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The Early 20th Century (1900-1950)

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Overview:

Cassie Brewer:

At the beginning of the 20th century, Greenwich Village was at a turning point. The area surrounding Washington Square Park had previously been home to the elite of the city; however, the cultural climate was changing. Increase in immigration to the area in the late 19th century led to the formation of Italian and Irish enclaves to the west and south of the park, with the upper-class remaining on the north side. With the wave of immigration came a boom in building; development was on the rise, and Greenwich Village was rapidly changing. In 1903-1904 alone nearly 1,200 new apartments were constructed, as opposed to the average of 250 for the few years preceding that.¹ Along with the residential growth came an increase in commercial expansion. More and more factories were opening on the east and west borders of the park, further changing the landscape of the village.²

Not only was Greenwich Village physically growing and changing, but the social atmosphere was shifting. The village was on its way to becoming a center for some of the century's most important social and cultural movements. Settlement houses, community forums and organizations were founded and flourished in Greenwich Village in the first decade of the 20th century; and would become the foundation and support of many later social movements. Society was changing, and Greenwich Village was at the forefront, fostering social movements as well as cultural and artistic activity.

The late 19th century development of tenement sections had a direct impact on the formation of settlements in Greenwich Village. There was an increasing amount of interest from the upper and middle class in the conditions of the poor and working-class areas of the city, and the social issues that res

from growing industrialism.³ Settlements were not unique to New York City, but many major settlements did their work in Greenwich Village. Upper and middle class settlement workers were, for the most part, both wealthy and educated, often at the college level and had an educational interest in the working class – both to educate themselves on urban conditions and to educate workers.⁴ They essentially gave up their privileged status to move into ‘slum’ districts to tackle social issues and improve the relations between the working and upper-classes. In Greenwich Village, settlement houses’ main focus would be on the immigrant communities; on improving their conditions as well as promoting kinship between often isolated ethnic groups.

Within two years, two settlements opened in the village; University Settlement’s West Side Branch in 1900 followed by Greenwich House in 1902. Already established, University Settlement had a clear mission to educate immigrant workers and guide them in transitioning from unskilled jobs to adopting a trade. West Side Branch immediately took on the role of providing services to the surrounding community including a kindergarten program, children’s clubs and a small circulating library. West Side Branch programs for children proved to be immediately popular; by 1901 thirty students were enrolled in the kindergarten and nearly five-hundred were a part of one of the house’s clubs. Their encouragement of learning, whether it be academic, artistic or practical is represented in the classes they offered, ranging from dance and music classes to debate classes.⁶

In addition to providing services, settlement house workers still very much wanted to study the conditions of tenement living and factory working in hopes of effecting change. Mary Simkhovitch, one settlement worker who felt strongly about the need for change, especially in regards to the effects of congestion, disease and unsafe working conditions on tenement residents. Simkhovitch was a strong proponent of the need to fully participate in the lives of those people she wanted to help. She felt that improvements could not happen simply by charitable efforts; and that it was necessary to bridge the gap between classes to make any lasting changes.⁷ In 1902, Simkhovitch moved from settlement worker to settlement house founder when she opened the doors to Greenwich House at 26 Jones Street in 1902. Upon opening, Simkhovitch outlined the focus of Greenwich House, which was based on three pillars: sociability, services and surveys.⁸ Greenwich House provided similar services as the West Side Branch with art, cooking and academic classes as well as children’s classes. They also had a ‘penny bank’ that accepted sums too small to be deposited in a regular bank and encouraged practical savings habits. Neighbors could also take advantage of the twice-weekly hot meals offered by the settlement.⁹

Staying true to her original mission, Simkhovitch and Greenwich House conducted surveys on the living and working conditions of the people the settlement served. Simkhovitch herself had a role in surveying and in 1909 went on to give a speech at the First National Conference on City Planning in Washington D.C. on the topic of congestion as a major problem in New York City, and specifically in Greenwich Village.¹⁰ Other surveys, conducted between 1902 and 1903 focused on the village exclusively. One survey, conducted by Louise Bolard More, Wage-earners’ budgets: a study of standards and cost of living in New York City analyzed the incomes and expenses of two hundred village families, reporting statistics on their condition.¹¹ Detailing the lives of twelve of the two hundred families, More gave faces to the largely invisible working class of Greenwich Village and shed light on the diversity of both the community and the issues plaguing them.

On the heels of the emergence of settlement houses was the creation of several community organizations aimed at bringing together village residents. At this point, it is clear that Greenwich Village is moving towards a new era of progressive movements. The overlap between settlement houses and organizations paired with the growth of community efforts is representative of the move towards social reform that

happening on a larger scale both in the village and in the city. Much like settlement houses, these organizations promoted gaining a better sense of community. Simkhovitch, clearly dedicated to his mission of increasing sociability, was also instrumental in the creation of other community organizations. In 1903, Simkhovitch helped to form the Greenwich Village Improvement Society whose purpose was to gain diverse membership and form common bonds over a shared 'villager' identity, while together advocating for neighborhood-wide improvements.¹² Interestingly, the small group of upper-class residents living along the northern border of Washington Square Park formed the Washington Square Association in 1907 with a similar mission to that of the Improvement Society. They sought to "maintain and improve the character of the neighborhood." However noble their undertaking seemed, they were in opposition with their working class neighbors. This patrician organization wanted to secure control over the neighborhood, largely focusing on the park itself, for fear it was becoming more of a playground than a park.¹³ Their motives did not hinder the growth of the more diverse GVIP, which gained popularity in the next decade.

The other major community project at this time was the community forum at the Church of the Ascension. Members of the church were mainly upper-class villagers, however, in 1907 the church began opening on Sunday nights and welcoming in all villagers, regardless of wealth or religious affiliation.¹⁴ Each forum would begin with a short prayer service followed by a lecture and discussion. Since the forum was a community one and not a religious one, the topics discussed were representative of what was on the mind of villagers at the time. They spoke of unemployment and money problems – as the forum's early years were during an economic depression- socialism and labor conditions. The Reverend at the time, Percy Stickney Grant, proposed the idea for the forum in 1907, stating many of the same motivations as settlement leaders like Simkhovitch. Grant felt strongly about the need to try to lessen the class gap and form alliances with community members regardless of class, ethnicity or religion. Free discussion was encouraged at the forum, which was in line with Simkhovitch's stress of the importance of sociability. As all of these institutions grew, Greenwich Village as a community became more defined and a foundation for later community support, in labor and women's struggles particularly, was forming.

Norma Jean Garriton

In the last decade of the 1800s, there is a steady rise in Jewish and Italian immigrants arriving in the Lower East Side, which happens simultaneously and in conjunction with the growing garment industry. Immigration patterns show a steep incline in migration from eastern and southern Europe, with families establishing permanent roots in America, particularly in Greenwich Village, and becoming a part of the workforce. As factory-style production takes hold in the area, young female members of these immigrant families were hired in increasing numbers because compared to men, they worked for less pay and were less likely to unionize. By the end of 1910, women totaled 85 percent of the workforce in New York City.

The first decade of the 1900s showed a rise in factory production, as a faster and easier means of fabrication. Factories enabled the garment industry to keep pace with the growing fashion industry and the immediate demands for new styles of clothing. The transition to bigger working spaces did not necessitate a transition to safer working conditions.¹⁶ In contrast, conditions only worsened for garment workers. As early as 1908, unrest in factories erupted in small acts of defiance, like Jacob Kline's impromptu walk out of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company.¹⁷ After a dispute over his paycheck led to a beating, Kline's protest caught the attention of other workers on the floor who followed him out the door. While the workers returned to their posts the following Monday, including Kline, the tension between workers and factories owners would only grow. A year later, garment workers organized the first large-scale women's strike in American history, the *Uprising of the 20,000*.¹⁸

The *Uprising of the 20,000* began at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory, at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Streets, in September of 1909. A small, worker-organized Triangle union had an internal dispute which had many employees of the Triangle seeking the help of the Ladies Waist Makers Union of New York, Local 25, of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union.¹⁹ When owners Max Blanck and Isaac Harris discovered the identity of workers seeking union organized help, they were let go with the explanation that there wasn't any work. However, the two factory owners advertised for new help in a newspaper the next day, angering workers and prompting Local 25 to call a strike. By October, under the leadership of the Leiserson Company, the second largest shirtwaist-producing factory in New York City, caused workers to strike there as well.²⁰

Local 25 saw the current circumstances as potential to inspire a large-scale strike. On November 23, 1909, after a rousing speech given by Clara Lemlich, an avid striker and loyal unionist, a call to action was made. A mass walk out was staged for the following day and picketing began. It's estimated that 20,000 people from 500 garment shops participated in the uprising.²¹ The majority of the strikers were young women who were demanding a reduction in hours to a 52-hour work week, with no more than 10 hours of overtime per day in the busy season, a uniform scale of pricing set by both the factory owners and the managers and recognition of the union. In her speech, Lemlich also advocated for "a place for workers to put their hats," which was synonymous with female strikers wanting to be treated as laborers.

The *Uprising of the 20,000* was a significant moment in American history. In the early part of the 20th century workers had few rights and labor laws were non-existent. Although women were by far the majority of the workforce, the unions neglected them.²³ The management of Local 25 had doubts about the commitment of female workers to the labor cause; women were considered the less intellectual sexes and were viewed as unaggressive by nature. Their lack of permanency within the labor fields, often left after getting married, was believed to be evidence of a lack of commitment and dedication to the union's cause.²⁴ The *Uprising of the 20,000* forced the union to reconsider their gender biases, women proved that they were serious about making changes in the garment industry and would stand up for their own rights. Local 25 decided to use sex as an advantage on the picket line, believing that factory owners and cops would be less harsh on women and that retaliation to female strikers would be viewed negatively in the press.

Factory owners were not lenient on women strikers as the union predicted. Blanck and Harris hired prostitutes to accost women on the picket line, and other factory owners hired thugs to severely injure vocal union leaders, like Clara Lemlich.²⁵ The abuse workers faced on the picket line only strengthened their resolve and created an unusual alliance between garment workers and the female members of New York's upper class. Alva Belmont and Anne Morgan, daughters of New York's wealthiest men, viewed female workers' plight as an important part of women's suffrage and offered their support.²⁶ The elite organized collections to support workers through the months of the strike, bailed arrested females out of jail and threw their influential support to the young women on the picket lines. Most shops had set for February 15th of 1910, but with the help of upper class women, strikers lasted much longer than the factory owners had expected.²⁷

Although some women succeeded in securing shorter hours and slightly higher wages, factory owners refused to recognize the union, which meant that future change would be hard to enact without more striking. The dangers of factory work were made apparent when a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory on March 25th, 1911. It was sparked by a smoking cigarette that was carelessly thrown into a trash bin and proceeded to destroy three floors of the Asch building, killing 146 people.²⁸ In thirty minutes the Triangle Fire became a significant moment in time for labor history, for several reasons. Firstly, the

death toll was a result of an inadequate number of exits. The Asch building had two stairways leading to Greene Street and Washington Place, the latter of which was never used and was often kept locked to prevent stealing, even though this was against fire code. On an average work day women were funneled out through the Greene Street stairway so security could check their handbags for stolen merchandise. The exit was so small only one person could pass at a time. On the day of the fire 1,000 workers had to squeeze through the Greene Street stairway because the doors to the Washington Place exit were locked on the 8th and 9th floors.²⁹ Unfortunately, the rapidly progressing fire closed off the Greene Street exit within fifteen minutes forcing workers to find other ways of escape. While the Washington Place doors were unlocked eventually on the 8th floor, they remained closed on the 9th with women dying trying to get them open.³⁰

Secondly, safety modifications that were supposed to have been made when the Asch building was built in 1901, were never completed. A building of its size should have had three exits and a fire escape, it had two and the fire escape was faulty. In a panic, many of the workers rushed onto the poorly crafted iron ladder and it began to buckle under the overwhelming weight. The shutters to the fire escape opened outward and the iron bar that kept the window in place got stuck threw the slates at the 8th floor window exit. It trapped the women attempting to descend from above, but it didn't stop the exit flow of escape. Soon the ladder reached its weight capacity and fell, killing everyone who was on it.³¹

Lastly, the proximity of the building to Washington Square Park drew a crowd of thousands, all of whom stood by helplessly as women and men began jumping off the building to escape the fire. The impact of witnessing the mass suicide attempt and the graphic media coverage in the newspapers, forced society to face the reality of working conditions in factories. The women who lay broken on the pavement were the same women who demanded better working conditions during the *Uprising of the 20,000*.

In the aftermath of the fire, New York City and the Village began a mourning period for the victims. Collections were raised to aid families who had lost loved ones and were sent to relatives of the dead or injured workers both in the United States and abroad.³² However, monetary stipulations were not enough for the mourning public, who demanded that someone be held responsible for the Triangle Shirtwaist tragedy. The newspapers repeatedly asked who would be held accountable and they directed their questions at notable public figures, like Manhattan borough president Mr. McAneny. When the District Attorney, Charles Whitman, was questioned in the newspapers, he was pressured into indicting factory owners Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, who were charged with manslaughter. The prosecution planned to prove that the owners knew the exit doors were locked and caused the death of Margaret Schwartz and Rosie Grosso. On December 27, 1911, the jurors declared Blanck and Harris not guilty, stating that it was impossible to ascertain if they knew the doors to the exits were locked.³³ The following March the assistant district attorney, Charles F. Boswick, tried to indict the factory owners on additional manslaughter charges, but the case was thrown out of court. However, on March 11, 1914, twenty-three individual civil suits against the owner of the Asch building, Joseph J. Asch, were settled at about \$75,000 in life lost.³⁴

The Triangle fire ushers in a new era of factory reform. In October of 1911, the New York City Board of Aldermen adopted the Sullivan-Hoey Act, establishing the Bureau of Fire Prevention. The New York State Legislature also created the Factory Investigating Commission, which held its first meeting on October 1, 1911.³⁵ The next four years that follow its creation are considered the "golden era in remedial factory legislation".³⁶ Between October 1911 and December of 1912, the FIC conducted investigations into factory safety, taking witness testimony from almost 500 people. It used this evidence to create new legislation that would enforce the use of fire safety measures, like fire escapes and alarms, in factories.

The Triangle fire also provided laborers with ammunition to continue striking. In January of 1913, the union called another strike. Unlike the *Uprising of the 20,000*, the strike only lasted three days before factory owners granted employees a “fifty-hour work week, improved sanitary conditions, union recognition, new wage scales and an arbitration board to deal with workers grievances”.³⁸ By September of 1913, 60,000 working women gained the benefit of a shorter workweek and a 20 percent increase in salary.³⁹

A year later, America will enter World War I and while labor rights will continue to dominate politics in the New Deal era, Greenwich Village and New York City will transition into wartime. Immigrants will slowly begin to expand residences past the Lower East Side, especially as the garment industry moves towards midtown in the 1920s. However, the Triangle Factory fire will remain apart of the labor history narrative even as the 100th anniversary approaches. Society has continued to commemorate the tragedy as a reminder that fair labor practices are as relevant in today's world as they were in 1911.

Brenann Sutter:

While Greenwich Village in the 1910s was politically and economically defined by labor issues, its cultural expression was largely embodied in the bohemians. The bohemians were individuals, often impoverished artists, writers and musicians, who subscribed to non-traditional lifestyles while pursuing their artistic endeavors. The ingenuity of the bohemians lied in their ability to create the platforms and institutions necessary to produce their art. Nowhere is this better exhibited than in the founding of the Provincetown Playhouse.

One of the Playhouse's original founders, writer Susan Glaspell, later expressed her exasperation with New York's theatrical scene in the early 1910s, “We went to the theater, and for the most part we came away wishing we had gone somewhere else. Those were the days when Broadway flourished almost unchallenged...What was this ‘Broadway,’ which could make a thing as interesting as life into a thing as dull as a Broadway play?”⁴⁰ In the 1910s, the Cape Cod village of Provincetown, MA had become a popular destination for many bohemian writers and actors to spend their summers. On July 15, 1911, Neith Boyce held a private performance of his newly written play *Constancy* and also invited Susan Glaspell and her husband George Cram Cook to debut their piece, *Suppressed Desires*. The shows were remarkably well received, and by the following summer news of the quality of Provincetown theater attracted the talents of Max Eastman and his wife Ida Rauh, Floyd Dell and Eugene O'Neill, poets John Reed and Harry Kemp, writer Louise Bryant, painter Marsden Hartley, and artists William and Marguerite Zorach. The group decided to become a legitimate theater organization and when they returned to Greenwich Village in November 1916, they opened the Provincetown Playhouse at 139 MacDougal Street.

The Provincetown Playhouse was created to provide talented artists with a venue while simultaneously undermining what the bohemians considered to be the undeserved monopoly that Broadway held on New York theater. The Playhouse also tried to reflect bohemian ideals through their choice of scripts by employing numerous women and African Americans in both artistic and managerial roles. The Playhouse even received a murderous threat from the Ku Klux Klan for performing the play *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, in which a black man kisses the hand of a white woman.⁴¹ This desire to produce quality, independent theater is what launched the careers of writers Eugene O'Neill, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Edward Albee, John Guare, Sam Shepherd, Charles Busch, and David Mamet. Despite surviving threats from the Klan and several changes in management, and internal frictions, the Provincetown Playhouse finally closed in 1929. It was unable to recover from the financial devastation of the stock market crash of 1929. The building remained in use by different theatrical organizations until 2009, when despite major public outcry, it was demolished. The Provincetown Playhouse on MacDougal Street, preserving only the walls containing

small theater in the southern corner of the building. In its place, NYU is in the process of constructing a new building for its Law School.

By the summer of 1916, Village bohemians were beginning to feel that their social and intellectual lifestyles were conflicting with the comparatively conservative attitude of the state and federal government. Ellis Jones, an editor for *Life* magazine organized what he considered to be a “second American Revolution” in which Greenwich Village would become an independent republic through protest⁴². Jones was so confident of his community’s support that he planned for the event to take place in Central Park Mall, believing Washington Square Park would be too small to contain the anticipated number of supporters. Jones fatefully scheduled his revolution for a Monday, and although it was summer, it rained, causing only a handful of Jones’ followers to show up. Yet the opposition was there in force; there were dozens of police officers armed with machine guns and ambulances stationed near the site in anticipation of a major anarchist rebellion. Jones was quickly arrested and the call for revolution was unanswered...that is, until Gertrude Drick.

Several historians have attributed the night of January 23, 1917 to be the last hurrah of Greenwich Village’s bohemia⁴³. Artist Gertrude Drick conceived of a plan to hold a mock revolution, an opportunity to recapture Washington Square Park in the name of bohemia. One evening she noticed the discreet access door on the West pier of the Washington Square Arch, and the resident policeman’s propensity to abandon his station for hours at a time. Drick approached her artistic mentor, John Sloan, with her plan to climb to the top of the arch and announce Washington Square’s succession from the Union. The two recruited four of their fellow bohemians to participate in the revolution: the actors Forrest Mann, C. Augustus Ellis, and Betty Turner, and the artist Marcel Duchamp. (Duchamp was also no stranger to controversy; his painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* scandalized the art community when displayed at the Armory in 1913.)

After dark on January 23, 1917, Drick and friends met on lower Fifth Avenue. With no sign of the meandering police officer, they opened the door, climbed up the spiral staircase, pushed open the door, and emerged on the top of Washington Square Arch. The bohemians came armed with food, beer, wine, liquor, hot water bottles for warmth, Chinese lanterns, red balloons, toy pistols, and of course, the Declaration of Independence of the Greenwich Republic. The conspirators built a small fire which everyone sat around, and they recited verses of poetry amidst their eating and drinking. Finally, Drick read the Declaration aloud, (the grand majority of the words on the one-page document being ‘what you want’), a mock seal was drawn, and all present parties provided their signature. Then the balloons were released into the night, the cap guns shot off, and more wine was drunk. The Free and Independent Republic of Washington Square was born. The next day, all that remained were several red balloons, but within almost “everyone south of 14th street knew of their status as a liberated community”, and the wealthy inhabitants of Washington Square North found little humor in the “bohemian tomfoolery”⁴⁴. The Free and Independent Republic Of Washington Square has left at least one lasting impact on Greenwich Village, as evidenced by the now ever-present lock on the West pier of the Washington Square Arch.

The revolution was farcical but its social implications indicate that this was a community in transition. The bohemians understood that their mores were radically different than those held by the rest of the country, and it is unsurprising that they desired to be part of a political state that reflected their social values. Perhaps social writer Luc Sante states it best when he says that the mock Revolution of 1917 “actually named the thing that all the inhabitants of Greenwich Village bohemia of that time were after, a revolution in more than just a legislative sense, a free territory untrammelled by convention”⁴⁵. The bohemian’s lighthearted craving for revelry and revolt suddenly seemed inappropriate and misguided when the United States begrudgingly entered an unprecedented global war on April 6, 1917.

The Greenwich Village bohemians and socialists were very vocal about their disgust over the United States' participation in World War I. Yet the strong anti-war sentiment did not prevent the effects of war from hitting home. Enrollment at NYU's University Heights campus dropped from 789 students in February 1917 to 238 in October 1918⁴⁷. As a result of this depletion, the University became a huge contributor to the war effort. In 1918, in collaboration with the Department of War, NYU set up units: National Army Training Detachment and The Student Army Training Corps (SATC) to provide military training. Over 1,600 men received instruction through these two programs at the University. NYU also recruited men to serve as ambulance volunteers for the Red Cross, sending the units to Europe where they would serve in the front lines of battle. Even following the conclusion of the war, NYU continued to engage in military activity by annually celebrating ROTC field day, where student soldiers would temporarily transform their football field into an active battleground. Students were provided with a helmet, gas mask, and blanks before engaging each other in open battle⁴⁸.

In Greenwich Village, the years 1912-1917 were golden years for the bohemians, often referred to as "confident years", "the little renaissance", "the joyous season" and "the innocent revolution"⁴⁹. But World War I forced Villagers to look beyond their local salons and playhouses. Their utopian ideals could not withstand against the reality of war. Bohemianism also came to be associated with radicalism, and the government's increasing fear over bolshevism led to increased surveillance and persecution of prominent Villagers. The nineteen-teens saw the end of bohemia but during the 1920s, Villagers were once again finding ways to push the limits of human expression.

Catriona Schlosser:

During the 1920s Bohemianism became a popularized less radical movement. An increasing number of single young people gravitated towards the Village as a form of rebellion and a way of "experiencing life". Caroline Ware, author of *Greenwich Village (1920-1930)* classifies these young people as pseudo-bohemians since they did not truly embody the bohemians of the past decade.⁵⁰ The wild antics that symbolized the Village seemed to permeate throughout the country, therefore making Greenwich Village seem a little less unique. Ware writes, "Of all the groups in the Village, this one [bohemianism] had the widest influence on the rest of the country, for it helped to popularize the 'wild party' from one end of the land to the other."⁵¹ One observer asked at the time that "There was as much freedom in [Greenwich Village] as before, but since it was equaled and even surpassed by the [suburbs], where was the defiance and the revolt against convention which once infused Bohemia?"⁵² The spread of Bohemianism throughout the country is a testament to how significant Greenwich Village was during the 1920s.

These pseudo bohemians were controversial and clashed with the already existing population. The bourgeoisie section of the Village disliked the Bohemian reputation that was attributed to the area. During the 20s, this population soon began to show great contempt towards drink, bohemianism and its change.⁵³ In fact, there were even rumors that these bourgeoisie villagers were responsible for tipping the police as to where speakeasies were located. In one instance, seven speakeasies in Greenwich Village which included the "Holly Arms," "the Jolly Friars," "Bertolottis," "Sheridan Square Inn," "Greenwich Village Mill," "Red Head Inn" and "Jimmie Kelly's" were locked by the authorities as a result of a tip from residents tired of Bohemians. "It is understood the men who gathered the evidence against the alleged violators were aided by information from old residents hostile to the so-called Bohemian element."⁵⁴ Even though Bohemianism permeated mainstream culture during the 20s, there were still groups annoyed by what they perceived as a radical element.

The Bohemian and Bourgeoisie conflict was not the only one present in Greenwich Village during the

1920s. There was also a growing clash between the new middle class that was moving to Greenwich Village and the immigrant residents who had been living there for quite some time. The two groups in separate worlds rarely ever crossing one another's path. If they were to meet it was in the local shops but very little interaction occurred. Many times they would meet in the local immigrant owned speakeasies. The middle class were rarely welcomed in these establishments. One owner stated, "Nothing earned greater scorn than to talk Italian. You don't like people who try to turn native."⁵⁵ The Irish and Italians saw Greenwich Village as theirs and resented these new residents coming in and changing its immigrant working class character. There were so many different groups living in Greenwich Village during this period that everyone tried to claim the Village as their own.

The 1920s is of course renowned for its literary achievements. The "lost generation" of writers which included Ernest Hemingway, T.S. Eliot and F. Scott Fitzgerald certainly left their imprint on America. Greenwich Village was a mecca for writers during this period. One of the more prominent symbols of the literary age was the opening of the Cherry Lane Theatre in 1924. Located at 38 Commerce St., the building was once a brewery, tobacco warehouse and eventually a box factory. A group of artists converted the box factory into a theatre and dubbed it the Cherry Lane Playhouse. This theatre still functions today and is considered New York's oldest and continuously running off-Broadway theatre. During the 20s the theatre showcased work by writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, and Elmer Rice. Throughout its history the Cherry Lane Theatre went on to showcase other prominent writers and is now considered a Greenwich Village Cultural Institution.⁵⁶

Perhaps one of the biggest events of the 1920s was prohibition and the rise of the speakeasy. Greenwich Village, like many other places throughout the United States, was greatly effected by the Temperance movement. As mentioned earlier, Greenwich Village had a very large immigrant population. Many ethnic groups who lived in the area, especially the Irish and Italians, considered drinking as part of their culture, so when the 18th Amendment banning the selling or purchasing of alcohol was passed, the immigrant groups saw it as an attack on their ethnicity. David Lerner, author of *Dry Manhattan* writes, "the Eighteenth Amendment meant much more than just a ban on alcohol. It was an assault on their ethnic traditions, a blatant example of class-based paternalism, and an imposition on the daily rhythm of life."⁵⁷ Some immigrants were so outraged that they even returned to their homeland. A New York Times article reported that "Some of them are returning through patriotism or homesickness and others for but fully three-fifths because, they declare, America has gone dry, which they consider tyranny, holding that after ten or twelve hours of work a workman should be permitted to buy his beer or other drink." Alcohol suddenly took on a new meaning. It was no longer a symbol of socializing and relaxing, but a symbol of rebellion. The members of the temperance movement were mainly Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and the movement had a strong Nativist and anti-Catholic tone. Holding onto their drink was a way of not only fighting prohibition but those who implemented it in the first place.⁵⁹ Evidence shows that the local speakeasies in Greenwich Village were quite successful at thwarting the authorities through bootlegging and speakeasies.

Caroline Ware believes that even though alcohol was illegal, that the liquor business was perhaps the most important principle industry in Greenwich Village during the 1920s.⁶⁰ Many teens in Greenwich Village worked as bootleggers and could earn up to \$10 making night deliveries or acting as spotters. The residents in Greenwich Village were clearly successful in their attempts to circumvent the prohibition laws. A New York Times article written on May 7, 1923, warned against the danger of bootlegging claiming that bootleggers would gain too much power if prohibition laws were not enforced.⁶¹ In many respects this article was correct. Bootleggers did have political power, social status and money. By 1930, the bootlegger was king and was as if the ban on alcohol did not even exist. At the close of the decade, every Italian grocery or

delicatessen in the Village sold wine or liquor.⁶²

Italian groceries and delicatessens were not the only places one could purchase alcohol during the in Greenwich Village. Speakeasies, illegal establishments where people used to go to socialize and flourished. The New York Times reported that by 1929 there were at least 32,000 speakeasies in New City.⁶³ Speakeasies took on a culture of their own. In the village residents tried to be resourceful by converting art studios into speakeasies. It is no surprise that rebellious Greenwich Village would have some of the more famous speakeasies which included the "Red Head," "the Golden Swan Cafe," and "Chumleys." Many of these speakeasies had literary significance. Eugene O'Neill used to frequent Golden Swan, and even dubbed it the "Hell Hole." It is believed that it is the basis for the setting in play, "The Iceman Cometh."⁶⁴

By the end of the decade, Greenwich Village, like the rest of the country, was hit hard by the Great Depression, but the village did not let this hold them back. In the 1930s, the village continued to maintain its rebellious, diverse, and artistic character.

Scott Woodward Young:

If the 1920s was a decade defined by its literary achievement and its bohemian character, then the 1930s marked achievements in the arts and a strong avant-garde spirit, though this decade in Greenwich Village history was indeed no less political and rebellious than the preceding ten-year period. The story of Greenwich Village between the years 1930 and 1939 is one of unique artistic vision intertwined with contemporary American and world politics.

Critical and emblematic events of the decade include the founding of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the downtown relocation of the New School for Social Research, continued labor protests and demonstrations, the founding of the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts, Edward Hopper's activity in the village, and the development of the abstract expressionists, an influential group of painters who lived and worked in Greenwich Village. These events together demonstrate an intensely active and creative culture of Greenwich Village history, one that would serve to establish New York City as a destination for the arts and a strong outlet for radical political thought.

Artists and writers of this period sought a distinct American perspective, a new point of view that operated as much as a personal expression as a reply to social conditions of the 1930s that included labor struggles, economic woes, and an increasing radical political presence. To understand the environment of the working class in Greenwich Village during the 1930s, it will be helpful to examine how these social conditions affected life in the Village.

The 1930s was a decade of intense labor conflict. Strikes were a common threat, mass protests were staged on a regular basis, and Socialist and Communist leaders regularly held elected office. Long before the Red Scare and McCarthyism effectively relegated radical Left politics to an extreme minority, New York City, and Greenwich Village in particular, existed as a veritable hotbed of left-wing activity.

Following the economic collapse of 1929, suddenly unemployed and poverty-stricken New York City residents initiated large-scale rallies, often centered around public gathering places such as Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village or nearby Union Square. With almost one in four without jobs at the beginning of the decade, workers of New York City united in protest at Union Square on March 6, 1930. On that day the Trade Union Unity League and the Communist Party organized the largest ever demonstration held at Union Square, with 110,000 unemployed workers and sympathizers amassing and around Union Square.

Other events would follow throughout the decade, from the annual May Day parade through Union

Square, a procession honoring the working men and women of the city, to various other events coordinated by various trade unions, political parties, and community organizations. One such organization was the New School for Social Research. This important institution was founded in 1925 by two former Columbia University professors who had resigned in protest over Columbia's official stance. Created as a place for academic freedom for both student and faculty, the New School opened in its Greenwich Village location in 1929 following a period of reorganization and expansion from its original West Twenty-Third Street building.

The New School's move into the Village was a bellwether for the 1930s: the school's new emphasis on its broad commitment to social reform, its political radicalism, and its disregard for convention made the New School a natural component in a Greenwich Village that would come to be defined by these characteristics. For those traveling to the Village or living within its borders, the New School's building on the northwest edge of the neighborhood at West Twelfth Street became the academic heart of Greenwich Village.⁶⁵

A current of social change permeated life in the Greenwich Village of the 1930s. As one first-hand account from 1933 described the neighborhood environment during this time: "Some observers claim that the depression was, in a way, a blessing for the Village...From three to ten poets, writers and artists craved a single studio to live together, pooling their meager resources...the present-day atmosphere of the Village is sadder to the profiteers but gladder to the dreamy, penniless prophets of the arts. Some claim that with the depression, an era of renaissance has dawned for the long-suffering Village. It is said that the semblance of the old spirit of merry or stoic poverty is now trickling back into some of the Village houses...[with] an overabundant joie de vivre."⁶⁶

The neighborhood's environment of happy unconventionality and its eager search for a new identity was most evident in the production of art during this time period. So it was in 1930, the year socialite socialite Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney founded the museum that would bear her name. Long before a series of moves would take the museum to its current home on Madison Avenue and East 74th Street, the beginnings of the Whitney Museum of American Art are rooted on West Eighth Street in Greenwich Village. In her speech at the formal opening of the museum in the fall of 1931, Whitney laid the foundation for the future of American art in the Village and beyond:

"For twenty-five years I have been intensely interested in American art. I have collected during these years the work of American artists because I believe them worth while and because I believed in our national creative talent. Now I am making this collection the nucleus of a museum devoted exclusively to American Art - a museum which will grow and increase in importance as we ourselves grow."⁶⁷

Before its re-inauguration as a fully realized museum, The Whitney Studio Club, as it was known from its earliest inception in 1918, became an early Bohemian outpost in the Village. Located originally at 100 West Fourth Street, artists would gather here to visit socially, read in the library, practice sketching, even play games such as billiard and Ouija.⁶⁸ Following the cultural lead of the Whitney Studio Club and later the Whitney Museum, many other artists and art world figures gravitated to the Village in the years following the Great Depression.

Another figure of the art world leading a downtown renaissance was the German modernist artist and teacher Hans Hofmann. Known for his exuberance and bravura, Hofmann originally came to New York City in 1932 to join the faculty of the Arts Student League, where his classes regularly filled to capacity. He left soon after to start his own school, the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts. Classes met informally

a studio at 444 Madison Avenue before Hofmann officially opened his school in 1933 at 137 East Fifth Street. Three years later another move took the school to 52 West Ninth Street in Greenwich Village before a final move in 1938 to 52 West Eighth Street. Hofmann himself shared a studio on West Ninth Street before taking his own space on West Eighth Street.

Hofmann's move to America and to New York City was influenced by contemporary politics in Europe and specifically the heavily conservative artistic tastes of Hitler-era Germany. Hofmann's modern and expressionist work was simply not welcome in his home country.⁷⁰ In the experimental environment of Greenwich Village, however, Hofmann found a warmly inviting home. Hofmann and his school became an active nucleus in the Village for new artists and students seeking to learn and explore modern style painting, and Hofmann himself would play a central role in the development of the modernist movement in America.

Life in Greenwich Village also attracted the modern painter Edward Hopper. Originally from upstate New York, Hopper first came to New York City in 1899 for art school. In 1913 he and his wife left an apartment on Fifty-ninth Street for a Greek revival row house at 3 Washington Square, just north of Washington Square Park. Hopper would live in this space until his death in 1967.

Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, Hopper worked to position himself as a leader among American contemporary artists. His reputation was established in 1929, when the Museum of Modern Art showcased Hopper's work in an exhibition called, "Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans." When the Whitney Museum opened its Greenwich Village doors for the first time in 1931 with Hopper's *Early Sunday Morning* as a feature, the artist's role as a contemporary force was strengthened even further.

Life in the Village would have an influential effect on Hopper and his work. In response to the erection in 1932 of two large apartment buildings on lower Fifth Avenue, Hopper painted *City Roofs*. With its imposing and bland depiction of these new apartment buildings, *City Roofs* communicated Hopper's negative views towards skyscrapers.⁷² Again in 1932, Hopper was moved by domestic tension to *Room in New York*. Depicting a couple in alienation, Hopper said of this work, "The idea had been in my mind a long time before I painted it. It was suggested by glimpses of lighted interiors seen as I walk along city streets at night, probably near the district where I live (Washington Square) although it's not a particular street or house but is really a synthesis of many impressions."⁷³

Through financial hardship and over the course of many years, Hopper and his wife, also an artist, continued to live in their space in Greenwich Village. As the Hopper biographer Gail Levin described, "They cherished the north-facing skylight and the open views to the south. Greenwich Village remained a vantage point for their ceaseless movements around the city, the invitations and openings, the escapes to plays and movies, the ever more urgent prowling in search of scenes."⁷⁴ Hopper's engagement with Greenwich Village reflected the neighborhood's high spirits and abounding creativity, qualities which would not soon fade from this downtown neighborhood.

Greenwich Village of the 1930s was a neighborhood defined by its taste for the vanguard, its open-minded sensibilities, and its drive to find a new artistic identity. Shaped by events at home that included labor strife and radical politics and by events abroad that included the European political precursors to World War II, the Village grew to become a locus of unconventional creativity. From this outpouring of imagination the Village became a home for the modernist art movement, anchored by the Whitney Museum of American Art, Hans Hofmann, and Edward Hopper. The following decade of the 1940s would prove no less creative, as abstract expressionism would continue to grow and develop within the confines of Greenwich Village.

Caitlyn Hahn:

The 1940s were a time of rebuilding for the Bohemian movement in Greenwich Village. In the later new movements in art and literature began, but the first half of the 1940s provided little in terms of artistic innovations or social rebellion that had made Greenwich Village famous. Over the years Greenwich Village had become both famous and wildly popular, due to the wealth of cultural going in the previous decades, and in the 1940s the area was at the height of its popularity. By the 1940s Greenwich Village was receiving widespread attention in the media. Cashing in on the area's popularity 20th Century Fox even released a motion picture in 1944 called "Greenwich Village" starring Carmel Miranda. According to the full synopsis provided by the database on the TCM website the movie is a composer who has his music stolen by the owner of a speakeasy, who wants to make it on Broadway. What is further the composer falls in love with a woman who was an aspiring poet when she came to Greenwich Village.⁷⁵ "Greenwich Village (1944)" romanticizes the experiences of an artist living in Greenwich Village. The theme of artists in Greenwich Village is clearly a main focus in this piece, which makes this film a prime example of how Greenwich Village was entering the mainstream eye. This romanticized view of the Bohemian lifestyle, which ignored the issues such as poverty, drug use, or sexuality, and problems with the law that often characterized Bohemians, helped add to the growing popularity of the area abroad. To be Bohemian was to be like a movie star. This association would have been considering appalling or even insulting by the artists, who fought so valiantly to resist the mainstream status quo.

This new public attention went against what in essence lay at the heart of Greenwich Village's creation: an artistic domain. What originally made Greenwich Village new and different was becoming popular and mainstream. This took away from the area's rebellious spirit. Perhaps it was for this reason, paired with the outbreak of WWII, that artistic production and innovation seemed to slow down in the early 1940s. Not everyone was opposed to the change. One reporter considered the change a counter culture to Bohemianism. According to the article Bohemian activity simply got in the way of the art and conformed to the standards of the bourgeoisie simply saved time and effort spent on being rebellious.⁷⁶ How little in the way of news from the time offers any evidence that the new influx of bourgeoisie did anything significant for the worlds of art and literature. By the end of the decade there was a call again for those who thought outside of the status quo. Villagers were looking to start a new Bohemia.⁷⁷

Another effect of Greenwich Village's popularity was a rise in the demand for residential buildings in the village. This affected the ability for Greenwich Village to remain the home of low income artists. One Miami, Oklahoma newspaper went as far as to claim that due to the increasing rent prices the "new Greenwich Village" had moved to Brooklyn where apartments were more affordable.⁷⁸ The 1940s were a time of urban revitalization and growth. Countless articles from the time period talk about new construction and the high influx of people moving into Greenwich Village. One article boasts about eighteen new structures in Chelsea and Greenwich Village. The article claims that the area had been "busier lately in apartment house construction work than at any time within the last decade."⁷⁹ This article, written in 1940, only suggested the very beginning of a decade of changes.

Not everyone was enjoying the new construction. Some began to worry that the historical aspect of the village would be destroyed, and some of the area's historic buildings were torn down. According to the website for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation's website urban renewal projects destroyed many 19th century buildings to be torn down. The outrage of those who opposed this type of blanket modernization began the first efforts at historical preservation in Greenwich Village.⁸⁰ The area around Washington Square was especially debated over. Many changes were suggested for the area. Some supported by area residents and others were denounced. As early as 1944 residents were taking me

to ensure Washington Square remained residential. The Washington Square Association was created for the protection of historic and picturesque buildings which help to give the lower West Side its 'atmosphere and charm, and further beautification of the residential blocks by separating them from commercial factory enterprises with green belts.'⁸¹ Save Washington Square Committee was formed on September 1947 in reaction to New York University's choice to build a law school on the square, a decision that the association disagreed with.⁸² Ultimately this fight was lost and the new law school was built, but it was only on many battles by Greenwich Village residents.

Another battle between NYU and local residents took place around the same time. The goal of this fight was to save "genius row." "Genius row" was a row of houses on Washington Square, where several talented individuals, such as Willa Cather and Stephen Crane, had previously lived. By the late 1940s these individuals were gone and the apartments fell into disrepair. A proposal was made to tear down "genius row" and replace the houses with a living art center, but some wished to save the cultural landmarks.⁸³ These efforts too were futile, but the fight was important because it paved the way for preservation work that would begin to take place in the coming years.

Luckily, Greenwich Village was able to withstand both its growing ties with mainstream America and its changing physical structure. The village proved it was not content to become a completely modernized and popularized entity. Bohemia was alive and well, even if its arts scene seemed to lay dormant for the latter half of the decade. There were some remaining instances of lasting socially defiant behavior, even in the early 1940's, when little seemed to be occurring. For example, at Greenwich House several protest plays were written, and then performed on roof top of Greenwich House. These unusual protests were meant to bring light to local social injustices through the dramatic arts. The first rooftop play was called "The Play's The Thing," and was acted out on May 24, 1941.⁸⁴ This play was created to protest the possible closing of local playgrounds when there was a demand for even more children's play areas. The first play was such a success that for the next few years the tradition continued with plays about the high cost of living and war efforts.

By the end of the 1940's the village was abuzz with new artistic endeavors. The post WWII years produced a renaissance of things new and different in Greenwich Village. Two new movements, one in art and one in literature, were about to take root in the late 1940s introducing the world to a new generation of bohemians and free thinkers. The New York School of Abstracts Expressionists began with a group of artists in Greenwich Village. Artists such as Lee Krasner, Hans Hoffman, Willem de Kooning, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, and most famously Jackson Pollock played with new ideas about color and form. The abstract expressionists strayed from realist painting that was popular in the 1940s. Abstract Expressionist paintings had no discernible subject matter. In fact, unlike the precise painting technique of realists, Abstract Expressionist painters painted not with brushes, but instead they paint on the canvas or paper from above. Despite its eventual effect on the larger art world, at first abstract expressionists had a following that was relatively small, but the painters did not work for public approval.⁸⁵ It is understandable that something so radically different from anything that had come before would cause some hesitancy from the general public, but artists in Greenwich Village rarely thought about the general public when making artistic decisions. Eventually, the art world was taken by storm, and because of the work of the abstract expressionists beginning in the late 1940s the center of the art world would soon move from Paris to Greenwich Village. The other famous artistic movement beginning in the late 1940s was of a literary nature. A new group of poets were making their way into Greenwich Village coffee shops and bars. They called themselves "beats" or "beatniks." These new poets focused on rhythm in their poetry. They looked at poetry as something to be felt, read aloud, and most definitely not analyzed. The beat movement was a way of looking at poetry unlike anything before. Names like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac became synonymous with this new literary genre. Both found their start in Greenwich Village.

Village in the 1940s.

Both the beat and abstract expressionist movements would come to maturity in the 1950s and 1960s. The 1940s were a time for meeting and experimenting. The arts in the late 1940s were like the sound of distant thunder. One could not yet see the storm, but one could tell something big was coming and growing nearer. Overall, the 1940s were an important, and often overlooked, time in Greenwich Village history. The decade rounded out what was Greenwich Village's "golden age." The village made its name known to the world between 1900 and 1950 for its artistic genius and offbeat characters. Yet there was so much more to come in the modern period. As Greenwich Village entered the modern era new writers, artists, social thinkers, and deviants broke the status quo, challenged authority, and continued to do the traditions set forth by those first Bohemians of the teens that made Greenwich Village what it is.

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add at least 4 resources per team member

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More, Louise Bolard. *Wage Earner's Budgets: A study of standards and cost of living in New York City* New York: Holt, 1907. Accessed through Harvard University Open Collections Project:

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:761800>]This book has a chapter on Greenwich Village, outlining its general history and conditions up to 1907.

Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Museum, On deposit from the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Social Settlements: United States. New York. New York City. "Greenwich House, New York City. Greenwich House, New York City.

Various photographs and 3 documents relating to the purpose of Greenwich House. Accessed through Harvard University Open Collection Project

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[did=1544443002&sid=1&Fmt=10&clientId=9269&RQT=309&VName=HNP](http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1544443002&sid=1&Fmt=10&clientId=9269&RQT=309&VName=HNP)] This article discusses how saloons in Greenwich Village were raided quite frequently. It also mentions how people were punished for making their own wine.

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Wordle Visualization:

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