

53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley



DESIGNATION REPORT

53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley

LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan
53 West 28th Street

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

Built c.1859 as an Italianate-style row house, 53 West 28th Street was the site of numerous musicians' and sheet music publishers' offices in the 1890s-1900s, part of a block known as "Tin Pan Alley."



47, 49, 51, 53, and 55 West 28th Street,
December 2019

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53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley

53 West 28th Street, Manhattan

Designation List 516 LP-2629

Built: 1859-1860

Builder: Linus Scudder

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map
Block 830, Lot 8

Calendared: March 12, 2019

Public Hearing: April 30, 2019

Designated: December 10, 2019

On March 12, 2019, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (“Commission”) voted to calendar the 53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley, for consideration as an individual landmark as part of a row of 19th-century buildings associated with the significant history of “Tin Pan Alley,” which occupied the block of West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue at the turn of the 20th century.

On April 30, 2019, the Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the 53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.4). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. 22 people testified in favor of the proposed designation, including representatives of Speaker of the New York City Council Corey Johnson, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer,

New York State Assembly Member Richard Gottfried, Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Society for the Architecture of the City, 29th Street Neighborhood Association, Village Preservation, Save Chelsea, the Bedford Stuyvesant Society for Historic Preservation, and Hampsong Foundation, and eight individuals. Four people, including three representatives of the owner and one individual, spoke in opposition to the proposed designation.

In addition, the Commission received 44 written submissions in support of the proposed designation, including from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers; Carnegie Hall; Municipal Art Society of New York; Museum of the City of New York; National Music Publishers’ Association; Americana Music Productions; Audubon Park Alliance; Dumbo Neighborhood Alliance; Flower Tenants Association; Jujamcyn Theaters; Mabel Mercer Foundation; Musicians Foundation; and from 29 individuals including descendants of James Reese Europe and J. Rosamond Johnson, African American composers whose work was published on West 28th Street in the era, and descendants of composers and bandleaders Noble Sissle and Duke Ellington. The Commission also received two letters providing additional research.

Editorial Note

Tin Pan Alley

The period between 1893 and 1910, when the block of West 28th Street between Sixth Avenue and Broadway was known as “Tin Pan Alley” for its concentration of music publishers, was an important cultural moment of intense music production and innovation that earned a name that went on to symbolize the popular music industry in general. Tin Pan Alley had an indelible impact on the history of American popular music and paved the way for what would become “the Great American Songbook.” However, arising during the period following the Civil War and the failure of Reconstruction, when Jim Crow laws and other unjust, discriminatory practices were reversing newly-won freedoms and rights for African Americans and entrenching systemic racism throughout American society, racist caricatures and stereotypes of African Americans were increasingly spread through mass media, including sheet music produced on Tin Pan Alley. At the same time, Tin Pan Alley’s music publishing brought ragtime to an international public, offered unprecedented opportunities for African-American artists and publishers to create mainstream American music, and saw many gain acclaim and prominence. The proposed designation of this row of five buildings, which represent the history of Tin Pan Alley, recognizes the significant contributions and achievements of African Americans here, and acknowledges the harsh realities they faced.

In our designations, the Landmarks Preservation Commission seeks to represent the diversity of New York City and to tell the story of all New Yorkers. Under the mandate of the Landmarks

Law, the agency is responsible for protecting buildings that are architecturally, historically, or culturally significant, and which through the integrity of their historic character and fabric represent important periods of architecture or history, as well as people or events. Preserving buildings that embody a specific aspect of New York’s history allows us to learn from it, and to recognize the experiences of those who lived through that history as part of our collective memory and heritage. Tin Pan Alley presents an important example of that function of historic preservation.

Tin Pan Alley arose during and reflects a post-Reconstruction context when racist policies, views and ideology were prevalent in New York City and throughout the country, and among other injustices were reflected in offensive caricatures and stereotypes spread through mass media. This designation does not celebrate the racist tropes and imagery found in some of Tin Pan Alley’s sheet music, but it must acknowledge it and put it in the context of American history at that time. The goal of this designation is to preserve the historic fabric of buildings that contained, contributed to, and continue to represent the significant history of Tin Pan Alley as part of New York City’s cultural heritage, so that we and future generations may experience and learn from them.

In our approach to this designation, extensive research was done to understand the historical and cultural context for this moment in the creation of widely accessible popular music. Songwriters and music publishers collaborated in new ways on Tin Pan Alley, and created a new popular American art form in the midst of an incredibly racist period in American history. This specific period in New York City’s African-American history, between Reconstruction and the Harlem Renaissance, is not yet well represented by landmark designations, and it is important to study

and recognize. LPC staff thoroughly and thoughtfully researched not only the history of Tin Pan Alley's music production, business practices, songwriters, and performers, but also the historic context of the Post-Reconstruction era, and the history of offensive racist stereotypes and caricatures that were spread through sheet music imagery and lyrics at this time. This rigorous research was necessary to document and recognize the significant achievements of African-American songwriters and publishers associated with Tin Pan Alley, and to preserve the historic fabric and character of buildings that embody Tin Pan Alley's significance.

KLM

We acknowledge the important scholarship of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in particular his book *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy and the Rise of Jim Crow*, and are grateful for the insights and conversations with historians John Reddick, Andrew Dolkart, and David Freeland. We appreciate the letters of support received from the descendants of James Reese Europe, Jr., J. Rosamond Johnson, Noble Sissle, and Duke Ellington.

Summary

53 West 28th Street

Between 1893 and about 1910, West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue became home to the most significant concentration of sheet music publishers then known in New York City. As publishers began to congregate in the area, the name “Tin Pan Alley” was coined c.1903 to evoke the racket of piano music audible on the block. Here, composers, arrangers, lyricists, promoters, performers, and printers came together as collaborative firms of sheet music publishers and made an indelible impact on practices for the creation, production and promotion of American popular music. As the office of numerous musicians and sheet music publishers in the 1890s-1900s, 53 West 28th Street represents Tin Pan Alley’s concentration of New York City’s influential popular music business in one location and its importance to American culture.

Tin Pan Alley arose at a unique technological moment before phonographs and records were affordable for most American families and when sheet music was the principal form of music distribution, the basis of much public performance, and the backbone of middle class in-home entertainment. Because most sheet music was meant to be taken home for performance on piano, the aim of publishers was to expose their music to masses of prospective purchasers to increase the likelihood of sheet music sales. A number of creative, lucrative, and sometimes devious business strategies arose on Tin Pan Alley; the shrewd business sense and insistent promotion tactics of Tin Pan Alley firms were essential to the era’s boom in

sheet music sales and were a precursor to promotion and sales tactics that remain a feature of the popular music business.

Music publishers sought offices close to theaters, hotels, music halls, and other venues to facilitate their collaboration with songwriters and song “pluggers,” musicians whose role was to promote and demonstrate new sheet music in department stores, theaters, vaudeville halls, and other entertainment venues. Their move to Tin Pan Alley in the 1890s reflected the northwestern movement of the City’s entertainment district and the proliferation of entertainment venues near Madison Square Park. On Tin Pan Alley, music publishers were concentrated in a close cluster—highlighted in the iconic row at 47-55 West 28th Street—rather than more isolated offices for the first time in New York City. The intimate scale of Tin Pan Alley’s row houses made it possible for publishers to advertise their work to theater crowds and passersby on low-slung signage, made sheet music publishers’ offices accessible to creative hopefuls eager to capitalize on their talent, and made the sonic experience from which Tin Pan Alley took its name possible, with piano music audible on the street from the multiple offices in each modest structure.

Tin Pan Alley represents a number of milestones for the participation of African-American and Jewish artists in mainstream music production. It arose about a decade after immigration of Jewish refugees from persecution in Eastern Europe to New York City began in the early 1880s, and a notable proportion of Tin Pan Alley’s music publishers, songwriters, and pluggers were of German or Eastern European Jewish descent or were immigrants themselves. At the same time, significant numbers of African Americans began to migrate to New York City in search of work and opportunities unavailable in the Jim Crow-era South,

and the prominence and valuation of African-American creators' contributions to the music business underwent significant growth on Tin Pan Alley.

A number of Tin Pan Alley's ragtime publications were well-known hits that brought ragtime into countless homes through the dissemination of sheet music and were pivotal to its popularization as a genre. However, as relatives of musical forms which were popular in minstrel shows, some of Tin Pan Alley's compositions were built on objectionable caricatures of African Americans in the tradition of blackface performance. Their employment of slurs and caricatures reflects systemic racism in the post-Reconstruction era and a particular lineage of racist stereotypes in American entertainment. Some African-American songwriters on West 28th Street deliberately tried to rework stereotypes that were popular in music of the time.

By 1910, with phonograph and record sales on the rise, almost all of Tin Pan Alley's music publishers had followed the entertainment district to Times Square, where larger, newer, and custom offices were able to accommodate their new in-house orchestras and recording spaces. The term "Tin Pan Alley" later grew to refer to the entire music production industry in America, and inspired the music studios of London's Tin Pan Alley on Denmark Street from 1911-1992.

53 West 28th Street was built c.1859 as an Italianate-style row house, intact elements of which include its bracketed cornice, fenestration pattern, and projecting stone lintels and sills. Like other structures on the block, it underwent a conversion to accommodate a retail storefront during the Tin Pan Alley era. Above its storefront, it retains much of its historic detail and its form and character reflect its appearance when numerous Tin Pan Alley sheet music publishers made their offices there in the 1890s-1900s. Along with the adjacent row at 47, 49,

51, and 55 West 28th Street, 53 West 28th Street represents Tin Pan Alley's significant contributions to American culture and popular music.

Building Description

53 West 28th Street

53 West 28th Street was built c.1859 as a three-bay, four-story and basement, Italianate-style brownstone row house. The projection and configuration of the storefront dates to a 1924 alteration (ALT 408-24).

Historic: This four-story and basement, three-bay, Italianate structure features a brownstone facade. The entrance enframing features a segmental-arched, pedimented door hood supported by foliate brackets and channeled pilasters with paterae; molded panel reveals; and a molded, segmental-arched door frame with an egg-and-dart-molded transom bar and single-paned transom light. The second, third, and fourth stories feature rectangular window openings with molded enframements and projecting molded lintels; some openings feature historic wood-framed double-hung one-over-one windows. The building is crowned with a pressed metal cornice with a dentil course, foliated modillion course, and foliated console brackets. Fire escapes were added in 1919, after the Tin Pan Alley era

Alterations: Projecting storefronts at basement and first story altered; stoop replaced with metal stairs; non-historic door to storefront punched through left wall of entrance vestibule and security gate installed above; non-historic entrance door installed at rear of vestibule; patera on easternmost pilaster pared; portions of door hood pared; facade painted.

History and Significance

Tin Pan Alley

Early Site History and Development of Madison Square

The section of West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, which came to be known as Tin Pan Alley c.1903, was developed with Italianate-style row houses in the 1850s as the area around Madison Square became an elite residential enclave. The block is situated on land included within the patent granted by British Governor Edmund Andros to Solomon Pieters, a free black man, in 1680. Pieters' father, Pieter San Tomé, was one of eleven African men enslaved by the Dutch West India Company and given "half-freedom" by the Council of New Amsterdam in 1644.¹ With the inheritance from his father, Pieters owned several other parcels on Manhattan and rose to a level of prominence rare for a person of African descent in colonial New York.² Pieters and his heirs owned the estate—then a farm—until 1716, when John Horne and Cornelius Webber purchased the property.³ A portion of the estate between what became West 26th and 31st streets west of Broadway was conveyed to John de Witt in 1751 and to Isaac Varian in 1787.⁴ Isaac Varian was a slaveholder; he and his descendants owned the site of 53 West 28th Street until 1852.⁵

The Commissioners' Plan of 1811 laid out gridded streets in Manhattan between Houston Street and 155th Street and set aside specific areas as markets and parks. The largest of these areas was drawn between 23rd and 34th streets and Third to Seventh avenues and was known as the "Grand Parade"; it was later reduced in size, in stages, from 240 to 6.23 acres and renamed Madison Square Park.⁶

With a smaller span from 23rd to 26th streets and Fifth to Madison avenues, Madison Square Park opened to the public on May 10, 1847.⁷ In the subsequent decades, numerous homes were built on the north and east sides of the park and in its immediate area. Most of the residences built during this development phase were brick or brownstone Italianate-style row houses. The structures on the north side of West 28th Street between Broadway and 6th Avenue were built c.1852 and c.1859 as four-story and basement row houses with brick or brownstone fronts, high front stoops, and an eight-foot setback from the street.⁸

Madison Square became the social center of Manhattan and home to several prominent families. Directories from the 1850s show numerous merchants, businessmen, and a physician living on the north side of 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue and illustrate Madison Square's development with fine residences at a time when it was home to a concentration of affluent New Yorkers.⁹

Entertainment Districts and Tin Pan Alley

From the 1890s until about 1910, West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue became home to the most significant and substantial concentration of sheet music publishers then known in New York City and was given the name Tin Pan Alley.¹⁰ Drawn by the proximity to theaters near Madison Square Park and less formal entertainment venues in the Tenderloin, music publishers began to relocate to West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue in 1893. The location of Tin Pan Alley was convenient for publishers, who were able to deliver their sheet music to numerous entertainment venues in the area; the concentration of publishers on the block, in turn, meant that songwriters were able to offer up their talents door-to-door in the hope that one firm or another might publish their work.¹¹ Among other attractors to the block were the office of the venerable

New York Clipper, the premier theatrical and entertainment magazine of the time, at 47 West 28th Street from 1900-1916, and the abundance of saloons, hotels, and other forums for entertainers, agents, and publishers to meet.¹²

The proliferation of theaters and entertainment venues north of Madison Square was an important incentive for the songwriters and music publishers of Tin Pan Alley to establish their offices on West 28th Street. The earlier commercialization of lower Broadway brought theaters, hotels, and retail to the Bowery, and then north to Union Square, where the theater district was known as the Rialto.¹³ With the northwestern movement of the City's entertainment district from Union Square to Madison Square, Tin Pan Alley brought the convergence of music publishers that had begun in the Rialto to its apex in the 1890s-1900s; unlike the Rialto, however, Tin Pan Alley was notable for its consolidation of music publishers in a close cluster—in particular on the north side of West 28th Street—for the first time in New York City, rather than discrete offices within a larger geographic area.

Madison Square Entertainment District

Drawn by transportation improvements and the relocation of an elite residential enclave to the area, high-profile department stores came north to Broadway and Sixth Avenue between 14th and 23rd streets and gave rise to the retail district known as Ladies' Mile (a designated New York City Historic District) from the late 1850s until about 1915.¹⁴ As development spread north from lower portions of Broadway, the entertainment district took root near Madison Square, where it built upon the reputation of the area's antebellum spectacles like Franconi's Hippodrome (1853, demolished), a 4,000-seat circus, and gave rise to vaudeville theaters, opera houses, and indoor arenas like Madison Square Garden (1879, demolished).¹⁵ Transit improvements to the stretch of

Broadway between 23rd and 34th streets drew a large concentration of legitimate theaters from the earlier entertainment centers of the Bowery and Union Square.¹⁶ These venues, which have since been demolished, were held in high esteem by theatergoers across the nation and were home to some of the best-known stock companies of the time. In 1879 and 1885, Gilbert and Sullivan's influential comic operas *The Pirates of Penzance* and *The Mikado* made their American debuts at the Fifth Avenue Theater at 27-31 West 28th Street (demolished), on the same block as the eventual Tin Pan Alley.¹⁷

To host the influx of visitors and attract affluent newcomers, luxurious hotels arose from Madison to Herald squares to rival the elegant and exclusive Fifth Avenue Hotel (1859, demolished), including the Grand Hotel (1868, a designated New York City Landmark), Gilsey House (1869-71, a designated New York City Landmark), and numerous others that have since been demolished.¹⁸ These hotels became venues for visitors to socialize, promenade, and take in of-the-moment entertainment, and for entertainment brokers and creatives to meet to meet, dine, and discuss business.¹⁹

Madison Square's tenure as a theater district



“That Fairyland of Theatres and gaudy Palaces which is Broadway.”

Theaters and other entertainment venues near Tin Pan Alley drew musicians and publishers to the block,
William Glackens, *Harper's Weekly* XLIV,
December 8, 1900

was brief. By the 1890s, Longacre Square, which became Times Square after the relocation of the *New York Times*' headquarters in 1904, began to draw theaters from Madison and Herald Squares with transit incentives and its entertainment venues' international cachet. The development of the Times Square area as New York City's ultimate theater district was a result of the expansion of mass transportation and the ascendance of New York City as a center of American dramatic arts. Hotels and theaters began to congregate around major midtown transportation centers like Grand Central Terminal (a designated New York City Landmark) in order to capitalize on larger potential audiences. Few entertainment venues were left in the area around Madison Square after 1910.²⁰

*The Tenderloin*²¹

Between Fifth and Seventh avenues from Madison Square to 42nd Street, and later west to Eighth Avenue and north to Central Park, the presence of elite residences, theaters, luxurious hotels, and other upscale establishments gave rise to a vibrant nightlife meant to divert well-to-do crowds of visitors. This, in turn, drew more notorious and illicit establishments to serve the area's patrons. The district became infamous for corruption in the form of police protection of businesses and the involvement of Tammany Hall in graft and vice within the area. In 1876, in anticipation of an increase in kickbacks after his transfer to the area precinct, New York Police Department Captain Alexander S. "Clubber" Williams purportedly boasted, "I've had nothing but chuck steak for a long time and now I'm going to get a little of the tenderloin."²² From then on, the section of Manhattan was known as the Tenderloin and became infamous as the City's vice district.²³

The Tenderloin's large size and variable boundaries—within which Tin Pan Alley arose—

brought about a coexistence of exclusive and mass entertainment in New York City. Despite its reputation for vice alone, the Tenderloin was home to an intricate mix of residences, retail, hotels, and theaters, and, to a lesser degree, saloons, dance halls, pool halls, and brothels; it was a social sphere built around brick and brownstone row houses, a space for the affluent to promenade, and, at night, a stage for all manner of entertainment and diversion.²⁴

Tenderloin saloons made less formal modes of entertainment than what was shown in Madison Square's theaters available to the masses. The largest and most notorious of these was the Haymarket, a dance hall in operation from 1872-1890 and 1897-1911 on the southeast corner of 30th Street and Sixth Avenue.²⁵ There, patrons were exposed to popular music typical of the Tin Pan Alley era, as the eventual Nobel laureate Eugene O'Neill wrote in his sonnet, "The Haymarket":

The music blares into a rag-time tune—
The dancers whirl around the polished floor.²⁶

With its heterogeneous character, the Tenderloin was a space where opportunities were available to a wider spectrum of the population than elsewhere, in particular after the shift of the area around Madison Square from an aristocratic enclave to a more diverse and democratic sphere. The Tenderloin became home to a significant percentage of the City's African-American population, in particular in an area that was known as "Black Chapel" on 27th and 28th streets near Seventh Avenue. Between 1890 and 1910, the African-American population of New York City grew from 23,601 to 91,709 with an influx of Southern-born blacks—"the advance guard of the Great Migration"—in search of work and opportunities unavailable in the Jim Crow-era South.²⁷ A number of entrepreneurs of color ran prominent businesses in the area, notably saloons that became spaces for black

songwriters and music publishers to gather.²⁸ Certain inns, taverns, and saloons, allowed a degree of racial integration in an era when Broadway's elite hotels and theaters did not admit black patrons.²⁹

Tin Pan Alley arose in the heart of the Tenderloin, on a section of West 28th Street known as "The Liveliest Block in Town" in an 1894 *World* article, which declared:

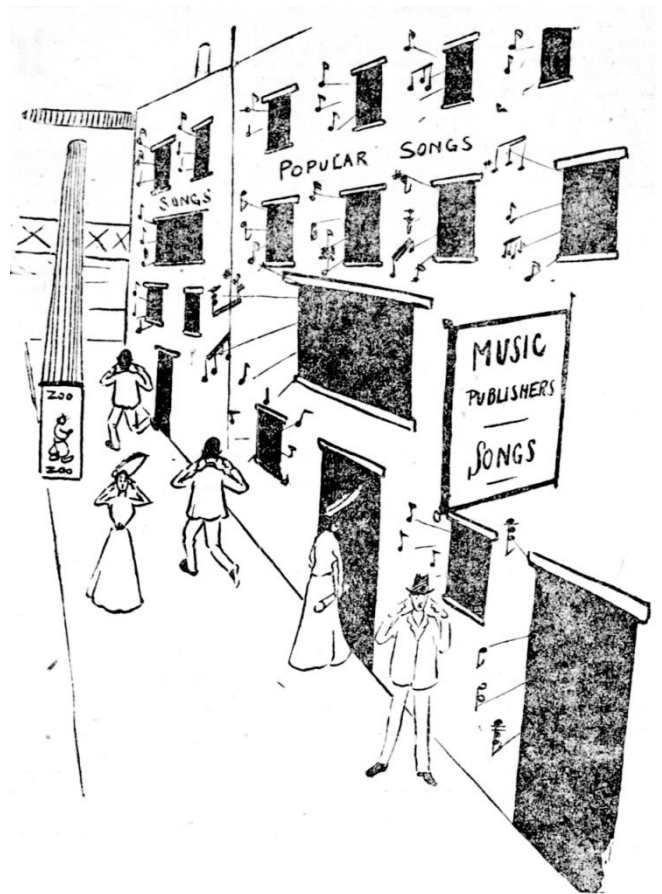
There is more life on the sidewalk there in the daytime than on any other one block in the gay Tenderloin district. ... Without moving off the block you can find a score of places to sleep, as many more to eat and drink in and an all-night Turkish bath. You can play billiards, get shaved, gamble, bet on the races, buy picture frames, flowers, clothes or shoes, get a tooth pulled, consult a physician or send a telegram. If you are an actor or a soubrette you can get an engagement, have your part typewritten, order a wig or ask for "a couple of seats, please" at the box-office of the Fifth-Avenue Theatre. You can live for twenty years without ever going away from this short block, and all this with the satisfactory feeling that you are "in it every minute," like the little boy in the song.³⁰

The Experience of Tin Pan Alley

The earliest known print application of the term "Tin Pan Alley" to West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue appeared in "Fourteenth Street's Rialto is Passing Away," a January 16, 1903 article in *The Morning Telegraph* that referred to "... West Twenty-eighth street, more commonly known as 'Tin Pan Alley,' from the multiplicity of song publishers' pianos."³¹ Coinage of the name "Tin Pan Alley" c.1903 has been variously—and inconclusively—attributed to four individuals: author O. Henry

(William Sydney Porter, 1862-1910); journalist and composer Monroe H. Rosenfeld (c.1861-1918); journalist Roy McCardell (1870-1961); and publisher Harry Von Tilzer (1872-1946).³² Later sources dramatize a supposed exchange between Rosenfeld and Von Tilzer as follows:

As [Rosenfeld] came into the office, von Tilzer was playing the piano and Rosenfeld noticed that it had a peculiarly muted tone. He asked why and von Tilzer replied that it was because other tenants of the building



This is "Tin Pan Alley"—you can tell by the sounds.

The origin of the term "Tin Pan Alley," with piano notes audible along West 28th Street, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "Tin Pan Alley? Why It's the Place Where the Popular Songs Come From," May 10, 1903, 9B



**Theater audiences “flock from Tin Pan Alley”
to demand the latest sheet music,**

H. Harmony, *The Evening World*,
November 11, 1905

had asked if the song writers could hold the noise level down. This they accomplished by putting strips of newspaper behind the piano strings. According to folklore, Rosenfeld remarked, “It sounds like a tin pan,” to which von Tilzer replied: “Yes, I guess this is tin pan alley.” Rosenfeld wrote the story for *The World* and Tin Pan Alley became synonymous with the world of popular music.³³

The term “Tin Pan Alley” seems to have had numerous influences, the most direct of which was the colloquial term “tin pan” as a metaphor for a tinny-sounding, inexpensive, or out-of-tune piano.³⁴ While music publishers’ offices on both sides of West 28th Street and the bookend of the elevated IRT station at 28th Street and Sixth Avenue might have given the sense of an “alley,” the term was perhaps also an allusion to the block’s location in the back

spaces of theaters and in the Tenderloin, with its reputation for more subversive forms of entertainment.³⁵

In its original usage, “Tin Pan Alley” was a term meant to disparage music publishers for their cacophonous and discordant work.³⁶ Nevertheless, Roy McCardell’s May 3, 1903 *New York World* article, “A Visit to Tin Pan Alley, Where the Popular Songs Come From,” shows that Tin Pan Alley’s magnitude and significance to American music was known by that date:

Strange are the ways of Tin Pan Alley. Great is the influence of Tin Pan Alley upon our country’s songs. For here they are conceived, originate, brought forth and spread, broadcast. Tin Pan Alley is that part of Twenty-eighth street [sic] that lies between Broadway and Sixth Avenue. Here center the song-publishing houses of New York. ...

Tin Pan Alley contains all the music publishing houses of note save four ...³⁷

The intimate scale of Tin Pan Alley’s row houses was a boon for publishers to advertise their work to theater crowds and passersby on 28th Street: “Old-fashioned, high-stooped houses, converted now into office and store buildings, line its sides; and the sides of those in turn are lined with enormous, garish signs which inform you, in letters a couple of feet high,” about the latest hits to be published by the firms inside.³⁸ The structures’ size further made the sonic experience from which Tin Pan Alley took its name possible, with piano music audible on the street from the multiple offices in each modest structure, and made sheet music publishers’ offices accessible to creative hopefuls eager to capitalize on their talent.

Rather than take exception to the din of piano music on Tin Pan Alley, playwright and songwriter Paul West wrote about the effect with enchantment

and gave a glimpse into the configuration of the music publishers' song "factories":

Imagine a great room, with four or five pianos in it, and a composer at each piano, composing. ... And they are all playing and singing as they compose, too! Yes, sir, all singing and playing at the tops of their voices! And this is going on in a dozen different buildings, the windows of which are wide open, so that the melody floats down to the street and mingles with the jangle of the bells on the horse cars, making the day beautiful.³⁹



In Twenty-eighth Street.

Theodore Dreiser, the novelist, occasional songwriter, and brother of notable balladeer Paul Dresser gave a glimpse into the frenetic, up-to-the-minute, and collaborative creative process within Tin Pan Alley's offices and the exchanges between firm personnel and independent artists there:

There are an office and a reception-room, a music-chamber where songs are tried, and a stock-room. Perhaps, in case of the larger publishers, the music-rooms are two or three, but the air of each is much the same. Rugs, divans, imitation palms, make this publishing-house more studio, however, than office. A boy or two serve to bring professional copies at a word. A salaried pianist or two wait to run over pieces which the singer may desire to hear. Arrangers wait to make orchestrations or take down the melody which the popular composer cannot play. ... Into these parlors come the mixed company to this distinctive



"In the exclusive Music-Room sits the Singer, critically listening."



A Rehearsal in the Private Room.

(Right) Vignettes of the Tin Pan Alley streetscape and publishers' offices, William Glackens, *Harper's Weekly* XLIV, December 8, 1900

world—authors who have or have not succeeded; variety-artists who have some word from touring fellows or who know the firm-masters of small bands throughout the city...; orchestra leaders of Bowery theatres and uptown variety halls and singers.⁴⁰

Music of Tin Pan Alley

Tin Pan Alley is often cited as the birthplace of American popular music for making sheet music available to countless American households, for the business and sales practices it made prevalent for the mass production and consumption of popular music, for its role in popularizing the American music form known as ragtime, and as the forebear of subsequent decades of popular music that became known as the “Great American Songbook.”⁴¹

About a decade before the first music publisher came to Tin Pan Alley, Rialto music publishers had been responsible for some of the best-known hits in an age when maudlin and melancholic music was in favor. The lyrics of that era were often meditations on themes of death, separation, sorrow, and lost love, though the melodies were often simple in order to maximize sheet music’s appeal to consumers of different proficiencies on piano.⁴² After their move to Tin Pan Alley, sheet music firms initially continued to focus on sentimental music; for example, while at 49 and 51 West 28th Street in the 1890s, M. Witmark & Sons were responsible for a string of saccharine works, among them “Her Eyes Don’t Shine Like Diamonds” (1894), “I Love You in the Same Old Way” (1896), and, with a caricature of African Americans that was prevalent at the time, “Honey, You’re My Lady Love” (1897).⁴³

In the 1890s, the taste for sentimental, melancholic music began to wane and an upbeat, danceable genre known as ragtime became the new vogue. Tin Pan Alley’s ragtime publications were

vital to the popularization and international recognition of the genre and are an essential component of Tin Pan Alley’s significance to American culture. Ragtime arose in Midwestern black communities as a descendant of black ensemble music of the prior decades, the influence of popular marches like those of John Philip Sousa, and polyrhythms from African music.⁴⁴ An essential characteristic of ragtime music is a particular pattern of syncopation that accentuates the beat and gives ragtime its buoyant, energetic, and danceable qualities.⁴⁵ In its syncopation, ragtime music was a relative of its precedent, the cakewalk, a dance that arose among enslaved black populations on Southern plantations as a satire of the austere dances of aristocratic white society, often in performances for slaveholders and their guests. With additional stylization and syncopation, cakewalk music became *de rigueur* for minstrel shows in which white performers wore blackface in a reprehensible imitation of the dance’s originators.⁴⁶

As a unique synthesis of African syncopation and European classical music, ragtime is often considered the first distinctly American form of music and the American counterpart to the work of classical European composers. Ragtime was the first music genre originated by African-American composers to gain widespread international appreciation as popular music and was among the first American music to be imitated by European composers. The influence of cakewalk and ragtime music is audible in works by European composers Claude Debussy, Erik Satie, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Igor Stravinsky, and others.⁴⁷ Ragtime was brought to consumers on a mass scale in the context of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which drew 27 million visitors, and at the 1900 Paris Exposition, one phase of John Philip Sousa’s European tour.⁴⁸ With the blues, ragtime was one of the foremost influences on the development of

jazz, which overtook it as the most popular genre of music after about 1917.

A number of Tin Pan Alley's ragtime publications were notable hits that brought ragtime into countless homes through the dissemination of sheet music and were pivotal to its popularization as a genre. Kentucky native Ben Harney (1872-1938), a white composer who was known as "Ragtime's Father" for his numerous ragtime hits and frequent appearances on domestic and international vaudeville circuits, was responsible for a number of ragtime publications through M. Witmark & Sons, among them the hit "Mister Johnson (Turn Me Loose)" (1896). Ernest Hogan (1865-1909), a black Kentucky native with experience as a dancer, musician, and comedian in minstrel shows, wrote the influential ragtime work "All C—ns Look Alike to Me"⁴⁹ in 1895. Published by M. Witmark & Sons at 49 and 51 West 28th Street in 1896, the song inspired a wave of imitations.

In addition to ragtime, Tin Pan Alley's firms published sheet music for marches, waltzes, sentimental ballads, comic "novelties," operettas, and scores from popular vaudeville, dramatic, and comedic productions. Although some of those compositions are unfamiliar to modern audiences, a number of works published at 47, 49, 51, 53, and 55 West 28th Street were bestsellers with significant influences on American popular music. The Orphean Music Company at 49 and 51 West 28th Street bought the rights to Harry Von Tilzer and Andrew B. Sterling's "My Old New Hampshire Home" in 1898 after its rejection by several other publishers. Months later, the firm's catalog was sold to Maurice Shapiro and Louis Bernstein of Shapiro, Bernstein & Company, which became the notable firm of Shapiro, Bernstein and Von Tilzer at 45 West 28th Street. Published by Shapiro, Bernstein, & Von Tilzer, "My Old New Hampshire Home" went on to sell over two million copies. Another work, Charles

N. Daniels' (as Neil Moret) and James O'Dea's "Hiawatha" from the musical of the same name, was published by the Whitney-Warner Publishing Company at 47 West 28th Street in 1902 and was the inspiration for numerous "Indian songs," which became popular for about a decade after its publication.

Although published outside of the row at 47, 49, 51, 53, and 55 West 28th Street, other hits of the era remain popular, among them singer, songwriter, and comedic actor Paul Dresser's "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away" (1897); Ren Shields and George Evans' "In the Good Old Summer Time" (1902), which became a standout number in the musical *The Defender*; George M. Cohan's "Give My Regards to Broadway" (1904) which was written for Cohan's musical *Little Johnny Jones*; and Jack Norworth and Albert Von Tilzer's "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" (1908).⁵⁰

Tin Pan Alley and the Promotion and Consumption of American Popular Music

On Tin Pan Alley, composers, arrangers, lyricists, promoters, performers, and printers came together as collaborative firms of sheet music publishers and made an enduring impact on practices for the production and promotion of popular music.⁵¹ These publishers originated and adopted a range of assertive, competitive, and sometimes devious strategies to bombard prospective sheet music consumers with their music and to capitalize on their firms' intense production of music for mass audiences. The shrewd business sense and insistent promotion tactics of Tin Pan Alley firms were essential to the era's boom in sheet music sales, came to characterize the entire music business thereafter, and were a precursor to promotion and sales tactics that remain a feature of the mainstream music business.

Tin Pan Alley represents a singular concentration of musicians and sheet music

publishers in one location with a focus on mass market audiences decades before the consolidation of New York City's music business in the Brill Building (1930-1931, a designated New York City Landmark) and eventual dispersal. It arose at a unique technological moment before phonographs and records were affordable for most American families and when sheet music was the principal form of music distribution, the basis of much public performance, and the backbone of in-home entertainment. Because most sheet music was meant to be taken home for performance on piano, the aim of publishers was to expose their music to masses of prospective purchasers to increase the likelihood of sheet music sales—a business model dependent on the intense promotion of new music for the publisher to score a hit.

As Tin Pan Alley's insistent promotion tactics became the modus operandi of the sheet music business, popular hits began to rocket in sales from hundreds to hundreds of thousands of copies. Some estimates suggest that between 1900 and 1910, over 100 sheet music titles even sold upwards of one million copies each.⁵² In 1893, M. Witmark & Sons was the first firm to move to what became Tin Pan Alley, in an office at 51 West 28th Street from 1893 to 1897; the firm expanded to 49 West 28th Street in 1896 to mark its first decade in the music business. M. Witmark & Sons was a pioneer of a number of Tin Pan Alley's business strategies.⁵³

Plugging

Although sheet music publishers initially made the rounds to entertainment venues to promote their music themselves, companies began to hire musicians as “pluggers” to demonstrate songs in music stores, department stores, theaters, vaudeville halls, and other entertainment venues.⁵⁴ Because of his crucial role in new music's exposure, a plugger was, one journalist wrote, “often better paid than the author. He is kept on

a regular salary, and the field of his operations is wide. It is by no means confined to theatres.”⁵⁵ Pluggers were often men with charisma and enough contacts in the music business to induce headliners, vaudeville stars, and other well-known performers to perform their firm's songs.

The influential founders of M. Witmark & Sons were consummate pluggers: after a stint as a singer with Billy Birch's San Francisco Minstrels, Julius Witmark leveraged his contacts in the music business and his talent as a songwriter to increase his compositions' exposure; his brother Isidore became the mediator between the performers and the firm. Under this model, the Witmarks “placed songs with almost every topnotcher at Tony Pastor's,”⁵⁶ the foremost vaudeville house of the era.

Booming

The bombardment of saloon patrons and vaudeville audiences with a new tune was seen as the single most effective sheet music promotion tactic, as publisher Edward B. Marks later wrote: “The best songs came from the gutter in those days. There was no surer way of starting a song off to popularity than to get it sung as loudly as possible in the city's lowest dives.”⁵⁷ Firms like M. Witmark & Sons undertook a technique known as “booming” in which the publishers' accomplices bought dozens of event tickets and, masquerading as audience members, sang the publisher's music to inflate demand and market a tune on its catchiness. Publisher Louis Bernstein of Shapiro, Bernstein & Company wrote about his firm's infiltration of the bicycle races at Madison Square Garden with this technique:

They had 20,000 people there, we had a pianist and a singer with a large horn. We'd sing a song to them thirty times a night. They'd cheer and yell, and we kept pounding away at them. When people walked out, they'd be singing the song. They couldn't help it.⁵⁸

Because sheet music sales were paramount for Tin Pan Alley's publishers, and because of their firms' frenetic production of music and direct competition with other firms on the block, publishers made use of aggressive tactics to market music regardless of its artistic value: "Such is the enormous output of the publishing concerns that almost no song may rise to popular favor through intrinsic merit. It must be taken by the neck and pushed, shoved, dragged hauled, kicked, and thrown through and over its fellows, until it arrives at the fore."⁵⁹ Charles Darnton's 1905 article, "The Song Clique Nuisance," conflated the roles of pluggers and boomers but illustrated the aggressiveness of Tin Pan Alley's firms:

First nights are made hideous by so-called "pluggers" intent on pounding a song into popularity. Audiences are powerless against them. They flock from "Tin Pan Alley"—that strip of Twenty-eighth street between Broadway and Sixth avenue—with resin on their hands and encores in their hearts. The din-making drove distributes itself judiciously about the theatre and waits its time. The merit of the song makes no difference.⁶⁰

Sheet Music Covers and Professional Copies

Tin Pan Alley's sheet music publishers often put a celebrated performer's photograph on a sheet music cover as an incentive for that performer to retain the music in his repertoire and as a souvenir for audience members who saw that singer perform the music live.⁶¹ Once an association between the new music and a well-known performer was made, publishers would advertise the work as that singer's latest hit in the *New York Clipper*.⁶² M. Witmark & Sons is thought to have been the first firm to distribute free newspaper "professional copies" to orchestra conductors and singers to encourage those musicians to perform their

songs. With these advance copies, the firm was able to debut and test the allure of its new music and, in exchange, its chosen performer was given free, fresh material with which to showcase his talents.⁶³

Current Events in Song

Another M. Witmark & Sons tactic was to capitalize on current events in order to market a song nationwide. In 1886, when rumors of then-President Grover Cleveland's imminent marriage to Frances Folsom began to circulate, Isidore Witmark wrote the song "President Grover Cleveland's Wedding March" and made thousands of copies of the sheet music; after an initial denial, the White House gave its confirmation of the engagement and the prescient Witmarks were the first publishers with an appropriate song to mark the occasion. Although the march did not become a major hit, it was emblematic of a shift in the music business to a creation-on-demand, up-to-the-minute model of songwriting to score opportune hits.⁶⁴

Women as Consumers and Performers

Women were both the target consumers of Tin Pan Alley's music and some of its best-known performers. From the mid-19th century through the early-20th century, as the piano became a more common feature of the middle-class home, it began to be seen as a mark of culture and sophistication, an instrument of uplift, and symbol of collective and domestic values. Throughout that time, most piano players in American homes were female; skillfulness on piano was seen as an indicator of a woman's refinement and fine social graces, and as an aspect of her domestic duties. The expectation that women manage the affairs of the parlor, where sheet music was the focus of entertainment, further meant that sheet music publishers on Tin Pan Alley and elsewhere strove to engage female consumers, as publisher Edward B. Marks wrote about his music's



“AIN’T YOU GOT A NICE DUET FOR TWO LADIES?”

Tin Pan Alley’s publishers sought to work with well-known female performers, J. C. Chase, *Hampton’s Broadway Magazine* XXI, October 1908

performance to sizeable audiences: “I wanted to get there before the family crowd went home to put the kids to bed. ...By the time we were through, our classic was firmly planted in as many domes as were within hearing distance.”⁶⁵ Publishers’ dependence on female consumers was evident in Charles Darnton’s lamentation about Tin Pan Alley, which made a connection between women’s alleged preferences and fads in music: “Songs are nearly always bought for or by women. For this reason the maudlin-pathetic ballad is the ‘best seller,’ while the comic song has little sale.”⁶⁶

Female stage icons were important affiliates for Tin Pan Alley’s publishers and some of the best-known performers of its sheet music. Tin Pan Alley’s

publishers put photographs of a number of well-known female vaudeville performers on their sheet music covers and in *New York Clipper* features as an incentive for those performers to retain the music in their repertoires.⁶⁷ The *Clipper*’s feature articles, one journalist wrote, were “almost always exclusively occupied by the female sex, who are familiarly designated as serio comic vocalists, and it is to them therefore that the publisher directs the bulk of his efforts.”⁶⁸ Publishers like the Witmarks sought to attract well-known female performers in order to increase sheet music sales. A full-page advertisement about the Witmarks’ 10th anniversary in the *Clipper* stated: “To Commemorate the Event, They have enlarged their establishment so that another number has been added, and their future New York address will be 49 and 51 WEST 28TH STREET. They have elegantly fitted up an EXCLUSIVE RECEPTION PARLOR FOR LADIES, where they will receive every attention, and it is hoped that the fair sex of the profession will take advantage of the same.”⁶⁹

Jewish and African-American Songwriters and Publishers of Tin Pan Alley

Tin Pan Alley represents significant milestones for the participation of African-American and Jewish artists and sheet music publishers in mainstream music production. It arose about a decade after substantial immigration of Jewish refugees from persecution in Eastern European to New York City in the early 1880s and at a time when significant populations of African Americans began to migrate to New York City from the American South.

The frenetic, profit-driven nature of the music business on Tin Pan Alley meant that the interactions between contributors of different races and ethnicities were often transactional rather than collaborative; nonetheless, it made the work of those contributors available on a remarkable scale and was built upon the recognition of the mass-market appeal of their work.⁷⁰

Jewish Songwriters and Publishers on Tin Pan Alley

A notable proportion of Tin Pan Alley’s music publishers, songwriters, and pluggers were of German or Eastern European Jewish descent or were immigrants themselves. Irving Berlin (née Israel Beilin 1888-1989), an immigrant from the Russian Empire, is known to have gone to the office of Harry Von Tilzer on West 28th Street in 1902 at age 14, when he was hired by Von Tilzer as a song plugger and sent to Tony Pastor’s Music Hall in the Rialto. Elsewhere in New York City, firms and practices that had begun on Tin Pan Alley became opportunities for a successive generation of Jewish songwriters. George Gershwin’s (née Jacob Gershowitz, 1898-1937) entrée into music was as a plugger for the publisher J. H. Remick and Company in 1914, at age fifteen, after the Tin Pan Alley era. Jerome Kern (1885-1945) and Vincent Youmans (1898-1946) also began their careers as pluggers or staff pianists after the Tin Pan Alley era.⁷¹

Later scholarship attributes the involvement of Jewish creatives in music and entertainment of the era to the fact that talent was paramount in those disciplines, which made opportunities available regardless of an individual’s origin, education, or experience, as the social critic Irving Howe wrote:

[The entertainment industry] brushed aside claims of rank and looked only for the immediate promise of talent. ... In the early 1900s, young Jews broke into vaudeville because here too, people asked not, who are you? but, what can you do?⁷²

Other authors posit that participation in the production of American popular music was a means for those outside of mainstream American culture to be seen as American themselves⁷³; this aspect of Jewish songwriters’ involvement was at its apex

after the Tin Pan Alley era, in patriotic wartime hits like Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America,” which was written in 1918 and sung in public for the first time to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Armistice Day in 1938. Some scholars suggest that first- and second-generation Jewish immigrants’ negotiation of their own multilingual and multicultural contexts made them distinctly able to hybridize the creative output of multiple cultures and collaborators on Tin Pan Alley.⁷⁴

African-American Music Publishers and Songwriters on Tin Pan Alley

Both contemporaneous anecdotes and later scholarship suggest a significant upsurge in the prominence and valuation of Tin Pan Alley’s African-American songwriters’ and publishers’ contributions to the music business on the block. Tin Pan Alley arose at a time when significant limitations to the rights of African Americans were in place in the United States, and its songwriters and sheet music publishers extended the prior decades’ deployment of racist caricatures and stereotypes in American entertainment. At the same time, African-American musicians and publishers were able to create new and unprecedented opportunities for themselves in mainstream music production, and Tin Pan Alley represents their remarkable achievements despite the hostile climate of the time.

West 28th Street was home to the descendent firm of the Attucks Music Publishing Company, the first music business in the United States under black ownership and with a staff of black songwriters. In August 1904, Attucks—after its namesake Crispus Attucks, a person of color and the first victim of the Boston Massacre and, by extension, the American Revolution—began to operate from 1255-1257 Broadway with Sheppard N. Edmonds (1876-1957), a novice songwriter, as its initial manager. In the first months of 1905, the Gotham Music Company began

to operate at 39 West 28th Street (demolished) and then from 42 West 28th Street under the direction of the prolific lyricist R. C. McPherson (aka Cecil Mack, 1871-1944). On June 6 or July 15, 1905, the Gotham-Attucks Music Company was born from a merger between the two companies, with its office at 42 West 28th Street.⁷⁵ Gotham-Attucks's roster of African-American songwriters included some of the foremost musicians of the era, including Will Marion Cook (1869-1944), Henry Creamer (1879-1930), Ford Dabney (1883-1958), R. C. McPherson, Jessie Shipp (1864-1934), and Bert Williams (1874-1922). Gotham-Attucks was the holder of exclusive rights to sheet music from the musicals *Abyssinia* (1906), and *Bandanna Land* (1907) by Bert Williams and George Walker (c.1872-1911), two of the most prominent minstrel performers of their time.⁷⁶ After his departure from the Attucks Publishing Company, Shepard N. Edmonds opened a publishing firm in 55 West 28th Street in 1906.⁷⁷

The reliance of much of Tin Pan Alley's music on ethnic caricatures and epithets gave rise to unique challenges for black musicians. Within the lifetimes of some Tin Pan Alley songwriters, the most in-demand form of performance went from minstrel shows built upon impersonations of black men and women by white men in blackface for white audiences, to tent and vaudeville shows with black and white casts and audiences.⁷⁸ Some black songwriters of the era later wrote that their authorship of "c—n songs" in the Tin Pan Alley era was a source of income, recognition, and hands-on experience that became critical to their careers as entertainers and musicians, and thought about their use of racial epithets as analogous to some black performers' reliance on minstrel show traditions in their vaudeville acts.⁷⁹

Some of the best-known African-American musicians of the era were able to copyright or publish popular "c—n songs" through other Tin Pan Alley

firms. While at 47 West 28th Street in 1900, the Morse Music Company bought the rights to "I Must A Been A Dreamin'" and "Pickin' on a Chicken Bone," compositions by Bob Cole (1868-1911) with arrangements by J. Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954). While at 49 and 51 West 28th Street, M. Witmark and Sons published Ernest Hogan's "All C—ns Look Alike to Me" in 1896; Bert Williams and Ernest Hogan's "Ninth Battalion on Parade" in 1896; and Bert Williams and George Walker's "Hannah, You Won't Do" and "Mammy's Little Pickaninny Boy" in 1896, and "De Darkies' Jubilee" in 1897. Victoria Music Company, at 51 West 28th Street in 1908-1909, was the successor to Archer & Lemonier, a firm under the direction of African-American pianist, composer, and vaudeville actor Thomas Lemonier (1870-1945). Victoria Music Company was responsible sheet music from *The Black Politician*, a musical with arrangements and lyrics by James Reese Europe and Cecil Mack, and "A Down Home Shout" by Herman Carle.⁸⁰

A number of Tin Pan Alley's most notable songwriters were black migrants whose participation in Tin Pan Alley was a milestone and a means for them to reclaim the epithets and stereotypes used against them, as composer J. Rosamond Johnson reflected: "We wanted to clean up the caricature."⁸¹ In recognition of this effort, the publisher Edward B. Marks later wrote that the brothers J. Rosamond and James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) "eschewed the squalor and the squabbles, the razors, wenches, and chickens of the first ragtime. The word 'c—n' they banished from their rhyming dictionary, despite its tempting affinity with 'moon.' The c—n song died, the c—n shouter vanished from the scene during the years of their ascendancy."⁸²

As a black-run music business with a roster of well-known black songwriters, the Gotham-Attucks Music Company was able to take greater control of the depictions of black performers on its sheet music covers and of black characters in the

lyrics of its music. On Gotham-Attucks sheet music covers, black performers and subjects were often shown in studio portraits, in formalwear, in contrast to much more common stage photographs of performers in blackface or illustrations of “c—n song” caricatures.⁸³

Caricatures and Stereotypes in American Popular Music of the Post-Reconstruction Era

While Tin Pan Alley represents notable contributions to American popular music, its legacy is interwoven with the complex and reprehensible saga of racism in the United States. In the Reconstruction Era (1863-1877), under the direction of Congress and successive United States presidents, measures were put in place to readmit the former Confederate states into the Union and to implement certain rights for African Americans after emancipation. By 1873, significant contingents of white Southerners sought “Redemption,” the reinstatement of white supremacist, pre-Civil War hierarchies and elimination of rights for African Americans rather than Reconstruction. These “Redeemers” undertook measures to reestablish their dominance throughout the South by enacting statutes to legalize and enforce segregation and imposing economic systems to limit opportunities for African Americans, often through intimidation and violence. The educator, writer, and activist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963) later wrote about the tumultuous Redemption era as one in which “the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.”⁸⁴ Statutes to legalize and enforce discrimination, disenfranchisement, and segregation became known as Jim Crow laws, a reference to the actor Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice’s blackface caricature in the music and dance hit, “Jump Jim Crow” (1828).⁸⁵ In New York, even in the absence of Jim Crow legislation, pro-Reconstruction legislators lost significant electoral support after the passage of a

statewide Civil Rights Act in 1873; at the same time, politicians apprehensive over the impact of equal rights on extant power structures sought to reinstate their Southern allies and began to gain traction among voters.⁸⁶

It was under these circumstances that, between 1890 and 1910, the Tenderloin became home to a significant African-American population as an influx of black migrants left the South for New York City. In place of de jure segregation, however, black migrants were often met with prejudice or discrimination in other forms: rents for tenants of color were higher than rents for white tenants in the Tenderloin, and African-American residents were often written about as “thugs” and subject to police harassment.⁸⁷

On Tin Pan Alley, musicians of various identities made use of caricatures and stereotypes across races, ethnicities, and nationalities.⁸⁸ Their employment of slurs and caricatures of African Americans reflects elements of the tension, apprehension, and institutional racism of the Redemption era and a particular lineage of racist stereotypes in American entertainment. In 1896, Ernest Hogan’s ragtime composition “All C—ns Look Alike to Me” was published by M. Witmark & Sons at 49 and 51 West 28th Street and set off demand for works known as “c—n songs” for their use of racist stereotypes and epithets that drew on earlier minstrel show caricatures. Although popular songs that made specific use of the “c—n” epithet and a similar characterization of African Americans were in circulation by 1880, Hogan’s addition of a danceable ragtime rhythm set his composition apart and set off a wave of imitations which made ragtime’s syncopation and the “c—n” stereotype inextricable in the minds of some listeners.⁸⁹ The “c—n” caricature that was popular in music of the era was itself an outgrowth of the antebellum minstrel character Zip C—n (1834), an objectionable blackface figure whose arrogant

behavior, ostentatious outfits, and frequent malapropisms and puns were meant by white performers to ridicule the behavior of free blacks. Zip C—n, in turn, was an extension of earlier blackface caricatures popular in American entertainment, from Long Tail Blue in 1827 to Jim Crow in 1828.

In music of the 1880s onward, as migration brought higher numbers of African Americans into urban centers, the caricature began to shift from an object of derision to an object of fear, and from foppish to outright violent.⁹⁰ Like the depictions of black Americans in mainstream music and performance, likenesses on sheet music covers underwent an evolution from the often positive images of African Americans in the Civil War era and grew more reliant on negative stereotypes and epithets.⁹¹

In 1900, a race riot in the Tenderloin highlighted how pervasive and potent negative stereotypes of African Americans in popular music were, as well as the vast recognition of Tin Pan Alley's black songwriters. On August 12, 1900, the murder of Robert J. Thorpe, a white plainclothes police officer, by Arthur J. Harris, a black migrant, brought tensions between the black and white populations of the Tenderloin to their breakpoint; on August 15, a subsequent clash between a black man, Spencer Walters, and a white man, Thomas J. Healy, near Thorpe's vigil set off an eruption of racial violence throughout the Tenderloin known as the Race Riot of 1900: "Men and women poured by the hundreds from the neighboring tenements. Negroes were set upon wherever they could be found and brutally beaten."⁹² Tin Pan Alley was a short distance from the riot's southern extent, and some of its black composers were both targets of violence and authors of song titles used in media coverage of the riot. The polymathic activist and songwriter James Weldon Johnson later wrote that among the rioters, "the cry went out to 'get Ernest Hogan and Williams and

Walker and Cole and Johnson,'" successful black composers whose names were well-known to the masses and who were active on Tin Pan Alley at the time.⁹³ The title of Ernest Hogan's "All C—ns Look Alike to Me" became a cavalier refrain in coverage of the indiscriminate violence against black New Yorkers in the Race Riot of 1900: "All C—ns Looked Alike" was the headline in nationwide coverage of the event. In the thick of the riot, Ernest Hogan himself "was chased like a wild beast with a pack at his heels ... 'Get the N—' was the chorus. ... The mob followed for the next three minutes and it was a life or death race for Hogan."⁹⁴ Racial violence, including the Race Riot of 1900, was the impetus for black inhabitants to leave the Tenderloin and move north to 53rd Street, San Juan Hill, and Harlem.⁹⁵ Jim Crow laws would remain in place until the passages of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964; Voting Rights Act of 1965; and Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act).

Songs that made use of the "c—n" epithet were popular from about 1880 until about 1930, with their most prolific production between 1890 and 1910.⁹⁶ In the 1890s alone, more than 600 "c—n songs" were in publication in the United States, some of which sold multiple millions of copies of sheet music.⁹⁷ In the context of African American migration to urban centers in the Redemption era, when significant restrictions to African-American civil rights were made in the United States, the prevalence of the genre has been read by historian James H. Dormon as "a necessary sociopsychological mechanism for justifying segregation and subordination."⁹⁸ At the same time, black artists' production and dissemination of such songs in the Tin Pan Alley era made it possible for those songwriters, composers, and performers to prosper and gain substantial recognition in mainstream American entertainment.



Banners welcome the Florists' Telegraph Delivery Association to West 28th Street in 1920,
Source unknown

West 28th Street's Flower District

Concurrent with the rise of Tin Pan Alley in the 1890s, florists began to open shops on 28th Street, which became the core of New York City's Flower District. Florists were a presence on the block for decades after Tin Pan Alley's last sheet music publishers left the area in about 1910. The Flower District's lineage traces back to door-to-door pushcart flower salesmen of the mid-to-late 1800s, a significant percentage of whom were immigrants from Germany, Eastern Europe, and Greece.⁹⁹ Because their flowers often came from growers on Long Island, salesmen began to consolidate near the ferries on East 34th Street in the 1870s; like the entertainment district, these salesmen went closer to an upscale customer base in the Ladies' Mile Historic District, fine residences near Madison Square, and venues in the Tenderloin in the 1890s. In particular, wholesale florists made their stores

between 26th and 29th streets close to Sixth Avenue.¹⁰⁰

Tin Pan Alley's music publishers' offices were often above florist shops in West 28th Street's show windows.¹⁰¹ On the north side of West 28th Street, florists were at 49 West 28th Street by 1892, 51 West 28th Street by 1896, 47 and 53 West 28th Street by 1900, and 55 West 28th Street by 1903. A number of these florists were Greek immigrants who shared tenement apartments elsewhere in New York City.¹⁰² The Flower District was a significant presence in the area until the 1970s; at the district's peak, the *New York Times* wrote that "more floral tonnage has changed hands in New York City than anywhere in the world outside Amsterdam."¹⁰³

Later Usage of the Term "Tin Pan Alley"

Between 1901 and 1920, most American households began to own phonographs for the first time. The

phonograph became less expensive than the piano or parlor organ and, unlike a piano for in-home entertainment, did not require practice or talent to operate. Piano sales in the United States rose from 171,138 in 1900 to 364,545 in 1909 before a sharp decline as phonographs and records became affordable and then commonplace.¹⁰⁴ By 1910, with phonograph and record sales on the rise, almost all of Tin Pan Alley's music publishers had followed the entertainment district to Times Square, where larger, newer, and custom offices were able to accommodate their new in-house orchestras and recording spaces.

Because of its inextricable association with music production after its application here, the term "Tin Pan Alley" later came to refer to the entire music production industry rather than the geographic area of West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue and specific era from 1893 until about 1910.¹⁰⁵ Like the common use of "Hollywood" to refer to the film business rather than an area of Los Angeles, or the use of "Wall Street" to refer to American financial markets rather than the Lower Manhattan street, the term "Tin Pan Alley" became a metonymy, first for the New York music scene and then for the music business as a whole. In 1934, the *New York Evening Journal* noted, "Tin Pan Alley! A street that doesn't actually exist and yet the most famous, even the most important street in the world!"¹⁰⁶ Another 1934 article reflects the usage of the term to refer to the music business in New York City: "Tin Pan Alley and the highways and byways that feed it are coming to life again. Singers are singing, hoofers are hoofing, orchestras are playing and people are dancing. ... Walk up and down Times Square and its precincts and you will see it in smiling faces."¹⁰⁷ Later articles reflect the national application of the term to refer to music even absent a single geographic center: "As a way of life for American popular music, Tin Pan Alley has passed out of existence. The successor to the Alley is the multi-million dollar song combined with slick offices in Radio City, Chicago,

and Hollywood, and with arteries coursing through the Broadway Theatre, the Hollywood Cinema, radio and television studios."¹⁰⁸

At the same time, Tin Pan Alley came to have an international usage: Tin Pan Alley on West 28th Street was the inspiration for the music studios of London's Tin Pan Alley on Denmark Street from 1911-1992.

Building History

53 West 28th Street

53 West 28th Street

53 West 28th Street was built c.1859 as an Italianate-style row house at a time when the blocks near Madison Square Park, which opened to the public in 1847, were being developed with elite residences. Linus Scudder, a mason, built 53 West 28th Street for the owner James Harriman, a banker.¹⁰⁹ By 1880, rooms were put up for rent to “gentlemen” tenants.¹¹⁰ A Ladies’ Elite Orchestra was organized from this address in 1884.¹¹¹ A fire in the basement kitchen on April 25, 1888, was described in dramatic detail in New York newspapers; at the time of the fire 53 West 28th Street was in use as either a “boarding house” or “a house of ill fame” with six residents, two of whom were African-American domestic staff and one of whom was Fanny Phippany, a housekeeper and former brothel proprietor in the Rialto who “in the days of the Tweed ring was notorious and rich.”¹¹² Flames “bursting from the lower part of the house” caused thousands of dollars in damage and the destruction of the interior. By 1889, after an alteration to interior partitions and construction of a rear kitchen extension (ALT 2099-88), 53 West 28th Street operated as a restaurant and the Hotel du Louvre with “a parlor floor and large and small rooms” for rent.¹¹³ In 1894, 53 West 28th Street was advertised for rent as “suitable for business” by a lessor willing to alter the interior to suit a prospective tenant; the structure underwent a conversion to accommodate a retail storefront by 1898, when it was advertised with its neighbors as “very desirable store and offices,” and in 1903 was again included with its neighbors “to let for business

purposes” in its storefront and on the floors above.¹¹⁴ By 1913, after the last songwriter had left 53 West 28th Street, its “large store, with basement; also fine parlor floor and loft with large skylight; steam heat” were again advertised for rent for business purposes.¹¹⁵

According to the *New York Times*, “In 1925 and again in 1926, two separate builders proposed the demolition of 49-55 for a 20-story loft building, ‘The New Fur Center,’ but at the project was never carried out, although similar loft buildings had already gone up on the street. After the 1929 market crash, the idea of new development on the block was a stretch, and the buildings began to acquire marginal uses.”¹¹⁶

Because of its closeness to Madison Square entertainment venues throughout its lifetime, among them the “New” Fifth Avenue Theater on this block from 1891-1939, 53 West 28th Street was an attractive location for a range of theater publications, music publishers, and entertainers.

Sheet Music Publishers

During the Tin Pan Alley era, a number of sheet music publishers made use of 53 West 28th Street for their offices. Among the era’s music business tenants at this address were:

- Alanson M. Hall (1854-1908), a composer and sheet music publisher, from 1897-1900.¹¹⁷
- The Orphean Music Company, a sheet music publisher, in 1898. The firm published Harry Von Tilzer’s “My Old New Hampshire Home” in 1898 after its rejection by several other publishers, as well as “Have You Come to Take Me Home” with lyrics by T. C. Harbaugh and music by Richard O. Man while at this address.¹¹⁸
- Petrie Music Company, a sheet music publisher, from 1896-1897. Though its center of operations

was in Chicago, the firm was under the direction of its namesake, Henry W. Petrie, at this address, and published the ballad “Tell Her We Just Love Her the Same” while here.¹¹⁹

- Roger Harding (1858-1901), a singer, composer, minstrel show performer, and music publisher, from 1900-1901. Harding was a renowned Irish-American performer and relocated his office at here after a move to 1180 Broadway to start his own firm in 1899 and before his move to Brooklyn and subsequent death in 1901. In his brief tenancy at this address, Harding published a number of songs in the “c—n song” genre.
- International Music Company, a sheet music publisher, from 1899-1900. The firm published “Hope On,” which was composed by Manuel Klein and “sung by the eminent English contralto Clara Butt,” and which was included as a supplement to the New York Journal and Advertiser on December 24, 1899. The firm also published a number of songs in the “c—n song” genre while here.
- Richard A. Saalfield, a sheet music publisher, from 1900-1901. Saalfield published popular American music and European classical music, as well as a number of songs in the “c—n song” genre while at this address.
- Cosmopolitan Music Company, a sheet music publisher, from 1904-1906. The firm published a number of songs in the “c—n song” genre while at this address
- Entre Nous Publishing Company, a sheet music publisher, from 1905-1907. Under the direction of the arranger Charles Greinert and lyricist and composer Stephen J. Mooney the firm published the ballads “My Dear Harry” and “Perhaps You Wonder Why” while here, as well as a number of songs in the “c—n song” genre.¹²⁰
- Leveen Publishing Company, a sheet music publisher, in 1905 (at the adjacent 51 West 28th Street from 1905-1907). In 1905, the firm published “The Boys in Brown: A Patriotic March Song” from 51 West 28th and “My Love, My Life” from this address.
- Limbach & Bishop, a sheet music publisher, in 1907. The firm published the ballad “Only a Messenger Boy” while here.
- Edward Rogers Publishing Company, a sheet music publisher, from 1906-1907. The firm advertised its move to this address as the “Grand Opening of the Hustling House” and published “ballads, ‘Irish’ songs, ‘c—n’ songs” written by Rogers, as well as a catalogue of Rogers’ hits, among them “Where the Suwanee River Winds Its Silv’ry Way” while here.¹²¹
- Selig Music Publishing Company, a sheet music publisher, from 1907-1908. Under the direction of songwriter Gabriel Selig, the firm bought out and superseded the Edward Rogers Publishing Company to become “the Hustling House,” with advertisements noting that “Mr. Rogers is no longer connected with this firm.”¹²² Selig was the exclusive publisher of comedienne Laurie Ordway’s “English” successes, including “The Dear Old Thing,” published at this address in 1907.¹²³
- Lazarus Baiut, a musician, in 1900.
- Harvey & Haines (Harry S. Harvey and LeRoy R. Haines), a sheet publisher, from 1904-1909.
- Maurice A. Strothoffe, a musician, in 1905.
- William Nelson, a musician, in 1907.
- Alfred Murphy, a musician, in 1907.
- Charles Greinert, as a musical score copyist from 1904-1906 and as a musician in 1909.¹²⁴

Some of the sheet music that was published at this address, including the work of African-American songwriters, featured racist epithets, subject matter, caricatures, or cover art that depicted performers in blackface. Other publications were consistent with

the popular taste for waltzes, marches, and ballads at the time.

Entertainment Tenants

53 West 28th Street was an attractive office location for other creators and entertainers of the era. Plimmer & Steiner, an American and European Vaudeville Exchange, was a tenant at this address in 1904. Walter J. Plimmer was a former theater operator from Birmingham, England, the creator of the “family department” of Benjamin Franklin Keith’s influential vaudeville theater business, and later a pioneer in sound film.¹²⁵ In 1905, former vaudeville agent and author Robert Grau made his office at this address.¹²⁶ Yerkes & Co., manufacturers of motion picture sound effects, were at this address from 1907-1909.

Tenants in the Visual Arts

In the Tin Pan Alley era, alongside the songwriters, performers, and other creatives on the block, a number of visual artists made 53 West 28th Street their home. Frank E. Hull, an artist, illustrator, letterer, was a tenant at this address in 1902. In 1905, William C. Hafner, an artist and specialist in miniature portraits, had an office at this address.¹²⁷ Charles P. Underhill, an artist, was at this address in 1909.

Flower District and Other Tenants

At 53 West 28th Street, songwriters’ and publishers’ offices were above and below a author, roofer, electrician, furniture salesman, and copyist’s offices. Florists began to open shops in the 1890s on 28th Street, which became the core of New York City’s Flower District, and were in business at 53 West 28th Street from 1900 onward. The Society of American Florists was listed at this address in 1918.¹²⁸

Endnotes

¹ In 1644, Pieter San Tomé and ten other enslaved men petitioned the Council of New Amsterdam for their freedom. “Half-freedom” liberated the enslaved men and their wives in return for an annual payment; the Dutch West India Company could still require labor, for wages, when necessary. This form of manumission, however, only applied to the adults and not their children; white colonists protested that condition and San Tomé’s descendants were ultimately set free. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33; I. N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909* (New York: Robert H. Dodd 1915-1928), 107.

Pieter San Tomé’s surname is sometimes written Santome or Santomee, or given as St. Anthony, all of which derive from the name of the African island nation now known as São Tomé and Príncipe. The surname given to an enslaved West Central African person often indicated his place of origin. In New Netherland, an enslaved person often derived his surname from his father’s first name; over time, many of the Dutch colony’s enslaved people gave their children common Dutch names, like Pieter. Consistent with the Dutch system of patronymics, Solomon Pieters’s name was sometimes given as Solomon Pieterson or Peterson.

² M. Christine Boyer, “Straight Down Christopher Street: A Tale of the Oldest Street in Greenwich Village,” in Rick Beard and Leslie Cohen Berlowitz, eds., *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counterculture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 53; Thelma Wills Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 120-133.

³ Pieters’ father—along with several other freedmen—received a large patent of farmland from Director-General Willem Kieft in 1644 following his manumission. That parcel, which was located at what is now West Houston and MacDougal Streets, was later inherited by Solomon and his brother Lucas. In 1659-1660, Director-General Peter Stuyvesant instructed settlers in outlying farms to move closer together for mutual protection and to serve as a buffer between the white colonists living at the tip of Manhattan and the Native Americans to the north. As part of this policy, free Africans were given small lots along the west side of the Bowery between Prince Street and Astor Place. Solomon Pieters’ parcel was located near what is now Great Jones Street. Stokes, 156.

⁴ Varian later bought the large Valentine farm in the

Bronx in 1791; the original fieldstone farm house is a designated a New York City Landmark.

⁵ Varian, a butcher, was in possession of one enslaved person at about the time he became the owner of this parcel. *1790 New York City and County Census*, 128. Decades earlier, Varian had been in possession of an enslaved man named Worcester who was implicated in the Conspiracy of 1741, a purported rebellion plot, and was one of 72 enslaved men deported from New York to Newfoundland, the West Indies, and Madeira. Sam Briggs, *Book of the Varian Family: With Some Speculation as to Their Origin* (Cleveland: T. C. Schenk & Co., 1881), 21.

Heirs to the area’s earlier landowners, including those of Isaac Varian, began to partition their properties in the 1830s and to sell lots to individuals and speculative builders.

⁶ Madison Square Park was named after Corporal Thompson’s Madison Cottage on the former Pieters estate, itself in honor of United States President James Madison. *Historical Sketch of Madison Square* (New York: Meriden Monographs No. I, 1894), 15.

⁷ For additional details about Madison Square Park, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 421, 501-2, and Kenneth Holcomb Dunshee, *As You Pass By* (New York: Hastings House, 1952), 233-35.

⁸ Alteration Application 1011-02, within the block-and-lot folder for Block 830, Lot 7 at the Manhattan office of the New York City Department of Buildings.

⁹ This section is based on H. Wilson, comp, *Trow’s New York City Directory for the Year Ending May 1, 1856* (New York: John F. Trow, 1855) and *Trow’s New-York City Directory for 1854-1855* (New York: John F. Trow, 1854).

The expansion of retail activities and shift of the entertainment district to Madison Square soon began to drive the elite residential enclaves further north and, later, closer to Central Park. M. Christine Boyer, *Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style, 1850-1900* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1985), 43; Andrew S. Dolkart, “Biography of a Tenement House” in *New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard Street* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 10.

¹⁰ “By 1900, Twenty-eighth Street knew the largest concentration of popular-music publishers any single street hand known up to that time, Fourteenth Street not excluded.” David Ewen, *The Life and Death of Tin Pan Alley: The Golden Age of Popular American Music* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1964), 122.

¹¹ Ben Yagoda, *The-B Side: The Death of Tin Pan Alley and the Rebirth of the Great American Song* (New York: Riverhead Books), 35.

¹² John Ahouse, "Remembering the New York Clipper" in *British Library Newspaper Library News*, Issues 23-30 (London: British Library Newspaper Library, 1997), 6-7.

¹³ This section is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Ladies' Mile Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1609), (New York: City of New York, 1989), 11-13; Boyer, *Manhattan Manners*, 73-79, 105-18, 113-124; and Stephen Garmey, *Gramercy Park: An Illustrated History* (New York: Rutledge Books/Balsam Press, 1984), 98-151.

¹⁴ Madison Square was a short distance from stations on the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) Sixth Avenue Line and drew development as a result of its ease of access. The Sixth Avenue Line had stations at 23rd, 28th, and 33rd streets from the 1870s until 1938.

¹⁵ Other venues that formed the context for development in the Madison Square entertainment district included the Grand Opera House (1868); the vaudeville theater Koster & Bial's Music Hall (former Bryant's Opera House, 1870); and the waxworks, music, and show venue Eden Musée (1884), all of which have been demolished.

¹⁶ Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Madison Square North Historic District Designation Report*, 12; *Where and How to Dine in New York* (1903), New York Historical Society. See: Michael and Ariane Batterberry, *On the Town in New York: From 1776 to the Present* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973).

¹⁷ Among these lost venues were the "New" Fifth Avenue Theater (1891-92); Daly's Fifth-Avenue Theatre (later Madison Square Theatre, 1863); San Francisco Music Hall (1875); Weber & Field's Music Hall (1892); the Brighton Theater (later Bijoux Theatre, 1878); and Wallack's Thirtieth Street Theatre (later Palmer's Theatre, 1882). Wallack's Thirtieth Street Theatre was "often spoken of as the leading theater in America." Daly's Fifth-Avenue Theatre was said to home to "the most famous stock-company" in the nation. Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Madison Square North Historic District Designation Report*, 12. See: Ruth Crosby Dimmick, *Our Theatres To-day and Yesterday* (New York: H.K. Fly Company, 1913).

¹⁸ Among these were the St. James Hotel (1859), the Albemarle (1860), and the Victoria (1877), all of which have been demolished.

The prestigious Fifth Avenue Hotel was built in 1856-1858

for Amos R. Eno when most Manhattan hotels were below 14th Street; as a result of its location, it was a challenge to finance and became known as "Eno's Folly." Despite its doubters, the Fifth Avenue Hotel signaled the establishment of a new "uptown" hotel district and was famous for its luxurious accommodations and illustrious guests, as well as its steam-operated elevator—the first to be installed in a hotel. See: Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Madison Square North Historic District Designation Report* (LP-2097), (New York: City of New York, 2001).

¹⁹ *Rider's New York City*, a tourist guidebook, noted: "This most modern type of American hotel has introduced a new element into social life here. It is not merely a hotel, but in a certain sense a public resort, frequented daily by a vast floating population comprised not only of casual strangers, but of resident New Yorkers... Any well-dressed stranger can enter unchallenged, use the parlors and sitting rooms as meeting places for social or business purposes, finish a day's correspondence on the hotel stationery, and in various ways make the modern caravansary serve the purpose of a private club, to which he pays neither fees nor dues." Fremont Rider, ed., *Rider's New York City: A Guide-book for Travelers, with 13 Maps and 20 Plans* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923), 7.

²⁰ Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Lunt-Fontanne Theater (Originally Globe Theater) Designation Report* (LP-1350), (New York: City of New York, 1987), 2-3.

²¹ This section is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Grand Hotel Designation Report* (LP-1041), (New York: City of New York, 1979), 1.

²² *New York Times*, May 20, 1979, IV, 20; Lisa Elsroad, "Tenderloin" in Jackson, Kenneth T., ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1161. The jurisdiction of the 19th Precinct was from 24th to 42nd streets between Fifth and Seventh avenues.

²³ Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 296. The area became the focus of reformers who elicited public outrage with descriptions of their undercover tours of Tenderloin resorts. These reformers' efforts led to the formation of the Lexow Committee, a New York State Senate investigation into police corruption in 1894-1895.

²⁴ Portions of this section are adapted from New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Gilsey House Designation Report* (LP-1039), (New York: City of New York, 1979), 1-2. See also: Lockwood, 296-299. In the 1890s-1900s, a number of brothels, saloons, and gambling houses bordered the block on Sixth Avenue and

Broadway, and peppered the upper stories of the West 28th Street itself. "Police Make Raids in the Tenderloin," *New York Times*, March 14, 1900, 2; "Dink Davis Not at Home," *The Sun*, April 15, 1892, 1.

²⁵ Luc Sante, *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1991), 14-15.

²⁶ Eugene O'Neill, "The Haymarket," *New London Telegraph*, November, 12, 1912.

²⁷ Gilbert Osofsky, "Race Riot, 1900: A Study of Ethnic Violence" in *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Winter 1963): 16-24. Despite the population increase, African Americans were 1.55% of the population of New York City in 1890 and 1.9% in 1910. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915* (Washington, D.C., 1918), 93.

The Great Migration was the relocation of over six million African Americans from the rural South to urban areas of the North, Midwest and West from about 1916 to 1970.

²⁸ In *History of Negro Saloons*, Richard J. Latimer profiled saloons under black ownership between 1885 and 1908, several of which were operational in the Tin Pan Alley era and close to Tin Pan Alley itself. Among these were John B. Nail's establishment around the corner from Tin Pan Alley at 805 Sixth Avenue; Nail's saloon was later run by "Lovey" Joe Robinson, and Nail himself was notable as the first full Life Member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At 118 West 27th Street was Ike's Rathskeller, later Ike Hines' Professional Club, an informal performance venue. Other black-run saloons in the area were under the ownership of George Dixon on 6th Avenue between 27th and 28th streets; Nat Edwards at 6th Avenue and 30th Street; Lee Robinson at 8th Avenue and 35th Street; Joe Walcott on 31st Street between 6th and 7th avenues; Johnson and Davis on 32nd Street between 6th and 7th Avenues; and John L. Sullivan on 6th Avenue and 37th Street. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library. Richard J. Latimer, "History of Negro Saloons," New York Public Library Digital Collections.

²⁹ David Freeland, *Automats, Taxi Dances, and Vaudeville* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 80. Franconi's Hippodrome featured "boxes for respectable Colored Persons" by 1853. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, New York Public Library, "Franconi's Hippodrome," 1853, New York Public Library Digital Collections.

³⁰ "The Liveliest Block in Town," *The World*, February

25, 1894, 1. Opera vocalist Joseph Victor Amédée Capoul and iconic stage actress Sarah Bernhardt were among the illustrious celebrities who made frequent visits to the block. The star actor Alessandro "Alex" Salvini rented an office at 49 West 28th Street in 1896. *Trow's New York City Directory for the Year Ending July 1, 1897* (New York: Trow Directory, Printing and Bookbinding Company, 1897), 1261.

³¹ "Fourteenth Street's Rialto Is Passing Away," *The Morning Telegraph*, January 16, 1903, 7.

³² According to a 1950 issue of *The Music Journal*: "It was none other than O. Henry himself who dubbed the popular song industry 'Tin Pan Alley.' Here's how! All of the popular song publishers used to have their offices in an old reconverted brownstone down on 28th Street, near Broadway and Sixth Avenue. There wasn't much money in the music business in those days, and most of the busy pianos in those offices had been obtained 'for free,' just for the cartage. When all those pianos were going at once—which was most of the time—the din along 28th Street must have been 'colossal.' One day O. Henry told his song-writing friend Harry Williams that he would meet him in 'that Tin Pan Alley tavern' down on 28th Street. He didn't know he had coined a phrase that will live forever." "It DID Happen," *The Music Journal*, vol. 8, nNo. 5 (October 1950), 41. Other publications from the 1950s, among them Hazel Meyer's *The Gold in Tin Pan Alley* (1958), likewise gave O. Henry or lyricist Stanley Murphy as possible coiners of the name Tin Pan Alley, although the origin of those accounts is unknown and recent scholarship dismisses both claims.

Monroe H. Rosenfeld was the author of the ragtime song "The Tin Pan Brigade" (1902) and, some believe, of a lost *New York Herald* or *New York World* article thought to contain the term "Tin Pan Alley." Roy McCardell wrote the article "A Visit to Tin Pan Alley, Where the Popular Songs Come From" for the *New York World* on May 3, 1903. Harry Von Tilzer claimed to have coined the term when Monroe H. Rosenfeld visited his office at 42 West 28th Street to research an article.

³³ Louis Calta, "Tin Pan Alley (Remember?) Is Celebrated," *New York Times*, July 27, 1976, 18.

³⁴ From the 1840s, "tin-pan" as an adjective meant clamorous, shrill, or thin and metallic-sounding as an extension of traditions known as Charivari, skimmington, and katzenmusik, among other terms—folk customs in which crowds often beat pots and pans as accompaniment for mock parades and impromptu serenades. The term "Tin Pan Alley" was used elsewhere in the United States

by 1869 to mean a low-income, ramshackle, or dangerous section of town, a reference to commotion and to the cheapness of tin. See: *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, Virginia), March 17, 1869 and *New Haven Evening Register* (New Haven, Connecticut), August 8, 1890.

³⁵ “Tin Pan Alley” was perhaps a relative of the slang terms “tin can alley,” a ramshackle or squalid area, and “Tin Pot Alley,” an “unsavory neighborhood” on Broadway south of Trinity Church. Like the row houses on Tin Pan Alley at the time of their construction, Tin Pot Alley was home to “some of the most eminent merchants of the olden time.” “Tin Pot Alley,” *Madison Journal*, July 27, 1878. “‘Brigham’ Comes to Wheeling,” *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, April 10, 1884, and “A Row in ‘Tin Can Alley,’” *Austin Weekly Statesman*, April 11, 1889. A ten-pin alley—a type of bowling alley—is known to have been on what became the site of Madison Square Park. Ten-pin bowling lanes were seen as “a great nuisance to the religious and moral portion of the community.” “Effective Blast Against a Ten-Pin Alley,” *New York Times*, February 12, 1883, 3. See: Jane Katherine Mathieu, *Out of Many, One: Tin Pan Alley and American Popular Song, 1890-1920*, PhD diss., (University of Texas at Austin, 2014), 7.

³⁶ “‘Tin Pan Alley’ is considered a term of reproach by the Tin Pan Alleyites. They prefer to designate it as ‘Melody Lane.’ But that is a poetic fancy that those who go down that way to hear the ‘new, big, screaming hits’ do not indulge in.” “A Visit to ‘Tin Pan Alley,’ Where the Popular Songs Come From,” *New York World*, May 3, 1903, 4M, reprinted in “‘Tin Pan Alley?’ Why It’s the Place Where the Popular Songs Come From,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 3, 1903, 9B.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Porter Emerson Browne, “Tin Pan Alley,” *Hampton’s Broadway Magazine*, Vol. XXI (October 1908), 455.

³⁹ Paul West, “Confessions of a Song Writer,” May 30, 1909, excerpt reprinted in *Buffalo Enquirer*, May 26, 1909, 6.

⁴⁰ Theodore Dreiser, “Whence the Song,” *Harper’s Weekly*, XLIV (December 8, 1900): 1165-1166a. Dreiser’s mention of the “salaried arranger” is a reference to the fact that some of the era’s best-known songwriters, like Charles K. Harris, were unable to read sheet music and enlisted arrangers to convert their whistles and hums into arrangements for piano.

⁴¹ Although numerous sources refer to Tin Pan Alley as the birthplace of the Great American Songbook, that usage

of “Tin Pan Alley” reflects the later application of the term to the music business writ large. The Great American Songbook refers to significant works American popular music from the 1920s-1950s, after the concentration of music publishers left West 28th Street. A substantial number of Great American Songbook music was made for motion picture soundtracks, theater productions, or jazz orchestra performances by composers Harold Arlen, Irving Berlin, Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter, and others.

⁴² Yagoda, 31-36.

⁴³ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁴ Norman Abjorensen, “Ragtime” in *Historical Dictionary of Popular Music* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 416-417.

⁴⁵ Ibid. “Ragtime found its characteristic expression in formally structured piano compositions. The regularly accented left-hand beat, in 4/4 or 2/4 time, was opposed in the right hand by a fast, bouncingly syncopated melody that gave the music its powerful forward impetus.” Jeff Wallenfeldt, ed., *The Black Experience in America: From Civil Rights to the Present* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2011), 76.

⁴⁶ Brooke Baldwin, “The Cakewalk: A Study in Stereotype and Reality,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1981): 205–218.

⁴⁷ The influence of cakewalk and ragtime music is audible in three works by French composer Claude Debussy: *The Golliwog’s Cake Walk* (1908), *Minstrels* (1910), and *Général Lavine–Eccentric (Dans le Style et le Mouvement d’un Cakewalk)* (1913). Other French composers, among them Erik Satie, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, and others made works which show the influence of ragtime, among them Satie’s *La Mort de Monsieur Mouche* (1900), *La Diva de l’Empire* (1904), *Piccadilly* (1904), and the ballet *Parade (Ragtime du Paquebot)* (1917). Russian-born composer Igor Stravinsky wrote *Piano-Rag-Music* (1919) and a ragtime number in his theater piece, *L’Histoire du Soldat* (1918). See: Deborah Mawer, *French Music and Jazz in Conversation* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴⁸ Sources disagree as to whether ragtime was heard as part of the program of the fair itself, in informal or unofficial performances on the fairgrounds, or around Chicago through musicians like Scott Joplin, who gave performances in the city at the time of the fair. Regardless, this was the first time that both black and white audiences were introduced to ragtime on a mass scale. See: Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: The*

Composers, the Songs, the Performers and Their Times, 13.

⁴⁹ Throughout this report, this epithet, which appears in sheet music titles of the era and in the prevalent term for a particular genre of music, is written as “c—n” to indicate that it is an offensive and derogatory term. Where the word appears in citations of article titles, it is written as the author rendered it in the article title.

Additional context for the use of the term in American entertainment and as a reflection of the tension, apprehension, and institutional racism of the Redemption era is given in the “Characters and Stereotypes in American Popular Music of the Post Reconstruction Era” section.

⁵⁰ Other works of the era were significant influences on their successors: Charles K. Harris’ “After the Ball” (1892); Charles B. Ward and John F. Palmer’s “The Band Played On” (1895); Joseph E. Howard and Ida Emerson’s “Hello! Ma Baby (1899); Harry Von Tilzer’s “A Bird in a Gilded Cage” (1900); Harry Williams and Egbert Van Alstyne’s “In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree” (1905); Nora Bayes and Jack Norworth’s “Shine on Harvest Moon” (1908); Gus Edwards and Edward Madden’s “By the Light of the Silv’ry Moon” (1909); Tell Taylor’s “Down by the Old Mill Stream” (1910); Leo Friedman and Beth Slater Whitson’s “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” (1910); and Irving Berlin’s “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” (1911).

⁵¹ Prior to the 1890s, rather than standalone businesses, most publishers of sheet music were music store owners, stationers, or commercial print shop proprietors who output broadsides, magazines, advertisements, books, and other print materials as well as sheet music. In addition to their in-store sales, larger companies commissioned their salesmen to promote sheet music while on other sales ventures. Salesmen began to recognize patterns among customers’ musical tastes and to realize how cost-effective—and profitable—it might be to publish and sell music to mass-market audiences on their own. Some of the Tin Pan Alley era’s best-known publishers began their careers as salesmen of clothes, accessories, or housewares. Songwriters likewise went to printers to make copies of their music to sell at local stores. Browne, “Tin Pan Alley,” 455; David A. Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers and Their Times* (New York: D.I. Fine, 1988), xvi. Among these were Isidore Witmark, earlier a salesman of water filters; Leo Feist of corsets; Joseph Stern of neckties; Edward B. Marks of buttons; and Max and Luis Dreyfus, of notions and picture frames. Yagoda, 33.

⁵² Sales figures differ from author to author, and sales figures for certain hits of the era appear to trace to the publishers’ own claims. Richard Maltby offers a figure of 200 million annual sheet music sales throughout the 1910s. David Ewen records two billion sheet music sales in 1910 while Russell Sanjek offers a more modest figure of 30 million sheet music sales in 1910. William D. Romanowski, *Pop Culture Wars: Religion and the Role of Entertainment in American Life* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996), 204; Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business: The First Four Hundred Years: Volume III from 1900 to 1984* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 7, 12, 16; Richard Maltby, ed., *Passing Parade: A History of Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 42; Ewen, *The Life and Death of Tin Pan Alley*, 18, 122.

⁵³ Some publishers saw opportunities in copyright limitations and began to pirate music as a business tactic. Although Colonial copyright acts gave creators certain short-term protections and Article I, Section 8, Clause 8 in the United States Constitution gave protections for original written work from 1787 onward, copyright protection did not *explicitly* apply to sheet music in the United States until the passage of the Copyright Act of 1831. Even then, it was subject to a substantial loophole: a lack of copyright protection within the United States on compositions written in other countries. Prior to 1891, copyright protection on music within the United States was applicable to American-made works but not to works made abroad. American publishers vied with each other to pirate and publish well-known compositions of European music, sometimes with adaptations to make the lyrics resonate with American audiences. In 1891, a series of treaties between the United States and a number of European countries became the International Copyright Law and gave copyright protection to foreign compositions in United States and to American works abroad. M. Witmark & Sons became the first major sheet music publisher in the United States to open an overseas branch; from there, the firm was able to publish and sell its music throughout Europe. Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: An Encyclopedia of the Golden Age of American Song* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 434-435; Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers, and Their Times*, 7-9.

Tin Pan Alley arose in an era before phonographs and records were prevalent and when sheet music sales were the determinant of a work’s success. As parlor piano rolls and phonograph records became common, music publishers and composers began to advocate against what composer John Philip Sousa wrote about as “The Menace of Mechanical Music” in 1906. To Sousa, piano rolls and records were “sweeping across the country with the speed of a transient

fashion in slang or Panama hats, political war cries or popular novels” and threatened to become a “substitute for human skill, intelligence and soul.” John Philip Sousa, “The Menace of Mechanical Music,” *Appleton's Magazine*, Vol. 8 (1906): 278-284. Sousa and other composers’ lobbyist efforts against mechanical music came to their ultimate realization in the Copyright Act of 1909.

⁵⁴ Although “plugger” has come to refer to these musicians regardless of their venue or employer, sheet music demonstrators in department and music stores were known as “song demonstrators” while those who worked directly for music publishers were known as “song pluggers.” Kanter, 31.

⁵⁵ Charles Darnton, “The Song Claque Nuisance,” *Evening World Home Magazine* (November 11, 1905): 9.

⁵⁶ David Ewen, *All the Years of American Popular Music* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1977), 104.

⁵⁷ Edward B. Marks, *They All Sang: from Tony Pastor to Rudy Vallée* (New York: The Viking Press, 1934) 1.

⁵⁸ Simon Napier-Bell, *Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay: The Dodgy Business of Popular Music* (London: Unbound, 2014), 6. The firm was earlier known as Shapiro, Bernstein & Von Tilzer, and later as Shapiro & Remick, Co.

⁵⁹ Browne, “Tin Pan Alley,” 455.

⁶⁰ Darnton equated Tin Pan Alley’s pluggers and boomers with the claque, a cohort of professional applauders in French theaters and opera houses. Claquing was at its apex in the 19th and 20th centuries, though it was attested in ancient sources, among them Plautus’ c.200 BCE *Amphitryon*: “Now Jupiter has told me to ask you for this favor: inspectors should go to each and every seat, to the spectators throughout the entire theatre; if they see any claqueurs appointed for anyone, their togas should be taken as security in the theatre... One ought to canvass through one’s capability, not through claqueurs.” *Plautus*, edited and translated by Wolfgang de Melo. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), 19, Lines 64-67. The Latin word translated here as “claqueurs” is *fautor* from *favior*, a favorer. The term “claque” comes from the French verb *claquer*, to clap.

“Confederates were planted in every part of the house. They clapped in the orchestra, banged in the balcony and crashed in the gallery.” Darnton, “The Song Claque Nuisance.”

⁶¹ After the Witmarks sent then-unknown composer Charles K. Harris of Milwaukee a meager 85 cents in royalties for his hit “When the Sun Has Set,” (c.1888),

Harris began an independent career as a music publisher. (By other accounts, the Witmarks sent Harris a check for his royalties, though six months later and with 85 cents postage due.) In c.1892, he wrote his magnum opus, “After the Ball,” which became the first sheet music in the United States to sell one million copies and which went on to sell upwards of five million copies. Some authors trace Harris’ inventiveness and drive to his initial frustration with M. Witmark & Sons’ business practices: Harris established a New York branch in 1897; from 1899 to 1902, his New York office was at 51 West 28th Street on Tin Pan Alley—the former offices of M. Witmark & Sons. Kenneth Aaron Kanter, *The Jews on Tin Pan Alley: The Jewish Contribution to Popular Music, 1830-1940* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc.), 16. Harris credited himself with a number of the promotion strategies which became the modus operandi of Tin Pan Alley’s publishers. Among other tactics, Harris claimed to have invented plugging, paying performers for each performance of a song in order to encourage repeat performances of his new music, and paying a well-known singer a significant sum to put his photograph on a sheet music cover. “I engaged a Negro expressman known as Julius Caesar, gave him a dollar, and instructed him ... to clap very loudly.” Charles K. Harris, *After the Ball: Forty Years of Melody* (New York: Frank-Maurice, Inc., 1926), 21.

⁶² Charles Aronstein, “How Songs Are Advertised,” *Printers’ Ink*, vol. XV, no. 13 (June 24, 1896), 23-24.

⁶³ Daniel Goldmark, “Creating Desire on Tin Pan Alley,” *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 90, no. 2 (Summer, 2007): 197-229.

⁶⁴ Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers and Their Times*, 7.

⁶⁵ Edward B. Marks quoted in Suisman, 72.

⁶⁶ Darnton, “The Song Claque Nuisance.”

⁶⁷ Because of their vaudeville and minstrel show pedigrees, a number of the female performers shown on Tin Pan Alley’s sheet music were known for their performance of “c—n songs.” Among these were May Irwin on “May Irwin’s New C—n Song Hits,” M. Witmark & Sons, 1895; Nellie Sylvester on “N—, N—, Never Die,” Carleton, Cavanagh & Co., 1897, for which Sylvester wrote the music; Josephine Sabel on “Sweet Claribel, Ballad and Waltz Refrain” and “I’m the Warmest Member in the Land: A C—ntown Egotism,” M. Witmark and Sons, 1896 and 1897; and Hattie Star on “You’re So Good, Daddy,” M. Witmark and Sons, 1896, for which Star wrote both the words and music. Lizzie B. Raymond, a well-known comedienne and “the people’s favorite vocalist,” was on M. Witmark & Sons sheet music cover for “My Coal Black Lady” after the firm’s relocation in 1898.

⁶⁸ Aronstein, 23.

⁶⁹ *New York Clipper*, February 15, 1896, 801.

⁷⁰ In 1911, the composer Will Marion Cook wrote to *The New York Age*, one of the most influential African-American newspapers of the time, about discrimination against African-American composers at a certain New York music publisher's office. *The Age* noted, "The attitude of the various music publishers toward the colored performer—whether friendly or otherwise—should be regarded philosophically. Their relationship and dealings involve a business proposition pure and simple, and if some of the firms are so saturated with color prejudice as to overlook the great good the colored artists do them commercially, then it is their loss." Lester A. Walton, ed., "Music and the Stage," *The New York Age*, February 9, 1911, 6.

⁷¹ It is unknown whether Von Tilzer had his own office at 42 West 28th Street or was still at 45 West 28th Street with Shapiro, Bernstein, and Von Tilzer at that point in 1902. See: Howard Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2006), 62, and Edward Jablonski, *Irving Berlin: American Troubadour* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1999), 22-23.

⁷² Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of Eastern European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 557.

⁷³ Kanter, *The Jews on Tin Pan Alley*, 37-38. Several authors point to the fact that Jewish entertainers like Irving Berlin (née Israel Isadore Baline), Al Jolson (née Asa Yoelson), and others saw fit to Anglicize their names as evidence of assimilation and "Americanization."

⁷⁴ Select "novelty" compositions included Yiddish lyrics or distinct references to Jewish culture and the style of certain singers was thought to evoke the synagogue cantorial. Berndt Ostendorf, "The Musical World of Doctorow's Ragtime," *American Quarterly* 43 (1991): 584-591; David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 33-35.

⁷⁵ Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers and Their Times*, 32-33.

⁷⁶ Emmett George Price, Tammy L. Kernodle, and Horace Maxille, eds., *Encyclopedia of African American Music, Vol. 1* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2011), 100-101.

⁷⁷ David A. Jasen and Gene Jones, *Spreadin' Rhythm Around: Black Popular Songwriters, 1880-1930* (New York: Routledge 2013), 124-125; *Trow's General Directory of the Boroughs of Manhattan and Bronx, City of New York, Vol. CXC, For the Year Ending July 1, 1907* (New York: Trow Directory, Printing, and Bookbinding Company, 1907), 410. The Gotham-Attucks Music Company ceased to operate as a legitimate music publisher after its sale to the "song shark" Ferdinand E. Miersch in 1911.

⁷⁸ The first all-black minstrel troupe to have a profitable season was Brooker and Clayton's Georgia Minstrels under the management of the performer Charles Hicks in 1865. Other all-black minstrel companies began to form about a decade later. In the tradition of earlier minstrel shows with white casts, these troupes wore blackface. Eileen Southern, "The Georgia Minstrels: The Early Years" in Anmarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara, eds., *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 163-175.

⁷⁹ Music publisher Edward B. Marks wrote that certain black artists of the era "were outwardly resigned to all sorts of discrimination" and made use of blackface and epithets despite awareness of their abhorrence in order to make inroads as entertainers. Much has been written about the era's black songwriters' and performers' employment of slurs and stereotypes as a form of compliance with the expectations of white audiences, showrunners, and publishers, and as a result of a lack of opportunities for black musicians, dancers, and comedians in the Gilded Age. More recent scholarship challenges this notion of black performers' capitulation to the predominant culture and instead recasts aspects of their work as activism, which better reflects the statements and observations of the artists themselves. Black songwriters' employment of stereotypes and epithets has been read as an in-joke in the tradition of slave songs, which were rife with double entendres to suggest one interpretation to white listeners and another to black listeners, and developments like the cakewalk, a relative of ragtime which began on Southern plantations as a means for enslaved blacks to mock certain genteel white customs. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 194; Marks, *They All Sang*, 96; "Postbellum Blackface Song" in Jon W. Finson, *The Voices That Are Gone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 230-231; Ellen M. Litwicki, "Popular Theater," in Charles William Calhoun, ed., *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America* (Lanham,

Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) 196.

In 1909, the black entertainer Bert Williams, whose blackface “Two Real C—ns” act with George Walker has been understood as an intentional subversion of the “c—n” caricature, spoke of “hoping and working for the day when Negroes on the stage will take themselves and be taken more seriously, when the colored performer can be something more than a minstrel man, a song and dance artist, or a slapstick agent.” Bert Williams quoted in Janet Brown, “The ‘Coon-Singer’ and the ‘Coon-Song’: A Case Study of the Performer-Character Relationship,” *Journal of American Culture*, 7 (Spring/Summer 1984): 6.

⁸⁰ This section is based on authorship credits on these sheet music covers and on associated copyright data.

⁸¹ Finson, *The Voices that Are Gone*, 235.

⁸² Marks, *They All Sang*, 96, quoted in “James Weldon Johnson Brought An Enduring Dignity to the Theatre,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, July 9, 1938, 13.

⁸³ Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 118.

⁸⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1935), 30.

⁸⁵ Legal discrimination was upheld in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, a landmark United States Supreme Court case that legitimized “separate but equal” facilities for black and white users in 1896.

⁸⁶ This paragraph is based on Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) and *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019). In common usage, Reconstruction refers either to a post-Civil War era in the United States from 1865-1877 or the process through which Congress sought to readmit and reform the former Confederate states from the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation through 1877. In both cases, the end date of 1877 reflects to the Compromise of 1877, under which the last federal forces were withdrawn from the South and an assurance of federal government non-interference in southern affairs was made.

⁸⁷ Most businesses and apartment complexes were not integrated. Florence E. Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish Toward State and National Affairs, 1848-1892*, (New York: 1951), 66; John C. Murphy, *An Analysis of*

the Attitudes of American Catholics Toward the Immigrant and the Negro (Washington, D.C., 1940), 53-54, 133. The activist Malcolm X (1925-1965) later wrote: “The North’s liberals have been for so long pointing accusing fingers at the South and getting away with it that they have fits when they are exposed as the world’s worst hypocrites.” See: Malcolm X., *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992) [1965], 296.

⁸⁸ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University press, 1993), 101. See: Jack Gottlieb, *Funny, It Doesn’t Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 25.

⁸⁹ Hogan allegedly heard the lyric “all pimps look alike to me” in a Chicago bar and rewrote the phrase to complement a ragtime beat. Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying, and Signifying—the Underground Tradition of African-American Humor That Transformed American Culture, from Slavery to Richard Pryor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 146.

⁹⁰ “Postbellum Blackface Song: Authenticity and the Minstrel Dream” in Finson, *Voices That Are Gone*, 200-239. David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009), 39.

⁹¹ “African American Sheet Music,” Brown University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, <https://library.brown.edu/cds/sheetmusic/afam/about.html>.

⁹² “West Side Race Riot,” *New York Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1900, 1; Gilbert Osofsky, “Race Riot, 1900: A Study of Ethnic Violence” in *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Winter 1963): 16-24.

“For four hours last night Eighth Avenue, from Thirtieth to Forty-second Street, was a scene of the wildest disorder that this city has witnessed in years. The hard feeling between the white people and the negroes in that district, which has been smoldering for many years and which received fresh fuel by the death of Policeman Thorpe ... burst forth last night into a race riot which was not subdued until the reserve force of four police precincts, numbering in all over 100 men ... were called to the scene and succeeded in clearing the streets by a liberal use of their night sticks.” “Race Riot on West Side,” *New York Times*, August 16, 1900, 1.

⁹³ James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1930), 126-127. Sources differ as to whether

George Walker or Bert Williams was also pulled from Sixth Avenue streetcar by the mob. Some accounts note that Hogan and Walker found their escape in the black-owned Marlborough Hotel.

⁹⁴ “The verse of ‘All C—ns Look Alike to Me’ was forgotten. The refrain became a fighting phrase all over New York. Whistled by a white man, it was construed as a personal insult. ... Hogan ... died haunted by the awful crime he had unwittingly committed against the race.” Marks, *They All Sang*, 91.

⁹⁵ Gilbert Osofsky, “Race Riot, 1900,” 19. See also: Jonathan Gill, *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America* (New York: Grove Press, 2011) 172-174.

⁹⁶ Patricia R. Schroeder, “Passing for Black: Coon Songs and the Performance of Race,” *Journal of American Culture*, vol. 33 (2010): 140.

⁹⁷ James H. Dormon, “Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks: The ‘Coon Song’ Phenomenon of the Gilded Age,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 4 (1988): 453.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 466. Composer Fred Fischer’s 1905 hit, “If the Man in the Moon Were a C—n,” sold three million copies. In 1933, when Fischer sought to renew his copyright, the piece was rewritten as “If the Man in the Moon Were a Loon”; historian J. Stanley Lemons suggests this fact as evidence that the word “c—n” was seen as offensive and unacceptable by 1933. See: J. Stanley Lemons, “Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 29.1 (Spring 1977): 102-16.

⁹⁹ “Germany” is used in this text as a catchall term for German-speaking states in Central Europe, which existed in various confederations until the reunification of Germany in 1990.

¹⁰⁰ Erika Kinetz, “War of the Roses,” *New York Times*, April 11, 2004, 14.

¹⁰¹ Jennifer Dunning, “A Singing Tour of the Gay 90’s Tin Pan Alley,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1982, C6.

¹⁰² Riley Griffin, “New York’s Flower District is Dying,” *Bloomberg*, August 14, 2018. Directories from 1890-1910 show numerous florists in business on the north side of West 28th Street.

¹⁰³ “Flower Market is a Hardy Perennial,” *New York Times*, August 31, 1977, 42.

¹⁰⁴ John Harvith and Susan Edwards Harvith, eds., *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph: A Century in Retrospect*

(New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 1; Roger Mantie and Gareth Dylan Smith, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Music Making and Leisure* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 244.

Although Thomas Edison invented a cylinder phonograph as a dictation machine in 1877, it was Emile Berliner’s invention of the Gramophone and phonograph record in 1880 that made the mass production of records possible. Once discs made music accessible on a mass scale, in-home music culture was able to shift from piano performance to records. William Howard Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press), 10-40.

¹⁰⁵ Even in 1913, a short time after most music publishers went uptown, a *Shreveport Times* article about the uptown “Melody Lane” mused: “In the first place, there is no such street as Tin-Pan Alley. There used to be. ... But the shops have separated. ...” *Shreveport Times*, September 21, 1913, 15.

¹⁰⁶ Louis Sobol, “Down Memory Lane with Ann Harding,” *New York Evening Journal*, January 20, 1934, The Voice of Broadway section.

¹⁰⁷ Rose C. Feld, “Tinkling Joy Returns to Tin Pan Alley,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 18, 1934.

¹⁰⁸ David Ewen, “Tin Pan Alley’s Tuneful History,” *House and Garden* (July 1951): 64, 87, 88.

¹⁰⁹ *Trow’s New York City Directory* (New York: J. F. Trow., 1860), 368, 546.

¹¹⁰ *New York Herald*, August 18, 1880, 5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, December 12, 1884.

¹¹² Quoted in Christopher Gray “Streetscapes/West 28th Street, Broadway to Sixth; A Tin Pan Alley, Chockablock With Life, if Not Song,” *New York Times*, July 12, 2003, 7.

Fanny Phippany (sometimes “Fippany”) was the former proprietor of a house of ill repute at 36 West 15th Street in the Rialto. That establishment was criticized in the *Gentleman’s Companion*, an 1870 guidebook meant to give the reader “an insight into the character and doings of people whose deeds are carefully screened from the public view” under the guise of aid to his moral character: “We point out the location of these places in order that the reader may know how to avoid them, and that he may not select one of them for his boarding house when he comes to the city.” *A Gentleman’s Directory, known as The Gentleman’s Companion*, (n.p., 1870), 6-7. The

publication noted that there were six boarders at Miss Phippany's 15th Street establishment. An October 1870 article in the *New York Times* reported that Fanny Phippany was sentenced to three months in prison for her operation of a "disorderly house." "Justice Dowling's Suggestions on the Social Evil," *New York Times*, October 26, 1870, 8.

¹¹³ *The Evening World* (New York, New York), January 11, 1889, 1. *New York Herald*, January 11, 1889, 7.

¹¹⁴ "To Let for Business Purposes," *New York Herald*, April 18, 1894, 2; "To Let for Business Purposes," *New-York Tribune*, May 1, 1898, 10; "To Let for Business Purposes," *New York Herald*, March 5, 1903, 15; "To Let for Business Purposes," *New York Herald*, February 11, 1913, 19.

¹¹⁵ "To Let for Business Purposes," *New York Herald*, February 11, 1913, 19.

¹¹⁶ Christopher Gray, "Streetscapes: West 28th Street, Broadway to Sixth; A Tin Pan Alley, Chockablock With Life, if Not Song," *New York Times*, July 13, 2003, Section 11, Page 7.

¹¹⁷ "Prof. A. M. Hall," *Dansville Express*, February 27, 1908.

¹¹⁸ *Ladies' Home Journal*, Vol. 15, February 1898, 27; David A. Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: An Encyclopedia of the Golden Age of American Song* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 402.

¹¹⁹ *New York Clipper*, June 20, 1897, 255. *Trow's New York City Directory, Vol CX, for the Year Ending July 1, 1897*, (New York: Trow Directory, Printing and Bookbinding Company, 1897) 1137.

¹²⁰ *Catalogue of Title Entries of Books and Other Articles, Issue 736* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), 562.

¹²¹ *New York Clipper*, March 10, 1896, 98.

¹²² *The Trow's (Formerly Wilson's) Copartnership and Corporation Directory of the Boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx*, March 1908, Vol. LVI, (New York: Trow Directory, Printing and Bookbinding Company, 1908) 741; *New York Clipper*, September 15, 1906, 791.

¹²³ *Variety* (March 1907): 71.

¹²⁴ *Billboard*, March 5, 1921, 7.

¹²⁵ "Walter Plimmer, Ex-Theater Man," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 2, 1944, 5.

¹²⁶ Robert Grau brought Maurice Barrymore to the

vaudeville stage at the New Union Square Theatre in 1897 and was a promoter of the American actress and dance pioneer Loie Fuller as an international star. He was later the author of three major texts in 1910, 1912, and 1914, about the entertainment business, theater, and the motion picture business. Anthony Slide, *The Encyclopedia of Vaudeville*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 212.

¹²⁷ *The International Studio*, vol. 36 (November 1908-February 1909), n.p.

¹²⁸ "Flowers by Telegraph," *New York Herald*, July 14, 1818, 22.

Findings and Designation

53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 830, Lot 8 as its Landmark Site.



New York City Department of Taxes Photograph (c. 1938-43),
Courtesy Municipal Archives



53 West 28th Street,
Landmarks Preservation Commission, December 2019



47-55 West 28th Street Buildings, Tin Pan Alley
Landmarks Preservation Commission, December 2019

Appendix: Musicians, Publishers, and Entertainers of 47-55 West 28th Street, 1893-c.1910

47 West 28th Street

Musicians and Music Publishers

Walter C. Parker, musician, 1896
William C. Parker, composer, 1896
Carleton, Cavanagh & Co., publisher, 1896-1897
Charles B. Ward, composer, 1897
William Pilling Music Publishing Co., publisher, 1898-1899
Morse Music Co., publisher, 1900
Peerless Publishing Co., publisher, 1902
George J. Wetzel, composer, 1902
Whitney-Warner Publishing Co., publisher, 1903
Falter Brothers, publisher, c.1903-1906

Tenants in the Entertainment Business

Mrs. Beaumont Packard's Theatrical Exchange, agent, 1894-1895
Dunlop's Stage News, theater publication, 1893-1896
New York Clipper, 1900-1916
Alfred E. Aarons, agent and composer, 1897
Sheridan Corbyn, agent, 1896
Richard Pitrot, agent, 1907-c.1910

Tenants in the Visual Arts

Samuel Arlent Edwards, artist, 1894-1895
William Clausen & Co., arts publisher, 1894-1895
John W. Huffington, artist, 1896-1899
R. Leighton Budd, artist, 1897-1898
A. Douglas Hamilton, artist, 1898
William Jacobs, artist, 1898-1899
Peter Richards, illustrator, 1906-1910

49 West 28th Street

Musicians and Music Publishers

Central Publishing Co., publisher, c.1894-1896
William C. Parker, composer, 1895
Witmark & Sons, publisher, 1896-1897
William C. Dunn and Co. (later Orphean Music Co.), publisher, 1898-1899
L. G. Warford & Co., publisher, 1899
Maurice Shapiro, publisher, 1899
Doty & Brill, publisher, 1900
Leighton & Leighton, publisher, 1905

Tenants in the Entertainment Business

Wilfrid North, motion picture director, 1890
Gustave Frohman Theatrical Exchange, agent, 1890-1892
Z & L Rosenfeld, script stenographer, 1892-1909
Mansfield & Magee, agent, 1893-1894
Alessandro Salvini, actor, 1896
Henry S. VanFleet, printer (*New York Clipper*), 1903
Jules Brulatour, motion picture executive, 1904-1905
Leighton & Leighton, vaudeville, 1905
F.G. Taylor, motion picture machine salesman, 1911

Tenants in the Visual Arts

George H. Walker & Company, lithographer, 1891
National Specialty Company, photographic equipment, 1904-1908
National Materials Company, photographic equipment, 1904-1908
Frank T. Dunlap, photographer, 1908-1909
Leroy Gracy, photographer, 1909-1910

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Musicians and Music Publishers

M. Witmark & Sons, publisher, 1893-1897
Harrie Harris, musician, 1896
Garrett J. Couchois, publisher, 1898
Maurice Levi, composer and publisher, 1898
William C. Dunn and Co. (later Orphean Music Co.), publisher, 1898-1899
Charles K. Harris, publisher, 1899-1902
Doty & Brill, publisher, 1900
William H. Anstead, publisher, 1902-1903
William Pilling Music Publishing Co., publisher, 1903
T. Mayo Geary Publishing Co., publisher, 1904
Joseph J. Kaiser, publisher, 1904-1905
Mine Publishing Co. (Albert P. Southwick, manager), publisher, 1904-1905
Paul Dresser Publishing Co., publisher, 1905-1907
Old Dominion Music Co., publisher, 1904-1907
Leveen Music Publishing Co., publisher, 1905-1907
Conn & Fischer, publisher, 1906
Harry Ennis Music Co., 1906
Manhattan Music Co., 1906
Mooney & Callan, publisher, 1907
Mozart Music Co., publisher, 1907
W. R. Haskins Co., publisher, 1907-1908
Archer & Lemonier, publisher, 1907-1908
Elite Music Supply Co., publisher, 1908
Joseph C. Kaiser Music Co., publisher, 1908
Victoria Music Co., publisher, 1908-1909
James H. Elliott, musician and publisher, 1908-1909

Tenants in the Entertainment Business

Robert Grau, vaudeville agent, 1903
Rich and Maeder, entertainment agents, 1895-1896

Tenants in the Visual Arts

Charles Paul Gruppé, 1892-1893
Étienne de Saptés, designer, 1895

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Musicians and Music Publishers

Alanson M. Hall, composer and publisher, 1897-1900
Orphean Music Co., publisher, 1898
Petrie Music Co., publisher, 1896-1897
Roger Harding, composer, and minstrel performer, 1900
International Music Co., publisher, 1899-1900
Lazarus Baiut, musician, 1900
Richard A. Saalfield, publisher, 1900-1901
Justus Ringleben, publisher, 1904
Cosmopolitan Music Co., publisher, 1904-1906
Harvey & Haines, publisher, 1904-1909
Maurice A. Strothoffe, musician, 1905
Leveen Publishing Co., publisher, 1905
Entre Nous Publishing Co. (Charles Greinert and Stephen J. Mooney, managers, 1905-1907
Limbach & Bishop, publisher, 1907
William Nelson, musician, 1907
Alfred Murphy, musician, 1907
Edward Rogers Publishing Co, songwriter and publisher, 1906-1907
Selig Music Publishing Co. (Gabriel Selig, manager), publisher 1907-1908
Charles Greinert, publisher, 1909

Tenants in the Entertainment Business

Plimmer & Steiner, vaudeville agent, 1904
Robert Grau, vaudeville agent, 1905
Yerkes & Co., motion picture sound effects, 1907-1909

Tenants in the Visual Arts

Frank E. Hull, illustrator, 1902
William C. Hafner, artist, 1905
Charles P. Underhill, artist, 1909

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Musicians and Music Publishers

Ring Music Company (Justus Ringleben), composer
and sheet music publisher, 1904

Arthur M. Cohen, arranger and songwriter, 1905

Harry Ennis, musician, 1905

Golding Music Co. (Austin Walsh, publisher),
publisher, 1905

Austin Walsh, publisher, 1905-1906

Shepard N. Edmonds Music Publishing Co.,
publisher, 1906-1907

Melville Music Publishing Co., publisher, 1906-
1907

Albert S. Keller, publisher, 1907

Nathan Bivins Publishing Co., publisher, 1907-1908

Harry S. Harvey, musician, 1910-c.1913

Tenants in the Entertainment Business

Charles Lella, theatrical shoemaker, 1902

Charles Kendall, filmmaker, 1902

Norman H. Powell, filmmaker, 1902

Roger Tolomei, agent, 1917-1918

Tenants in the Visual Arts

Stoughton-Seaman Co. (later Seaman Bros. Co.),
prints, 1903-1907

William Cudlip, photographer, 1909-1910

Other Notable Tenants

Mother Earth, anarchist magazine, 1911-1913

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