Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s

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IN 1929, THE PUBLISHERS OF *TRUE STORY MAGAZINE* RAN FULL-PAGE ADVERtisements in the nation's major newspapers celebrating what they called "the American Economic Evolution." Claiming to be the recipient of thousands of personal stories written by American workers for the magazine's primarily working-class readership, they felt well placed to report that since World War I, shorter working hours, higher pay and easy credit had created an "economic millennium." Now that the nation's workers enjoyed an equal opportunity to consume, "a capital-labor war which has been going on now for upwards of three hundred years" had virtually ended. *True Story* claimed that twenty years ago, Jim Smith, who worked ten to twelve hours a day in a factory and then returned home "to his hovel and his woman and his brats," was likely to resort to strikes and violence when times got tough. Not so his modern-day counterpart. Today, the magazine asserted, Jim Smith drives home to the suburbs after a seven or eight hour day earning him three to seven times as much as before, which helps pay for the automobile, the house and a myriad of other possessions. Now an upstanding member of the middle class, Jim has learned moderation. Mass consumption had tamed his militance.[1] Advertising executives at the J. Walter Thompson Company shared *True Story Magazine*'s confidence in the homogenizing power of mass culture. In an issue of their own in-house newsletter devoted to "the New National Market," they too claimed that due to standardized merchandise, automobiles, motion

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pictures and most recently the radio, the so-called "lines of demarcation" between social classes and between the city, the small town and the farm had become less clear.[2]

Sixty years later, historians are still making assumptions about the impact of mass culture that are similar to those of *True Story Magazine*'s editors and J. Walter Thompson Company's executives. With not much more data about consumer attitudes and behavior in the 1920s than their predecessors had, they too assume that mass culture succeeded in integrating American workers into a mainstream, middle-class culture. When workers bought a victrola, went to the picture show, or switched on the radio, in some crucial way, the usual argument goes, they ceased living in an ethnic or working-class world. This common version of the "embourgeoisement thesis" credits a hegemonic mass culture with blurring class lines. When labor organizing occurred in the 1930s and 1940s, the view holds, it stemmed not from industrial workers' class consciousness but from their efforts to satisfy middle-class appetites.[3]

How can historians break free of the unproven assumptions of the era and reopen the question of how working-class audiences responded to the explosion of mass culture during the 1920s? Let me first acknowledge how difficult it is to know the extent to which workers participated in various forms of mass culture, and particularly the meanings they ascribed to their preferences. But I will suggest in this essay one strategy for discerning the impact of mass culture. Shifting the focus from the national scene, where data on audience reception is weak, to a particular locale rich in social history sources can yield new insights into the way that workers responded to mass culture. Chicago offers a particularly good case since it was the best documented city in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. In this period, Chicago was a laboratory for sociologists, political scientists and social workers—and a multitude of their students. Their numerous studies of urban life, along with ethnic newspapers, oral histories, and other local sources, can serve social historians as revealing windows into working-class experience with mass culture. Chicago's industrial prominence, moreover, attracted a multiethnic and multiracial work force, which gives it all the more value as a case study.

In order to investigate how workers reacted to mass culture on the local level of Chicago, it is necessary to make concrete the abstraction "mass culture." This essay, therefore, will examine carefully how workers in Chicago responded to mass consumption, that is, the growth of chain stores peddling standard-brand goods; to motion picture shows in monumental movie palaces; and to the little box that seemed overnight to be winning a sacred spot at the family hearth, the radio.

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While *True Story Magazine*'s Jim Smith may have bought his way into the middle class, in reality industrial workers did not enjoy nearly the prosperity

that advertisers and sales promoters assumed they did. All Americans did not benefit equally from the mushrooming of national wealth taking place during the 1920s. After wartime, wages advanced modestly if at all in big manufacturing sectors, such as steel, meat-packing, and the clothing industry, particularly for the unskilled and semiskilled workers who predominated in this kind of work. And most disruptive of workers' ability to consume, unemployment remained high. Workers faced unemployment whenever the business cycle turned downward, and even more regularly, faced layoffs in slack seasons. So Chicago's average semiskilled worker did not have nearly as much money to spare for purchasing automobiles, washing machines and victrolas as manufacturers and advertisers had hoped.[4]

But people with commodities to sell worried little about workers' limited income. Instead, they trusted that an elaborate system of installment selling would allow all Americans to take part in the consumer revolution. "Buy now, pay later," first introduced in the automobile industry around 1915, suddenly exploded in the 1920s; by 1926, it was estimated that six billion dollars' worth of retail goods were sold annually by installment, about fifteen percent of all sales. "Enjoy while you pay," invited the manufacturers of everything from vacuum cleaners to literally the kitchen sink.[5]

But once again, popular beliefs of the time do not hold up to closer scrutiny: industrial workers were not engaging in installment buying in nearly the numbers that marketers assumed. Automobiles accounted for by far the greatest proportion of the nation's installment debt outstanding at any given time—over fifty percent. But while *True Story*'s Jim Smith may have driven home from the factory in his new automobile, industrial workers in Chicago were not likely to follow his example. One study of the standard of living of semiskilled workers in Chicago found that only three percent owned cars in 1924. Even at the end of the decade, in the less urbanized environment of nearby Joliet, only twenty four percent of lower income families owned an automobile, according to a *Chicago Tribune* survey. The few studies of consumer credit done at the time indicate that it was middle income people—not workers—who made installment buying such a rage during the 1920s, particularly the salaried and well-off who anticipated larger incomes in the future. Lower income people instead were saving at unprecedented rates, often to cushion themselves for the inevitable layoffs.[6]

When workers did buy on credit, they were most likely to purchase small items like phonographs. The question remains, however, whether buying a phonograph—or a washing machine—changed workers' cultural orientation. Those who believed in the homogenizing power of mass consumption claimed that the act of purchasing such a standardized product drew the consumer into a world of mainstream tastes and values. Sociologist John Dollard argued at the time, for example, that the victrola revolutionized a family's pattern of

amusement because "what they listen to comes essentially from the outside, its character is cosmopolitan and national, and what the family does to create it as a family is very small indeed."[7] We get the impression of immigrant, wage-earning families sharing more in American, middle-class culture every time they rolled up the rug and danced to the Paul Whiteman orchestra.

But how workers themselves described what it meant to purchase a phonograph reveals a different picture. Typically, industrial workers in Chicago in the 1920s were first- or second-generation ethnic, from eastern or southern Europe. In story after story they related how buying a victrola helped keep Polish or Italian culture alive by allowing people to play foreign-language records, often at ethnic social gatherings. Rather than the phonograph drawing the family away from a more indigenous cultural world, as Dollard alleged, many people like Rena Domke remembered how in Little Sicily during those years neighbors "would sit in the evening and discuss all different things about Italy," and every Saturday night they pulled out a victrola "and they'd play all these Italian records and they would dance. . . ."[8] In fact, consumers of all nationalities displayed so much interest in purchasing foreign language records that in the 1920s Chicago became the center of an enormous foreign record industry, selling re-pressed recordings from Europe and new records by American immigrant artists. Even the small Mexican community in Chicago supported a shop which made phonographic records of Mexican music and distributed them all over the United States. And some American-born workers also used phonograph recordings in preserving their ties to regional culture. For example, Southerners—white and black—eased the trauma of moving north to cities like Chicago by supporting a record industry of hillbilly and "race records" geared specifically toward a Northern urban market with southern roots.[9] Thus, owning a phonograph might bring a worker closer to mainstream culture, but it did not have to. A commodity could just as easily help a person reinforce ethnic or working-class culture as lose it.

Of course, when the publishers of *True Story* spoke of a consumer revolution, they meant more than the wider distribution of luxury goods like the phonograph. The were referring to how the chain store—like A & P or Walgreen Drugs—and the nationally-advertised brands that they offered—like Lux Soap and Del Monte canned goods—were standardizing even the most routine purchasing. A distributor of packaged meat claimed, "Mass selling has become almost the universal rule in this country, a discovery of this decade of hardly less importance than the discovery of such forces as steam and electricity."[10] Doomed, everyone thought, were bulk or unmarked brands, and the small, inefficient neighborhood grocery, dry goods, or drug store that sold them. Americans wherever they lived, it was assumed, increasingly were entering stores that looked exactly alike to purchase the same items from a standard stock.

Closer examination of the consumer behavior of workers in a city like Chicago, however, suggests that workers were not patronizing chain stores. Rather, the chain store that purportedly was revolutionizing consumer behavior in the 1920s was mostly reaching the middle and upper classes. Two-thirds of the more than five hundred A & P and National Tea Stores in Chicago by 1928 were located in neighborhoods of above-average economic status (Table 1). An analysis of the location of chain stores in Chicago's suburbs reveals the same imbalance. By 1926, chains ran fifty three percent of the groceries in prosperous Oak Park, and thirty six percent in equally well-off Evanston. In contrast, in working-class Gary and Joliet, only one percent of the groceries were owned by chains. As late as 1929, the workers of Cicero found chain management in only five percent of this industrial town's 819 retail stores.[11] Chain store executives recognized that workers were too tied to local, often ethnic, merchants to abandon them, even for a small savings in price.[12] A West Side Chicago grocer explained: "People go to a place where they can order in their own language, be understood without repetition, and then exchange a few words of gossip or news."[13] Shopping at a particular neighborhood store was a matter of cultural loyalty. As one ethnic merchant put it, "The Polish business man is a part of your nation; he is your brother. Whether it is war, hunger, or trouble, he is always with you willing to help. . . . Therefore, buy from your people."[14]

No less important, the chain store's prices may have been cheaper, but it's "cash and carry" policy was too rigid for working people's limited budgets. Most workers depended on a system of credit at the store to make it from one payday to the next. In tough times, the loyal customer knew an understanding storekeeper would wait to be paid and still sell her food. So when

TABLE 1

Location of Chain Grocery Stores in Chicago, 1927–1929 by Economic Status of Neighborhood

Chain Store	Total no. stores	Total no. in census tracts with rental data	% stores in census tracts above median rental*
National Tea	535	530	66%
A & P	17	17	65%
TOTALS	552	547	65.5%

*using 1930 rental data where median monthly rental was $51.30.

Sources: *Chicago Telephone Directory*, Alphabetical and classified, 1927; *Polk's Directory of Chicago*, 1928–29; Charles S. Newcomb, *Street Address Guide by Census Area of Chicago, 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1933); "Economic Status of Families Based on Equivalent Monthly Rentals; Tracts Combined When Total Homes Are Less Than 300, But Homes With Value or Rental Unknown Were Omitted in Computing the Median," Data taken from Table 10, *Census Data of Chicago, 1930*, box 51, folder 8, Burgess Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

Figure 1. **Oscar Kibort's store on Chicago's West Side was typical of the family-run groceries that ethnic, working-class people patronized during the 1920s. Here they could buy on credit and communicate in a familiar language with the shopkeeper. Customers bought bulk goods from barrels and crates like those pictured in the foreground as well as learned more about the kinds of packaged items so carefully displayed on Mr. Kibort's shelves. Chicago Historical Society.**

an A & P opened not far from Little Sicily in Chicago, people ignored it. Instead, everyone continued to do business with the local grocer who warned, "Go to A & P they ain't going to give you credit like I give you credit here."[15] While middle-class consumers were carrying home more national brand, packaged goods in the 1920s, working-class people continued to buy in bulk—to fetch milk in their own containers, purchase hunks of soap, and scoop coffee, tea, sugar and flour out of barrels. What standard brands working-class families did buy, furthermore, they encountered through a trusted grocer, not an anonymous clerk at the A & P.[16]

When workers did buy mass-produced goods like ready-made clothing, they purchased them at stores such as Chicago's Goldblatt's Department Stores, which let customers consume on their own terms. Aware that their ethnic customers were accustomed to central marketplaces where individual vendors sold fish from one stall, shoes from another, the second-generation Goldblatt brothers, sons of a Jewish grocer, adapted this approach to their stores. Under one roof they sold everything from food to jewelry, piling

merchandise high on tables so people could handle the bargains.[17] The resulting atmosphere dismayed a University of Chicago undergraduate sociology student, more used to the elegance of Marshall Field's. To Betty Wright, Goldblatt's main floor was a mad "jumble of colors, sounds, and smells." Amidst the bedlam, she observed

> many women present with old shawls tied over their heads and bags or market baskets on their arms. They stopped at every counter that caught their eye, picked up the goods, handled it, enquired [sic] after the price, and then walked on without making any purchase. I have an idea that a good many of these women had no intention whatsoever of buying anything. They probably found Goldblatt's a pleasant place to spend an afternoon.

Most appalling to this student, "Customers seemed always ready to argue with the clerk about the price of an article and to try to 'jew them down.' "[18] Betty Wright did not appreciate that behind Goldblatt's respectable exterior facade thrived a European street market much treasured by ethnic Chicagoans.

Ethnic workers in a city like Chicago did not join what historian Daniel Boorstin has labeled "national consumption communities" nearly as quickly as many have thought. Even when they bought the inexpensive, mass-produced goods becoming increasingly available during the 1920s, contrary to the hopes of many contemporaries, a new suit of clothes did not change the man (or woman). Rather, as market researchers would finally realize in the 1950s when they developed the theory of "consumer reference groups," consumption involved the meeting of two worlds—the buyer's and the seller's—with purchasers bringing their own values to every exchange.[19] Gradually over the 1920s, workers came to share more in the new consumer goods, but in their own stores, in their own neighborhoods, and in their own way.

In the realm of consumption, workers could depend on the small-scale enterprises in their communities to help them resist the homogenizing influences of mass culture. But how did ethnic, working-class culture fare against forms of mass culture—such as motion pictures and radio—which local communities could not so easily control? Did the motion picture spectacle and a twist of the radio dial draw workers into mainstream mass culture more successfully than the A & P?

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Workers showed much more enthusiasm for motion pictures than chain stores. While movies had been around since early in the century, the number of theater seats in Chicago reached its highest level ever by the end of the 1920s. With an average of four performances daily at every theater, by 1929 Chicago had enough movie theater seats for one-half the city's population to

attend in the course of a day; and workers made up their fair share—if not more—of that audience.[20] Despite the absence of exact attendance figures, there are consistent clues that picture shows enjoyed enormous popularity among workers throughout the twenties. As the decade began, a Bureau of Labor Statistics' survey of the cost-of-living of workingmen's families found Chicago workers spending more than half of their amusement budgets on movies.[21] Even those fighting destitution made the motion picture a priority; in 1924, more than two-thirds of the families receiving Mothers' Aid Assistance in Chicago attended regularly.[22]

But knowing that workers went to the movies is one thing, assessing how they reacted to particular pictures is another. Some historians have taken the tack of analyzing the content of motion pictures for evidence of their meaning to audiences; the fact that workers made up a large part of those audiences convinces these analysts that they took home particular messages decipherable from the films. But my investigations into the variety of ways that consumers encountered and perceived mass-produced goods suggests that people can have very different reactions to the same experience. Just as the meaning of mass consumption varied with the context in which people confronted it, so too the impact of the movies depended on where, with whom, and in what kind of environment workers went to the movies during the 1920s.[23]

Chicago's workers regularly patronized neighborhood movie theaters near their homes in the 1920s, not "The Chicago," "The Uptown," "The Granada" and the other monumental picture palaces built during the period, where many historians have assumed they flocked. Neighborhood theaters had evolved from the storefront nickelodeons prevalent in immigrant, working-class communities before the war. Due to stricter city regulations, neighborhood movie houses now were fewer in number, larger, cleaner, better ventilated and from five to twenty cents more expensive than in nickelodeon days. But still they were much simpler than the ornate movie palaces which seated several thousand at a time. For example, local theaters in a working-class community like South Chicago (next to U.S. Steel's enormous South Works plant) ranged in size from "Pete's International," which sat only 250—more when Pete made the kids double up in each seat for Sunday matinees—to the "Gayety" holding 750 to the "New Calumet" with room for almost a thousand.[24] Only rarely did workers pay at least twice as much admission, plus carfare, to see the picture palace show. Despite the fact that palaces often claimed to be "paradise for the common man," geographical plotting of Chicago's picture palaces reveals that most of them were nowhere near working-class neighborhoods: a few were downtown, the rest strategically placed in new shopping areas to attract the middle classes to the movies.[25] Going to the pictures was something workers did more easily and cheaply close to home. As a U.S. Steel employee explained, it was "a long way"—in many respects—from the steeltowns of

Southeast Chicago to the South Side's fancy Tivoli Theater.[26]

For much of the decade, working-class patrons found the neighborhood theater not only more affordable but more welcoming, as the spirit of the community carried over into the local movie hall. Chicago workers may have savored the exotic on the screen, but they preferred encountering it in familiar company. The theater manager, who was often the owner and usually lived in the community, tailored his film selections to local tastes and changed them every few days to accommodate neighborhood people who attended frequently. Residents of Chicago's industrial neighborhoods rarely had to travel far to find pictures to their liking, which they viewed among the same neighbors and friends they had on the block.

When one entered a movie theater in a working-class neighborhood of Chicago, the ethnic character of the community quickly became evident. The language of the yelling and jeering that routinely gave sound to silent movies provided the first clue. "The old Italians used to go to these movies," recalled Ernest Dalle-Molle, "and when the good guys were chasing the bad guys in Italian—they'd say—Getem—catch them—out loud in the theater."[27] Stage

Figure 2. **The 398-seat Pastime Theater on West Madison Street typified the small, neighborhood theaters that workers frequented during the 1920s. Admission was twenty-five cents in 1924, and most who attended were spared the additional cost of carfare as they lived within walking distance. Chicago Historical Society.**

Figure 3. **The 4000-seat Tivoli Theater at Cottage Grove and 63rd Street on the South Side contrasted in almost every way with neighborhood theaters like the Pastime. This so-called "picture palace" was owned by Balaban & Katz, the largest theater chain in Chicago. Admission was a dollar in 1924; that price plus the carfare required from most working-class neighborhoods ensured that middle-class people, not workers, were the picture palace's primary patrons. Chicago Historical Society.**

events accompanying the films told more. In Back of the Yards near the packinghouses, at Schumacher's or the Davis Square Theater, viewers often saw a Polish play along with the silent film.[28] Everywhere, amateur nights offered "local talent" a moment in the limelight. At the Butler Theater in Little Sicily, which the community had rechristened the "Garlic Opera House,"

Italian music shared the stage with American films.[29] In the neighborhood theater, Hollywood and ethnic Chicago coexisted.

Neighborhood theaters so respected local culture that they reflected community prejudices as well as strengths. The Commercial Theater in South Chicago typified many neighborhood theaters in requiring Mexicans and blacks to sit in the balcony, while reserving the main floor for white ethnics who dominated the community's population.[30] One theater owner explained, "White people don't like to sit next to the colored or Mexicans. . . . We used to have trouble about the first four months, but not now. They go by themselves to their place."[31] Sometimes blacks and Mexicans were not even allowed into neighborhood theaters. In contrast, the more cosmopolitan picture palaces, like those owned by the largest chain in Chicago, Balaban & Katz, were instructed to let in whoever could pay.[32] Thus, the neighborhood theater reinforced the values of the community as powerfully as any on the screen. This is not to deny that working-class audiences were affected by the content of motion pictures, but to suggest that when people viewed movies in the familiar world of the neighborhood theater, identification with their local community was bolstered, and the subversive impact of the picture often constrained.

Thus, even if local communities did not control the production of motion pictures during the 1920s, they still managed for a good part of the decade to influence how residents received them. The independent, neighborhood theater in that way resembled the neighborhood store, harmonizing standardized products with local, particularly ethnic, culture.

Neighborhood stores and theaters buffered the potential disorientation of mass culture by allowing their patrons to consume within the intimacy of the community. Rather than disrupting the existing peer culture, that peer culture accommodated the new products. Shopping and theatergoing were easily mediated by the community because they were collective activities. Radio, on the other hand, entered the privacy of the home. At least potentially, what went out across the airwaves could transport listeners, as individuals, into a different world.

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As it turned out, though, radio listening did not require workers to forsake their cultural communities any more than shopping or moviegoing did. Radio listening was far from the passive, atomized experience we are familiar with today. It was more active; many working people became interested in early radio as a hobby, and built their own crystal and vacuum tube sets. Radio retailers recognized that workers were particularly apt to build their own radios. "If the store is located in a community most of the inhabitants of which are workmen," a study of the radio industry showed, "there will be a large

proportion of parts . . . ," in contrast to the more expensive, preassembled models stocked by the radio stores of fashionable districts. That radio appealed to the artisanal interests of Chicago's workers was evident in their neighborhoods in another way. As early as 1922, a Chicago radio journalist noted that "crude homemade aerials are on one roof in ten along the miles of bleak streets in the city's industrial zones."[33]

Even workers who bought increasingly affordable, ready-made radios spent evenings bent over their dial boards, working to get "the utmost possible DX" (distance), and then recording their triumphs in a radio log. Beginning in the fall of 1922, in fact, Chicago stations agreed not to broadcast at all after 7 p.m. on Monday evenings to allow the city's radio audience to tune in faraway stations otherwise blocked because they broadcasted on the same wavelengths as local stations. "Silent Nights" were religiously observed in other cities as well. In addition to distance, radio enthusiasts concerned themselves with technical challenges such as cutting down static, making "the short jumps," and operating receivers with one hand.[34]

Not only was radio listening active, but it was also far from isolating. By 1930 in Chicago, there was one radio for every two or three households in workers' neighborhoods, and people sat around in local shops or neighbors' parlors listening together (Table 2 and Table 3). Surveys showed that on average, four or five people listened to one set at any particular time; in eighty-five percent of homes, the entire family listened together. Communal radio listening mediated between local and mass culture much like the neighborhood store or theater.[35]

Even Chicago's working-class youth, whose parents feared they were abandoning the ethnic fold for more commercialized mass culture, were listening to the radio in the company of other second-generation ethnic peers at neighborhood clubs when not at home with their families. Known as "basement clubs," "social clubs," or "athletic clubs," these associations guided the cultural experimentation of young people from their mid-teens to mid-twenties. Here, in rented quarters away form parental eyes and ears, club members socialized to the constant blaring of the radio—the "prime requisite" of every club, according to one observer. The fact that young people were encountering mass culture like the radio within ethnic, neighborhood circles helped to minimize the disruption.[36]

But even more important to an investigation of the impact of the radio on workers' consciousness, early radio broadcasting had a distinctly grassroots orientation. To begin with, the technological limitations of early broadcasting ensured that small, nearby stations with low power dominated the ether waves. Furthermore, with no clear way of financing independent radio stations, it fell to existing institutions to subsidize radio operations. From the start, nonprofit ethnic, religious and labor groups put radio to their service. In 1925, twenty-eight percent of the 571 radio stations nationwide were owned by

TABLE 2

Radio Ownership in Five Chicago Neighborhoods Inhabited by Industrial Workers, 1930

Neighborhood	% Households Owning Radios
1. *Southeast Chicago* (Steel Mills)	*53.00%*
East Side	69.37%
South Chicago	55.90%
Hegewisch	46.74%
South Deering	40.00%
2. *Back of The Yards* (Meatpacking)	*46.07%*
Bridgeport	48.35%
New City	43.78%
3. *Old Immigrant Neighborhoods* (Small Factories & Garments)	*37.41%*
West Town	41.33%
Lower West Side	36.79%
Near West Side	34.10%
4. *Southwest Corridor* (Int'l. Harvester, West. Electr.)	*55.42%*
North Lawndale	58.41%
McKinley Park	55.03%
South Lawndale	54.68%
Brighton Park	53.55%
5. *Black Belt*	*46.44%*
Washington Park	61.58%
Grand Blvd.	46.90%
Douglas	30.85%
Radio Ownership in Middle-Class Neighborhoods for Comparison	
Avalon Park	83.96%
Chatham	81.26%
Greater Grand Crossing	76.04%
Englewood	67.61%

Source: Louis Wirth and Margaret Furez, eds., *Local Community Fact Book* (Chicago: Chicago Recreation Commission, 1938).

educational institutions and churches, less than four percent by commercial broadcasting companies.[37] In Chicago, ethnic groups saw radio as a way of keeping their countrymen and women in touch with native culture. By 1926, several radio stations explicitly devoted to ethnic programming broadcasted in Chicago—WGES, WSBC, WEDC, and WCRW—while other stations carried "nationality hours." Through the radio, Chicago's huge foreign language-speaking population heard news from home, native music, and special broad-

TABLE 3

United States Census Data on Family Ownership of Radios, 1930

A. Radio Ownership in Chicago and other U.S. Community Types, By Race and Ethnicity of Families

Family Race & Ethnicity	Chicago	Urban	Rural Farm	Rural Non-Farm
Native White	74.2%	56.3%	24.0%	37.4%
For-born White	54.1%	46.2%	32.0%	35.1%
Black	42.6%	14.4%	.3%	3.0%
All Families	63.2%	50.0%	20.8%	33.7%

B. Percent Radio-Owning Families in Industrial Suburbs of Cook County, 1930

City	Percent Families Reporting Radios
Berwyn	78.1%
Blue Island	73.7%
Calumet City	57.1%
Chicago Heights	53.5%
Cicero	65.4%
Harvey	66.7%
Melrose Park	57.8%
Cook County Overall	64.6%

Sources: United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933); "Families in Cook County with Radios (1930)," *Daily News Almanac and Year Book for 1933* (Chicago: Daily News, 1933), 801.

casts like Benito Mussolini's messages to Italians living in America.[38] One of the stations which sponsored a "Polish Hour" and an "Irish Hour" is also noteworthy for bringing another aspect of local, working-class culture to the radio. The Chicago Federation of Labor organized WCFL, "the Voice of Labor," to, in its own words, "help awaken the slumbering giant of labor." Having suffered a variety of defeats after World War I, most notable the failure to organize Chicago's steel mills and packing plants, the Federation seized radio in the 1920s as a new strategy for reaching the city's workers. "Labor News Flashes," "Chicago Federation of Labor Hour," and "Labor Talks with the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union" alternated with entertainment like "Earl Hoffman's Chez Pierre Orchestra" and "Musical Potpourri."[39]

Radio, therefore, brought familiar distractions into the homes of workers: talk, ethnic nationality hours, labor news, church services, and vaudeville-type musical entertainment with hometown—often ethnic—performers. More innovative forms of radio programming, such as situation comedy shows, dramatic series and soap operas, only developed later. And a survey com-

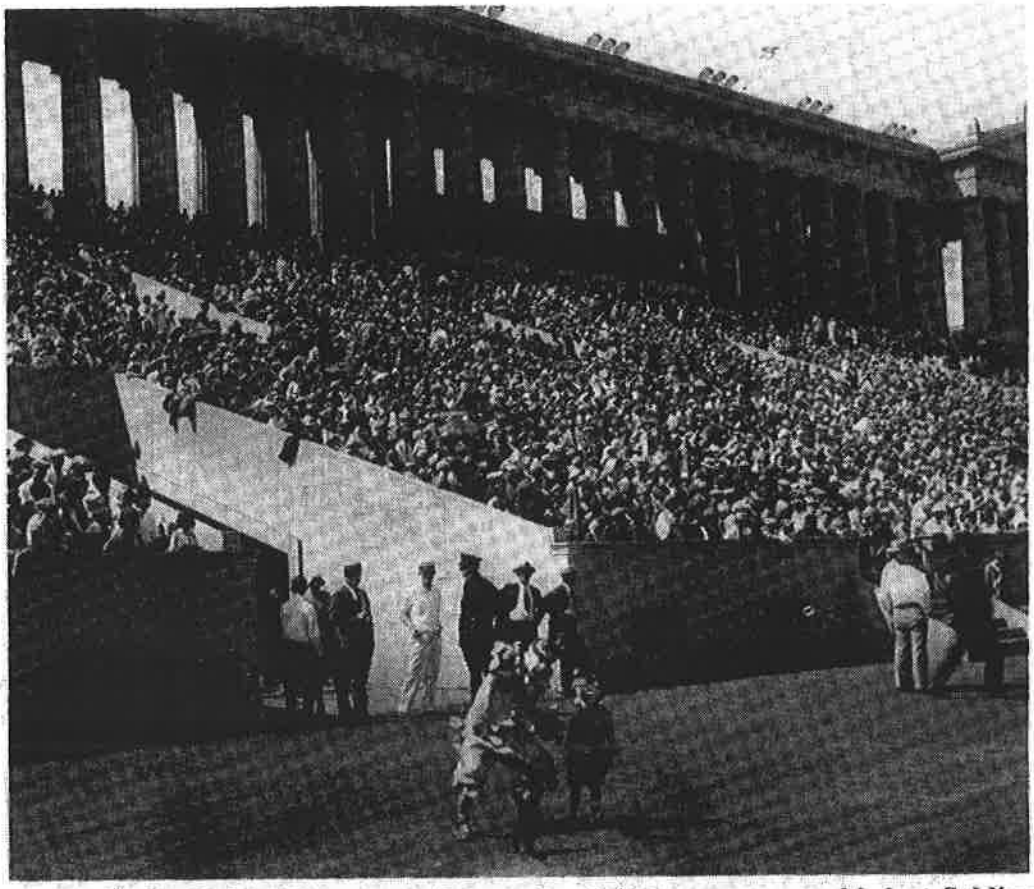

Figure 4. **On Labor Day, 1927, thousands of Chicagoans assembled at Soldier Field in Grant Park for a celebration to benefit WCFL, the Chicago Federation of Labor's "Voice of Labor" radio station. In this early era before commercial, network radio came to dominate the air waves, local non-profit radio stations like WCFL were common. When Chicago workers turned on the radio, they thus heard familiar messages from labor unions, churches, ethnic societies, and other grassroots organizations. Chicago Historical Society.**

missioned by NBC in 1928 found that eighty percent of the radio audience regularly listened to these local, not to distant, stations.[40] Sometimes listeners even knew a singer or musician personally, since many stations' shoestring budgets forced them to rely on amateurs; whoever dropped in at the station had a chance to be heard. Well-known entertainers, moreover, shied away from radio at first, dissatisfied with the low pay but also uncomfortable performing without an audience and fearful of undercutting their box office attractiveness with free, on-air concerts. While tuning in a radio may have been a new experience, few surprises came "out of the ether."[41]

As a result, early radio in Chicago promoted ethnic, religious, and working-class affiliations rather than undermining them, as many advocates of mass

culture had predicted. No doubt radio did expose some people to new cultural experiences—to different ethnic and religious traditions or new kinds of music. But most important, workers discovered that participating in radio, as in mass consumption and the movies, did not require repudiation of established social identities. Radio at mid-decade, dominated as it was by local, noncommercial broadcasting, offered little evidence that it was fulfilling the prediction of advocates and proving itself "the greatest leveler," capable of sweeping away "the mutual distrust and enmity of laborer and executive . . . business man and artist, scientist and cleric, the tenement dweller and the estate owner, the hovel and the mansion."[42]

By letting community institutions—ethnic stores, neighborhood theaters and local radio stations—mediate in the delivery of mass culture, workers avoided the kind of cultural reorientation that Madison Avenue had expected. Working-class families could buy phonographs or ready-made clothing, go regularly to the picture show, and be avid radio fans without feeling pressure to abandon their existing social affiliations.

* * *

While this pattern captures the experience of white ethnic workers in Chicago's factories, it does not characterize their black co-workers, who came North in huge numbers during and after World War I to work in mass production plants. Blacks developed a different, and complex, relationship to mass culture. Black much more than ethnic workers satisfied those who hoped a mass market would emerge during the twenties. Unlike ethnic workers, blacks did not reject chain stores and standard brands, nor try to harness radio to traditional goals. But blacks disappointed those who assumed an integrated, American culture would accompany uniformity in tastes. For ironically, by participating in mainstream commercial life—which black Chicagoans did more than their ethnic co-workers—blacks came to feel more independent and influential as a race, not more integrated into white middle-class society. Mass culture—chain stores, brand goods, popular music—offered blacks the ingredients from which to construct a new, urban black culture.

Blacks' receptivity to mass culture grew out of a surprising source, a faith in black commercial endeavor not so very different from ethnic people's loyalty to ethnic businesses. During the 1920s, a consensus developed in Northern black communities that a separate "black economy" could provide the necessary glue to hold what was a new and fragile world together. If blacks could direct their producer, consumer and investment power toward a black marketplace by supporting "race businesses," the whole community would benefit. Less economic exploitation and more opportunity would come blacks' way. This was not a new idea. "Black capitalism" had been fundamental to Booker

T. Washington's accommodationist, self-help philosophy at the turn of the century. What changed in the 1920s was that now blacks of all political persuasions—including the Garveyite nationalists and even the socialist-leaning "New Negro" crowd—shared a commitment to a separate black economy. In the face of racial segregation and discrimination, the black community would forge an alternative "Black Metropolis" which rejected white economic control without rejecting capitalism.[43]

At the center of the separate black economy stood "race businesses." Black consumers were told that when they patronized these enterprises, they bought black jobs, black entrepreneurship, and black independence along with goods and services, and bid farewell to white employment prejudice, insults and overcharging. "You don't know race respect if you don't buy from Negroes," sermonized one pastor.[44] Central to the nationalist program of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association, not surprisingly, were commercial

Figure 5. **This photograph, taken by Jack Delano of the U.S. Office of War Information in April 1942, depicts the kind of small business that blacks succeeded in, since barbers, hairdressers and undertakers faced little competition from whites with their superior economic resources. The caption reads, "Mr. Oscar J. Freeman, barber, owns the Metropolitan Barber Shop, 4654 South Parkway. Mr. Freeman has been in business for 14 years," which would put his shop's opening at 1928. Library of Congress.**

enterprises—a steamship line, hotel, printing plant, black doll factory, and chains of groceries, restaurants and laundries.[45]

But the "black economy" strategy was only moderately successful. Those black businesses which did best were geared solely to black needs, where there was a large Negro market with little white competition. For example, undertakers, barbers and beauticians faced few white contenders; black cosmetic companies even succeeded in selling hair products like Madame C. J. Walker's hair growth and straightening creams through nationwide chains.[46] And black-owned insurance companies whose salesmen knocked on doors up and down blocks of the Black Belt proved the greatest business triumph of all.[47] But insurmountable economic barriers kept other Negro entrepreneurs from competing viably. Black merchants and businessmen suffered from lack of experience, lack of capital (there were only two black banks in the city to provide loans, and these had limited resources), and an inability to offer customers the credit that ethnic storekeepers gave their own countrymen or Jewish businessmen in black areas gave black customers. The short supply of cash in black stores, moreover, kept wholesale orders small, retail prices high, and shelf stock low, all of which forced black customers to shop elsewhere.[48]

The poor showing of black business made black customers, even those deeply committed to a black economy, dependent on white business. But concern with black economic independence nonetheless left its mark. Within the white commercial world, blacks developed two preferences which they pursued when financially able: standard brand goods and chain stores. Blacks shopping in non-black stores felt that packaged goods protected them against unscrupulous storekeepers or clerks. Not sharing the ethnic worker's confidence in his compatriot grocer, the black consumer distrusted bulk goods. This reliance on brand names only grew, moreover, when black customers who could survive without credit increasingly chose to patronize chain stores, attracted to their claims of standardized products and prices.[49]

No less important, the chain store could be pressured to hire black clerks, while the Jewish, Greek or Italian store in a black neighborhood was usually family-run. If blacks could not own successful businesses, at least they should be able to work in them. By the mid to late 1920s, consumer boycotts to force chains to hire blacks flourished in black neighborhoods. "Don't Spend Your Money Where You Can't Work" crusades sought black economic independence through employment rather than entrepreneurship. By 1930, consumers in Chicago's enormous South Side Black Belt had pressured local branches of The South Center Department Store, Sears Roebuck, A & P, Consumers' Market, Neisner's 5 Cents to a Dollar, Woolworth's, and Walgreen's Drugs to employ blacks, some almost exclusively.[50]

With strict limitations on where blacks could live and work in Chicago,

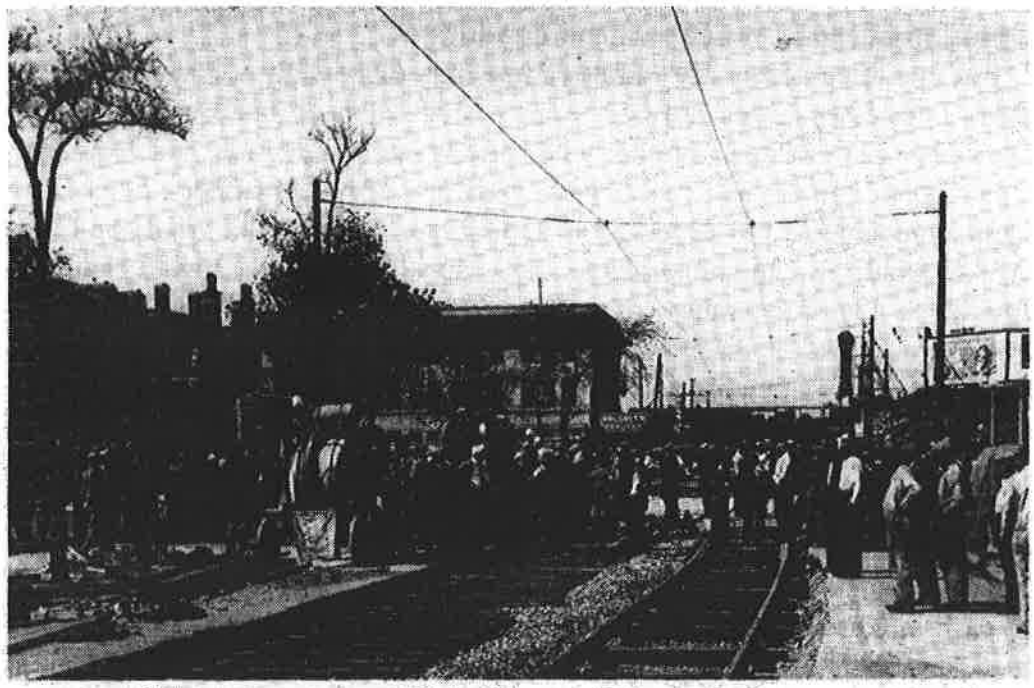

Figure 6. **This photograph, published in the *Chicago Daily News* in 1930, bore the caption, "Race Riot, 51 St. and Grand Blvd." Whether it was in fact a race riot, or simply an assembly of unemployed men in the Black Belt, is hard to say, but note the "Walgreen Drugs" sign prominent in the background, an indication of the prevalence of chain stores in black neighborhoods during the 1920s.**

consumption—both through race businesses and more mainline chains—became a major avenue through which blacks could assert their independence. But chain stores were not the only aspect of mass culture to contribute to the making of an urban, black identity. Blacks also played a role in shaping another major feature of mass culture in the twenties—jazz. In contrast to black commercial schemes which mimicked white examples or black consumption which contented itself largely with white products, here the trend-setting went the other way. Black folk culture, black inventiveness, black talent gave the twenties its distinctive image as the "Jazz Age" and dictated the character of mainstream American popular music for many years to come.

Chicago was the jazz capital of the nation during the 1920s. Here, in the middle of the Black Belt, mixed audiences in "Black and Tan" cabarets tapped to the beat of King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Lil Hardin, "Fats" Waller, Freddy Keppard, Jelly Roll Morton and others. In segregated company, blacks relished Chicago's "hot jazz" at their own more modest clubs, black movie theaters, and semi-private house parties; whites, meanwhile, danced black dances like the Charleston to black bands playing in palatial ballrooms that prohibited Negro patronage.[51]

The Chicago jazzmen's music reached far beyond the city's night clubs.

Blacks—and some whites—all over the country bought millions of blues and jazz phonograph recordings, known as "race records." At record stores on Chicago's South Side, one store owner remembered, "Colored people would form a line twice around the block when the latest record of Bessie or Ma or Clara or Mamie come in."[52] With the exception of Negro-owned Black Swan Records, white recording companies like Paramount, Columbia, Okey and Victor were the ones to produce special lines for the Negro market. But because white companies depended on the profitable sales of race recordings as the phonograph business bottomed out with the rise of radio, they had little interest in interfering with the purest black sound. As far away as the rural south, blacks kept up with musicians from Chicago and New York by purchasing records from mail-order ads in the *Chicago Defender* or from Pullman porters travelling south.[53] The radio, too, helped bring black jazz to a broad audience. Chicago stations broadcasted Earl "Fatha" Hines with his band at the Grand Terrace Supper Club, and other groups performing at the Blackhawk Restaurant. Fletcher Henderson's Rainbow Orchestra played at New York's Savoy, but in time was heard in homes all over America.

Here again, then, mass culture in the form of commercial record companies and radio helped blacks develop and promote a unique, and increasingly national, black sound. And the dissemination of jazz not only contributed to black identity. It also helped shape the character of American popular music. True, white bands often reaped more financial profits from a "sweetened" and more "swinging" jazz than did its black creators in Chicago's Black Belt clubs (though black men—Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson and Don Redman—played an important role in turning the Chicago "hot" sound into the smoother, bigger, more tightly packaged "swing" that came out of New York.) And also true, by making a name for themselves in the music world, blacks fit right into white stereotypes of the "natural musician." Nonetheless, jazz gave black musicians and their fans recognition in the cultural mainstream, for expressing themselves in a language they knew was their own. Long before Motown, blacks were molding American popular music in their own image.

Black jazz recordings, or black employment in chain stores, became a vehicle for making a claim on mainstream society that racism had otherwise denied. When blacks patronized chain stores, they were asserting independence from local white society, not enslavement to cultural norms. No doubt their consumption of mass cultural products did give them interests in common with mainstream American society, and subjected them to the vagaries of the capitalist market. But with mass culture as raw material, blacks fashioned their own culture during the 1920s that made them feel no less black.

So it would seem that despite the expectations of mass culture promoters, chain stores, standard brands, motion pictures, and the radio did not absorb workers—white or black—into a middle-class, American culture. To some

extent, people resisted aspects of mass culture, as ethnic workers did chain stores. But even when they indulged in Maxwell House Coffee, Rudolph Valentino and radio entertainment, these experiences did not uproot them since they were encountered under local, often ethnic, sponsorship. When a politically conscious, Communist worker asserted that "I had bought a jalopy in 1924, and it didn't change me. It just made it easier for me to function," he spoke for other workers who may not have been as self-conscious, but who like him were not made culturally middle-class by the new products they consumed.[54]

Beginning in the late 1920s and increasingly in the 1930s, local groups lost their ability to control the dissemination of mass culture. Sure of their hold over the middle-class market, chain stores more aggressively pursued ethnic, working-class markets, making it much harder for small merchants to survive. The elaboration of the Hollywood studio system and the costs of installing sound helped standardize moviegoing as well. Not only were neighborhood theaters increasingly taken over by chains, but the "talkies" themselves hushed the audience's interjections and replaced the ethnic troupes and amateur talent shows with taped shorts distributed nationally. Similarly, by the late 1920s, the local non-profit radio era also had ended. In the aftermath of the passage of the Federal Radio Act of 1927, national, commercial, network radio imposed order on what admittedly had been a chaotic scene, but at the expense of small, local stations. When Chicago's workers switched on the radio by 1930, they were likely to hear the A & P Gypsies and the Eveready Hour on stations that had almost all affiliated with either NBC or CBS, or had negotiated—like even Chicago's WCFL, "the Voice of Labor"—to carry some network shows. The Great Depression only reinforced this national commercial trend by undermining small distributors of all kinds.

Thus, grassroots control over mass culture did diminish during the thirties. But the extent to which this more national mass culture in the end succeeded in assimilating workers to middle-class values remains an open question. It is very likely that even though the structure of distributing mass culture did change by the 1930s, workers still did not fulfill the expectations of *True Story Magazine* editors and J. Walter Thompson Company executives. It is possible that workers maintained a distinctive sense of group identity even while participating, much the way blacks in the twenties did. Historical circumstances may have changed in such a way that workers continued to put mass culture to their own uses and remain a class apart. And increasingly over time, mass culture promoters—moviemakers, radio programmers, chain store operators and advertisers—would recognize this possibility, and gear products to particular audiences; the 1930s mark the emergence of the concept of a segmented mass market, which gradually displaced expectations of one homogenous audience so prevalent in the 1920s.

Relatedly, we should not assume—as advocates of the embourgeoisement school do—that as workers shared more in a national commercial culture, they were necessarily depoliticized. In fact, there is much evidence to suggest that a more national mass culture helped unify workers previously divided along ethnic, racial and geographical lines, facilitating the national organizing drive of the CIO. A working population that shared a common cultural life offered new opportunities for unified political action; sit-down strikers who charted baseball scores and danced to popular music together and union newspapers which kept their readers informed about network radio programs testified to the intriguing connections between cultural and political unity. Extension of this study into the 1930s and beyond might reveal that, ironically, mass culture did more to create an integrated working-class culture than a classless American one. In taking this study beyond the 1920s, thus, it is imperative that investigators continue to pay careful attention to the context in which people encountered mass culture, in order not to let the mythical assumptions about mass culture's homogenizing powers prevail as they did in our popular images of the twenties.

NOTES

1. True Story Magazine, *The American Economic Evolution*, vol. 1 (New York, 1930), 32–34, 67.

2. J. Walter Thompson Company, "Newsletter #139," 1 July 1926, 157–59, RG 11, J. Walter Thompson Advertising Company Archives (JWT).

3. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York, 1976); Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (New York, 1982); Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption* (New York, 1983). While this is also the general thrust of Roy Rosenzweig's argument, he does suggest that in bringing diverse groups of workers together, the movies unintentionally may have helped them mount a more unified political challenge in the 1930s. But they did not organize out of a working-class consciousness. Having shared in middle-class culture in the 1920s, they fought to sustain and expand their access to it, which was being endangered by the depression. Roy Rosenzweig, *"Eight Hours For What We Will": Workers and Leisure in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1870–1930* (New York, 1984).

Sociologists have also shared the assumptions of contemporary observers who were confident of the homogenizing power of mass culture. See Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York, 1962); John Goldthorpe and David Lockwood, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge, 1969). For criticism of the embourgeoisement thesis, see John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson, *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (London, 1979) and James E. Cronin, *Labour and Society in Britain, 1918–1979* (London, 1984), 146–72.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony applied to mass culture is more complex. If defined narrowly, it comes close to embourgeoisement in suggesting that by participating in mass culture, workers come to share values with the ruling elite and thereby reinforce its control. If defined more broadly, however, the theory allows for more diversity in responses to mass culture but nonetheless argues that if the experience does not make workers into revolutionaries, it still

serves to legitimate elite rule. For a useful discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, see T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 (June 1985): 567–93.

4. On the wages and unemployment of Chicago's factory workers, see my dissertation, "Learning to Live in the Welfare State: Industrial Workers in Chicago Between the Wars, 1919–1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1986), chap. 4, "Contested Loyalty at the Workplace."

5. Wilbur C. Plummer, "Social and Economic Consequences of Buying on the Installment Plan," "Supplement" vol. 129 of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Jan. 1927), 2; Edwin R. A. Seligman, *The Economics of Installment Selling: A Study in Consumers' Credit with Special Reference to the Automobile* (New York, 1927) cited in "Economics of Installment Selling," *Monthly Labor Review* 26 (Feb. 1928): 233.

6. Leila Houghteling, *The Income and Standard of Living of Unskilled Laborers in Chicago* (Chicago, 1927); Chicago Tribune, *Chicago Tribune Fact Book, 1928* (Chicago, 1928), 46; Frank Stricker, "Affluence for Whom?—Another Look at Prosperity and the Working Classes in the 1920's," *Labor History* 24 (Winter 1983): 30–32. Stricker estimates that even by 1929, a working-class family had no more than a thirty percent chance of owning a car.

7. John Dollard, "The Changing Functions of the American Family" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1931), 137–38.

8. See the following transcripts of interviews from Italians in Chicago Project (IC), University of Illinois Chicago Circle (UICC): Rena Domke, 28 Apr. 1980, Chicago, 3; Mario Avignone, 12 July 1979, Chicago, 24; Thomas Perpoli, 26 June 1980, Chicago, 34; Theresa DeFalco, 28 Apr. 1980, Downers Grove, Ill., 17; Leonard Giuleano, 2 Jan. 1980, Chicago, 19; Rena Morandin, 22 July 1980, Chicago, 18; Ernest Dalle-Molle, 30 Apr. 1980, Downers Grove, Ill., 76; Edward Baldacci, 29 Apr. 1980, Chicago Heights, Ill., 17. For additional evidence of how Italians valued the phonograph as a way to enjoy their native culture, see Gaetano DeFilippis, "Social Life in an Immigrant Community" (c. 1930), 42, box 130, folder 2, Burgess Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections (UCSC); C. W. Jenkins, "Chicago's Pageant of Nations: Italians and their Contribution," *Chicago Evening Post*, 16 Nov. 1929, Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey (CFLPS), box 22, UCSC; Autobiography of an Italian Immigrant, n.d., 18, box 64, folder 24, Chicago Area Project Papers (CAP), Chicago Historical Society (CHS), Chicago.

9. Pekka Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings: An Introduction"; Richard K. Spottswood, "Commercial Ethnic Recordings in the United States," and idem., "The Sajewski Story: Eighty Years of Polish Music in Chicago," in *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*, American Folklife Center, Studies in American Folklife, no. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1982), 1–66, 133–73; Robert C. Jones and Louis R. Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago* (Chicago, 1931), 7. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for *American Quarterly* for pointing out how similarly Southerners used phonograph recordings.

10. "Supreme Court of the District of Columbia in Equity No. 37623, United States of America Petitioner vs. Swift & Company, Armour & Company, Morris & Company, Wilson & Co., Inc., and The Cudahy Packing Co., et al., Defendants, On Petitions of Swift & Company, and Its Associate Defendants, and Armour & Company, and Its Associate Defendants, for Modification of Decree of February 27, 1920, Petitioning Defendants Statement of the Case," 1930, 14. For more on chain stores as a way of streamlining distribution to make it equal in efficiency to mass production, see *Chain Store Progress* 1 (Nov.–Dec. 1929), *Chain Store Progress* 2 (Jan. 1930).

For basic information on the development of chain stores, see James L. Palmer, "Economic and Social Aspects of Chain Stores," *Journal of Business of the University of Chicago* 2 (1929): 172–290; Paul H. Nystrom, *Economic Principles of Consumption* (New York, 1929), 518–22; Nystrom, *Chain Stores* (Washington, D.C., 1930); Walter S. Hayward, "The Chain Store and Distribution," *Social Science Review* 115 (Sept. 1924): 220–25.

For details on Chicago's chain stores, see Ernest Hugh Shideler, "The Chain Store: A Study of the Ecological Organization of a Modern City" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1927); Committee on Business Research, "Study Sales of Groceries in Chicago," *Chicago Commerce*, 14 Apr. 1928, 15; "Analyze Variety Store Sales Here," *Chicago Commerce*, 1 Sept. 1928, 23; Einer Bjorkland and James L. Palmer, *A Study of the Prices of Chain and Independent Grocers in Chicago* (Chicago, 1930); Ernest Frederic Witte, "Organization, Management, and Control

of Chain Drug Stores" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1932); Robert Greenwell Knight, "A Study of the Organization and Control Methods of Walgreen Company's Chain of Drug Stores" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1925).

11. "How Strong Are the Chain Groceries in the Leading Cities?" *J. Walter Thompson News Bulletin* (June 1926): 14–21, RG 11, JWT; United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Volume 1, Retail Distribution* (Washington, D.C., 1934), 662.

12. Ling Me Chen, "The Development of Chain Stores in the United States" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1929), 12, 102; William J. Baxter, "The Future of the Chain Store," *Chicago Commerce*, 29 Oct. 1928, 24; "The Science of Chain Store Locations," *Chain Store Progress* 1 (Mar. 1929): 5; Stanley Resor, "What Do These Changes Mean?" *J. Walter Thompson News Bulletin* 104 (Dec. 1923): 12–13, JWT.

A 1927–28 study of chain store locations in Atlanta found a situation much like Chicago's. Forty-five chain stores served the 8,634 families in the "best" areas of town—one store for every 191 families—while in the "third best" and "poorest" areas combined, the same number of chains served 33,323 families, one store for every 740 families. Guy C. Smith, "Selective Selling Decreases Costs: Market Analysis Enables Seller to Choose His Customer, Saving Costly Distribution Wastes," *Chicago Commerce*, 14 Apr. 1928, 24.

13. Quoted in Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States, Chicago and the Calumet Region*, vol. 7 in the University of California Publications in Economics (Berkeley, 1932), 169.

14. *Dziennik Zjednoczenia*, 28 Nov. 1932, quoted in Joseph Chalasinski, "Polish and Parochial School Among Polish Immigrants in America: A Study of a Polish Neighborhood in South Chicago," n.d., 20, box 33, folder 2, CAP Papers.

Among Mexican immigrants, who came to Chicago in increasing numbers during the 1920s, loyalty to Mexico entered into the selection of stores to patronize. It was not enough that a merchant be Mexican, but he had to also remain a Mexican citizen. One storekeeper complained, "I have a store in the Mexican district. If I become a citizen of the United States the Mexicans won't trade with me, because they wouldn't think I was fair to them or loyal to my country. I read the papers and I would like to vote, but I must not become a citizen. I have to have the Mexican trade to make a living." Quoted in Edward Hayden, "Immigration, the Second Generation, and Juvenile Delinquency," n.d., 10, box 131, folder 3, Burgess Papers.

On a practical level, patrons felt that they could best trust their own merchants; butchers of other "races" would certainly put a heavier thumb on the scale. R. D. McCleary, "General Survey of Attitudes Involved in the Formation of a Youth Council on the Near-West Side," n.d., 2, box 101, folder 10, CAP Papers.

15. Paul Penio, 30 June 1980, Itasca, Ill., IC, UICC, 17.

16. Sidney Sorkin, "A Ride Down Roosevelt Road, 1920–1940," *Chicago Jewish Historical Society News* (Oct. 1979): 6; The Chicago Tribune, "Consumer Survey: An Investigation into the Shopping Habits of 2205 Chicago Housewives, October 1929," mimeographed. A study of one hundred working-class Chicagoans found that in 1927 "curiously enough, canned goods and American inventions—the cheaper ways of filling an empty stomach . . .—seem to have invaded the ranks but little." Laura Friedman, "A Study of One Hundred Unemployed Families in Chicago, January 1927 to June 1932" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1933), 112.

Sophonisba Breckinridge spoke with a Croatian woman who pointed out that in her neighborhood store she could ask the grocer about new things she saw but did not know how to use, whereas elsewhere she could not ask and so would not buy. Sophonisba Breckinridge, *New Homes for Old* (New York, 1921), 123.

17. JoEllen Goodman and Barbara Marsh, "The Goldblatt's Story: From Poverty to Retailing Riches to Ch. 11 Disgrace," *Crain's Chicago Business* 4 (19–25 Oct. 1981): 17–27; "Four Boys and a Store," 30 June 1960, mimeographed press release.

18. Betty Wright, Paper for Sociology 264, Mar. 1931, 4–6, box 156, folder 2, Burgess Papers. William Ireland noted that the Wieboldt's Store on Milwaukee Avenue lost its lower-class customers to Iverson's—across the street—when it changed its merchandising techniques to attract middle-class customers. " 'The lower-class' Poles will only trade where the store puts out on the sidewalk baskets of wares through which customers can rummage." William Rutherford

Ireland, "Young American Poles" (written as M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1932, but not submitted), 26.

19. Louis E. Boone, *Classics in Consumer Behavior: Selected Readings Together With the Authors' Own Retrospective Comments* (Tulsa, 1977).

20. Alice Miller Mitchell, *Children and Movies* (Chicago, 1929), 66.

21. "Cost of Living in the United States—Clothing and Miscellaneous Expenditures," *Monthly Labor Review* 9 (Nov. 1919): 16.

22. Mary F. Bogue, *Administration of Mothers' Aid in Ten Localities with Special Reference to Health, Housing, Education and Recreation*, Children's Bureau Publication No. 184 (Washington, D.C., 1928), 90.

At the end of the decade, one study showed wage earner families spending a greater percentage of income on picture shows than families of either clerks or professionals: the $22.56 a year they put toward movies equalled that expended by clerks with a third more income and was twice as much as professionals spent who were earning salaries almost four times higher. President's Research Committee, *Recent Social Trends in the United States*, vol. 2 (New York, 1933; reprinted Westport, Conn., 1970), 895.

23. For a study that analyzes film content for insight into audience response, see Lary May's fascinating *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry, With a new Preface* (Chicago, 1983).

24. "Trip to Calumet Theatre Brings Back Memories," *Daily Calumet*, 23 Nov. 1981; "South Chicago Was Home to Many Theaters," *Daily Calumet*, 25 Apr. 1983; Felipe Salazar and Rodolfo Camacho, "The Gayety: A Theatre's Struggle for Survival," Project for Metro History Fair, n.d., manuscript; "Southeast Chicago Theatres Filled Entertainment Need," *Daily Calumet*, 3 Jan. 1983; "Theaters Plentiful on the Southeast Side," *Daily Calumet*, 10 Jan. 1983.

25. Douglas Gomery, "Movie Audiences, Urban Geography, and the History of the American Film," *The Velvet Light Trap Review of Cinema* 19 (Spring 1982): 23–29.

26. Interview with Jim Fitzgibbon, 16 July 1981, Chicago, Oral History Collection, Southeast Chicago Historical Project (SECHP), 14.

27. Interview with Ernest Dalle-Molle, 30 Apr. 1980, Chicago, IC, UICC, 76.

28. Robert A. Slayton, " 'Our Own Destiny': The Development of Community in Back of the Yards" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1982), 59–60.

29. For a description of amateur night, see "Fitzgibbons Was Important Part of Southeast Historical Project," *Daily Calumet*, 13 June 1983. On the "Garlic Opera House," see Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago's Near North Side* (Chicago, 1929), 164–65.

30. Student paper, n.a., n.t., n.d. but c. 1930, 26, box 154, folder 5, Burgess Papers; for more evidence of the discrimination blacks encountered at movie theaters, see The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations And A Race Riot* (Chicago, 1922), 318–20.

31. Quoted in Taylor, *Mexican Labor*, 232.

32. Barney Balaban and Sam Katz, *The Fundamental Principles of Balaban and Katz Theatre Management* (Chicago, 1926), 15, 17–20.

33. Hiram L. Jome, *Economics of the Radio Industry* (Chicago, 1925), 11–117. For more on home assembly of radios by workers, see Provenzano, 17 Mar. 1980, Brookfield, Ill., IC, UICC, 24–25; Thomas Perpoli, 26 June 1980, Chicago, IC, UICC, 59; Anita Edgar Jones, "Conditions Surrounding Mexicans in Chicago" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1928), 85. On abundance of aerials, see *Radio Broadcast* (Oct. 1922), quoted in Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, vol. 1-to 1933 (New York, 1966), 88. Also, Paul F. Cressey, "Survey of McKinley Park Community," 20 Oct. 1925, 1, box 129, folder 7, Burgess Papers.

34. For an amusing picture of "DX fishing," see Bruce Bliven, "The Legion Family and the Radio: What We Hear When We Tune In," *Century Magazine* 108 (Oct. 1924): 811–18; on Chicago's "silent night" see Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 93; on technical challenges see "Merry Jests and Songs Mark Radio Party," *Chicago Commerce*, 5 Apr. 1924, 17; "Radio Marvels Will Be Seen at Show," *Chicago Commerce*, 2 Oct. 1926, 9.

35. Daniel Starch, "A Study of Radio Broadcasting Made for the National Broadcasting

Company, Inc.," 1928, 23, box 8, folder 4, Edgar James Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society (WSHS); American Telephone and Telegraph Company, "The Use of Radio Broadcasting as a Publicity Medium," 1926, mimeographed, 4, box 1, folder 8, Edgar James Papers, WSHS; Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Report of a Research into the Attitudes and Habits of Radio Listeners* (St. Paul, 1933), 26; Malcolm Willey and Stuart A. Rice, *Communication Agencies and Social Life* (One of a Series of Monographs Prepared Under the Direction of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends) (New York, 1933), 202; Provenzano, IC, UICC, 25.

36. For more discussion of youths' attraction to mass culture, see my "Learning to Live in the Welfare State," 190–95. For vivid descriptions of club life, see Isadore Zelig, "A Study of the 'Basement' Social Clubs of Lawndale District," Paper for Sociology 270, 1928, box 142, folder 3, Burgess Papers; S. Kerson Weinberg, "Jewish Youth in the Lawndale Community: A Sociological Study," Paper for Sociology 269, n.d., 50–79; box 139, folder 3, Burgess Papers; Meyer Levin, *The Old Bunch* (New York, 1937), 3–9, 18–26, 121–39; Ireland, "Young American Poles," 72–75; "The Regan's Colts and the Sherman Park District" and "The Neighborhood," 1924, box 2, folder 10, McDowell Papers, CHS; Guy DeFillipis, "Club Dances," 1935, box 191, folder 7, CAP Papers; Robert Sayler, "A Study of Behavior Problems of Boys in Lower North Community," n.d., 24–27; box 135, folder 4, Burgess Papers; William J. Demsey, "Gangs in the Calumet Park District," Paper for Sociology 270, c. 1928, box 148, folder 5, Burgess Papers; Donald Pierson, "Autobiographies of Teenagers of Czechoslovakian Backgrounds from Cicero and Berwyn," 1931, box 134, folder 5, Burgess Papers.

37. Willey and Rice, *Communication Agencies and Social Life*, 196, 200.

38. Bruce Linton, "A History of Chicago Radio Station Programming, 1921–1931, with Emphasis on Stations WMAQ and WGN" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1953), 155; Mark Newman, "On the Air with Jack L. Cooper: The Beginnings of Black-Appeal Radio," *Chicago History* 12 (Summer 1983): 53–54; *Chicago Tribune Picture Book of Radio* (Chicago, 1928), 75–86; *WGN: A Pictorial History* (Chicago, 1961), 28; *Poles of Chicago, 1837–1937: A History of One Century of Polish Contribution to the City of Chicago* (Chicago, 1937), 240; Martha E. Gross, "The 'Jolly Girls' Club: Report and Diary," Mar. 1933, 28, box 158, folder 5, Burgess Papers; Joseph Kisciunas, "Lithuanian Chicago" (M.A. thesis, DePaul University, 1935), 40; Interview with Margaret Sabella, 29 Mar. 1980, Chicago, IC, UICC, 8; from the CFLPS, UCSC: "Colonial Activities," *Chicago Italian Chamber of Commerce*, May 1929, 17, and "Radio Concert of Polish Songstress," *Dziennik Zjednoczenia*, 5 Aug. 1922; *Immaculate Conception, B.V.M. Parish, South Chicago, Diamond Jubilee: 1882–1957*, n.p.; Peter C. Marzio, ed., *A Nation of Nations: The People Who Came to America as Seen Through Objects and Documents Exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution* (New York, 1976), 443.

39. Edward Nockels to Trade Union Secretaries, 23 Dec. 1926, box 15, folder 106, Fitzpatrick Papers, CHS; William J. H. Strong, "Report on Radiocasting for the Special Committee, Mssrs. Fitzpatrick, Nockels and Olander, of the Chicago Federation of Labor and the Illinois Federation of Labor, November 5th, 1925," 1, box 14, folder 100, Fitzpatrick Papers; "The Aims, Objects and History of WCFL," *WCFL Radio Magazine* 1 (Spring 1928), 58–59; Erlign Sejr Jorgensen, "Radio Station WCFL: A Study in Labor Union Broadcasting" (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1949).

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41. Willey and Rice, *Communication Agencies and Social Life*, 195–99; Linton, "History of Chicago Radio Station Programming," 61–62, 121; Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 99–101; Arthur Frank Wertheim, *Radio Comedy* (New York, 1979); Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting* (Belmont, Calif., 1978), 71–78.

42. N. Goldsmith and Austin C. Lescarboura, *This Thing Called Broadcasting* (New York, 1930), 296.

43. On the philosophy of a separate black economy, see Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890–1920* (Chicago, 1967), 111–18, 192–200 and M. S. Stuart, *An Economic Detour: A History of Insurance in the Lives of American Negroes* (New York, 1940), xvii–xxv, 101. P. W. Chavers devoted his life to the establishment of a viable black economy in Chicago. Madrue Chavers-Wright, *The Guarantee—P.W. Chavers: Banker, Entrepreneur, Philanthropist in Chicago's Black Belt of the Twenties* (New York, 1985).

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45. Edmund David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison, 1968), 50–61, 174–75.

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48. For discussion of the difficulties that black businessmen faced, see Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 438–56; Hunter, "Problems of Colored Chicago," 12; Spear, *Black Chicago*, 183–84; Paul K. Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro As a Consumer* (New York, 1932), 126, 135–39; Harris, *Negro as Capitalist*, 54–55, 172; Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, vol. 1, 307–12; Harmon, "Negro As a Local Business Man," 131, 140, 142, 144–45, 147, 152–55.

49. Edwards, *Southern Urban Negro As Consumer*, 153–66, 209–13. Several years after this study was published, Edwards expanded his investigation into urban black consumption habits to include the North. He concluded that Northern Negroes showed the same predisposition to brand names as Southern urbanites. Also see Raymond A. Bauer and Scott M. Cunningham, *Studies in the Negro Market* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 11–14 and Raymond A. Bauer, Scott M. Cunningham, and Lawrence H. Wortzel, "The Marketing Dilemma of Negroes," *Journal of Marketing* 29 (July 1965), reprinted in Boone, *Classics in Consumer Behavior*, 353–64.

50. St. Clair Drake, "Churches and Voluntary Associations in the Chicago Negro Community," Report of Official Project 465–54–3–386 Conducted Under the Auspices of the Works Projects Administration, 1940, mimeographed, 247; Oliver Cromwell Cox, "The Negroes Use of Their Buying Power in Chicago As a Means of Securing Employment," Prepared for Professor Millis, University of Chicago, 1933, cited extensively in Drake, "Churches and Voluntary Associations," 230, 247–51; T. Arnold Hill, "Picketing for Jobs," *Opportunity* 8 (July 1930): 216; Stephen Breszka, "And Lo! It Worked: A Tale of Color Harmony," *Opportunity* 11 (Nov. 1933): 242–44, 350; "Butler Stores Cheat," *The Messenger* 7 (Apr. 1925), 156; Wright, Paper for Sociology 264, Mar. 1931, 7, Burgess Papers; Elizabeth Balanoff, "A History of the Black Community of Gary, Indiana, 1906–1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1974), 200–02; John L. Tilley, *A Brief History of the Negro in Chicago, 1779–1933 (From Jean Baptiste DeSaible—To "A Century of Progress")* (Chicago, 1933), 16–18, 25–26; Hunter, "Problems of Colored Chicago," 10, Burgess Papers.

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16–25, 148–55; Louis Armstrong, *Swing That Music* (New York, 1936); Demsey J. Travis, *An Autobiography of Black Jazz* (Chicago, 1983).

52. Marshall W. Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York, 1956), 167–68.

53. A survey of a 1929 out-of-town edition of the *Chicago Defender* revealed that 18.7 percent of the 1070 advertisements were for race records. Edwards, *Southern Urban Negro as Consumer*, 185. For information on race records, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery To Freedom* (New York, 1977), 224, 231; LeRois Jones, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and The Music That Developed From It* (New York, 1963), 99–103, 128–29; Stearns, *Story of Jazz*, 167–68, 190; Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 128–31.

54. Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson: American Radical* (Pittsburgh, 1981), 68.