to hear about the local gossip.

The population of River City is just over two thousand people. Everyone in town knew each other. They wanted to keep the status quo. Harold Hill coming into town changes things, he is someone new and he shakes up the town.

The separate sphere ideology was still going strong in 1912. This was the idea that society was separated into the public sphere and the private sphere. The public sphere, which included political life, working outside of the home, and anything having to do with money was controlled by men. The private sphere, which was everything going on in the home, was controlled by women. Women were seen as incapable of logical reasoning, but purely emotion beings. This is why Harold Hill thinks he will have no trouble getting Marion to believe him. If he can trick all of the men in town, a woman should be no problem. Things like voting, and working as lawyers or doctors was seen as beyond their abilities. Women, if they absolutely had to work, were expected to do jobs that were more nurturing in nature, such as teaching or domestic services. Many people were afraid that if women started working more consistently, jobs would be taken away from men. Part of why Marion is seen scandalous and unwomanly by the members of River City is because she holds an academic, normally male job.

Some women had access to higher education, but they could only attend women's colleges, and these women had to come from wealthy homes just to afford to go to school. Marion could have had a college degree if Miser Madison helped her family pay for her degree. Many women who had degrees would not be allowed to use them in the professional world. Mrs. Shinn is probably one of those women. She sees herself as well educated and cultured, so she probably had some schooling, but she does not have a formal job. In 1912, it was not yet the norm for women to attend college. Women were expected to get married. The average marriage age for women was between twenty-one and twenty-two years old. Marion, being about twenty-six would have been seen as on her way to being a spinster. She was not too old to get married quite yet, but she was getting there.

Women who were wealthier would be expected to be part of the Ladies' Aid Society. These were both social clubs and charitable agencies. They would meet on a regular basis and collect used clothing, or food, sew quilts, and find ways to raise money for the poor. Women from good families were expected to be part of these organizations. Mrs. Shinn and the Pick-a-Little ladies would all be involved in one of these types of organizations.

Marion is initially not trusted by the women of River City because she is educated, has what is usually considered a man's career, and she is uninterested in marriage. She is seen as a bit of a radical and cold because she does not want to conform to the ideals of how a woman should act. The Pick-a-Little ladies only come around to her when she has a sweet moment dancing with Harold Hill. She has to come across as more classically feminine before anyone in town will listen to her. By contrast, Mrs. Shinn is highly respected because, while she has enough education to read and enjoy Balzac, she is prescribes to the separate spheres Ideology.
OFFICERS LADIES' AID SOCIETY.

First Row: Mrs. Elizabeth Hautz, Mrs. Frederika Ruess, Rev. G. A. Kienle, Mrs. C. Kallmerten.

Second Row: Mrs. Otto Fiedler, Mrs. S. G. Schaller, Mrs. Henry Goetz.
The people of River City probably were not that involved in United States politics, but important events were going on. The events below all occurred before the time of the play, and everyone in the United States would have been aware of them.

Jan 6: New Mexico becomes the 47th state
Jan 9: US marines invade Honduras
Feb 8: The first Eastbound US transcontinental flight lands in Jacksonville, Florida
Feb 14: Arizona becomes the 48th state
Mar 12: Girl Scouts formed in Savannah, Georgia
Apr 14-15: Titanic sinks off the coast of Newfoundland
May 5: 6th Olympic games in Stockholm, Sweden
May 30: US marines sent to Nicaragua
June 5: US marines invade Cuba
June 6: Eruption at Novarupta in Alaska begins

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THE NEW YORK HERALD.

THE TITANIC SINKS WITH 1,800 ON BOARD; ONLY 675, MOSTLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN, SAVED
42nd Street

42nd Street the musical premiered in 1980 and is based on a 1933 movie of the same name. The film was made to make people forget how awful the world outside of the movie theatre was. The audience was meant to put on blinders and just enjoy the Busby Berkeley dance numbers. The stage version looks back at the 1930s and almost wishes to be back then. Both versions of the show are attempting to escape from the outside world and remind the audience that the American Dream still works. What was going on in the late 1970s and very early 1980s that made the height of the Great Depression seem like an era the American public would want to escape to?

Depression era America was not in good shape. The economy was in the toilet and most people were out of work. However, Franklin D. Roosevelt was a strong leader and worked to give the people as much relief as possible. In the 1970s, there was a recession that was almost as bad as the Great Depression. Jimmy Carter was irredeemable and blamed the character of the American people for their plight. The United States did not look or feel like the best country in the world anymore. This made people nostalgic for an era when things could only get better.

In both the 1930s and the 1970s, the American Dream was in trouble. It is difficult to see yourself pulling yourself up from you boot straps and becoming successful when no one is able to do so and the world looks bleak. 42nd Street is a reaffirmation of the American Dream. With just a little bit of support even a no body from the chorus can be a star.
The 1970s were a reaction to the radical liberalism of the 1960s. Most marginalized groups were continuing to fight for rights that they had started fighting for in the 1960s. The idea from the 1950s and 60s that America was the best was starting to be questioned. The Watergate scandal caused Americans to lose faith in their federal government. The economy was so bad that the unemployment rate was almost as high as it was during the Great Depression. Many Americans wanted less government interference in the day to day economy. This was a time when the American Dream was really being questioned. The rags-to-riches story was really looking to be impossible. Were the people of the 1930s better off than the people of the 1970s?

The oil crisis caused the economy to take a turn for the worse. The Arab countries of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) were upset at the US because the American government was allied with Israel. Those Arab nations also claimed that they only had so much oil and had to conserve it. They imposed an embargo on all oil being shipped to the US. The US was hugely dependent on foreign oil. The embargo caused huge amounts of inflation and the worst recession since the Great Depression. The government tried to make oil prices more manageable for Americans by price controlling already discovered oil (old oil), but producers just shut down old oil production to avoid price control. There was not enough oil. There were long lines at the gas pump and a panic to get gasoline. The price of gas was no longer the problem, the availability was.

The unemployment rate reached into the double digits. It had not been that high since the Great Depression. President Jimmy Carter did very little to solve the issues with the economy. His attempts to reduce inflation or stimulate the economy only made things worse. On July 15, 1979 Carter gave a speech that blamed the American people for the economic crisis. The American public did not take well this accusation and they blamed Carter for the economic downturn because of his lack of leadership skills.

In 1979, the Iranian Revolution occurred. The previous leader, the shah, was overthrown and an Islamic theocracy took over. The United States had supported the shah, so the Iranian people saw the US as an oppressive enemy. Carter allowed the shah to seek refuge in the United States. This enraged Iranians. A bunch of Iranian students stormed the American embassy and took fifty-three American workers hostage. They said that these Americans would be tried as spies and executed if the United States did not hand the shah over. At first the American people rallied behind Carter and would have supported any action he took. However, he was not doing anything. Instead, he took action against the Soviet Union for invading Afghanistan by refusing to give them grain and by boycotting the 1980 Moscow Olympics. The Soviet Union's actions had nothing to do with the crisis in Iran. The hostage crisis was a symbol of America's declining power and influence.

42nd Street premiered in 1980. The show helps the audience to escape from the craziness that is going on in politics and the economy. 1933 was economically similar, so the audience could empathize with some of the plight of the characters. The show also reaffirms that with hard work, talent, and someone pointing you out, the American Dream is still possible. Were the 1930s better? Probably not. People of the 1970s longed for the sureness of the 1930s, and there is no ambiguity in 42nd Street.

1970s Broadway was not that different from 1930s Broadway. The content of the shows were completely different, but the economic climate was similar. Theaters were not doing well. Shows were not staying open for very long. An actor did not go to the New York theatre scene to become rich and famous. The money was in Hollywood.

New York, particularly 42nd street, was not doing well during the 1970s. The area was full of strip clubs, and not the classy ones either, the I-will-probably-get-a-disease-from-being-in-here type clubs. 42nd Street was also full of prostitution, drugs and other crime. In the early 1970s, there was an attempt to clean up 42nd street. Tax breaks were given as an incentive for business owners to build reputable businesses in the area. Several new theaters were built to try to bring the area back to its former glory. Unfortunately, this did not work and 42nd street only got sleazier. It got even worse when the economy tanked. Any reconstruction projects came to a halt when the economy kept getting worse. By 1977, the famous sign that spun headlines along the Times Tower on Times Square had to turn its lights out.

Musical theatre was no longer popular among the general public, the world of musical theatre was a subculture more than being in the limelight. By 1979, a musical cost at least one million dollars to produce. Operating prices were also unbelievably high. There was no guarantee that a musical would profit. Inflation was bad all over the country, but on Broadway inflation was up four hundred percent. Shows were not opening as often as they had in the decades prior. The shows that were being produced were not lasting long.

The odds were not for 42nd Street to be successful. It was one of the biggest and boldest musical comedies, spectacle wise, to be premiered in decades. The tap numbers were larger and much more extravagant than anything that had been on stage before. It allowed people to look back on that era wearing their nostalgia goggles and think about how much better theatre was back in the day. The show is also a reaffirmation of the American Dream. We are all Peggy Sawyers. and if picked from the chorus, we could be a big hit.

1970s theatre was not all that different from 1930s theatre in that people were not buying tickets. When the economy is bad and you're worried about how you're going to get food on the table, theatre and entertainment are not priorities. The actors in the original Broadway performance were having the same issue of finding work that the cast of Pretty Lady was having.

Imagine a complete stranger coming into town on a train carrying nothing but a suitcase and the clothes on his back. He does not know a single person in the area, and yet he comes to your house, rings the doorbell and asks to come inside so he can try to sell you something. Today, this sounds a little odd, but in 1912 the traveling salesman was necessary and a little bit exciting.

The fictional town of River City, Iowa is tiny, with a population of only about twenty-two hundred people. There are no malls, no department stores, and no specialty stores. There would probably be a general store, but if it’s out of something that you need then what? You would have to wait for the next traveling salesman to come into town. Not everyone in town trusted an incoming traveling salesman. He was a stranger after all and not all salesmen were trustworthy. These men were taught how to be charismatic. They knew how to charm their way into a town and get people to buy whatever they were selling.

Today’s world is much bigger than that of River City in 1912. We don’t need people going around the country selling anvils, cigarettes, or children’s bands. We still love the idea of the traveling salesman because they take us back to a simpler time. The Music Man’s book writer and composer, Meredith Wilson calls the show a Valentine, a love letter to the seemingly carefree days of 1912.
Imagine living in 1933, not having a job, and having to get on a line that goes around the block just to get a hot meal. When the world feels unbearable where do we turn? Imagine living in 1980 having to wait in a line over three miles long just to put gas in your car, inflation being crazy high, and having no faith in the federal government to help fix anything. When the American Dream seems impossible where do we find hope?

*42nd Street* premiered in 1980, is set in 1933, and has always been aware that the world outside of the theatre can be unbearable. The show knows that we’ve been struggling. It wants to help us forget about those problems if only for a little while. *42nd Street* shows us the 1933 that we want to see, not 1933 as it actually was. Sometimes we need a couple of hours to look at the glittering lights and wonderful dance moves and overlook the awful newspaper headlines of the day. Sometimes we need a show that says yes the American Dream works.

We need *42nd Street* today just as much as it was needed in 1980. Our government just shut down and the economy is in bad shape. There is nothing wrong with taking some time away from real life and “Listen to the lullaby of old Broadway.”