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New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy

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NEW DEAL COWBOY: GENE AUTRY
AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

By

Michael Dean Duchemin

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy

History Department

College of Liberal Arts

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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

Michael Dean Duchemin

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New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explains how Gene Autry used his mastery of multiplatform entertainment and the techniques of transmedia storytelling to make the policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), the 32nd President of the United States, more attractive to the American public. Making a case for cultural significance, the work shows how Autry developed a singing cowboy persona to exploit the western genre as his *modus operandi*, because it appealed to rural, small town and newly-urban Americans in the Midwest, South and Southwest. Examining Autry's oeuvre within a context created by Roosevelt administration policies, the dissertation exposes a process of public diplomacy at work in American media culture from 1932 to 1942. I used a storyboarding technique and other methods of history museum exhibition to organize archival research with artifacts, photographs, sound recordings, radio broadcasts, motion pictures, and video recordings preserved by the Autry Qualified Interest Trust, Autry Foundation, Gene Autry Entertainment and the Autry National Center of the American West. Music proves to be a transcendental art form, capable of tying together these multiplatform entertainments into a single name-brand enterprise. As President Roosevelt's policies shifted from the New Deal to the Good Neighbor and war preparedness strategies, Gene Autry's cultural products reflected these changes. The self-described New Deal Cowboy helped Americans deal with the cultural transformation that accompanied the Great Depression and the run up to World War II.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
1. “PRIVATE BUCKAROO”	1
AMERICA’S ACE COWBOY	1
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY	4
PUBLIC HISTORY	14
2. “THAT SILVER HAired DADDY OF MINE”	22
INTRODUCTION	22
COUNTRY-WESTERN HYBRID MUSIC	34
MUSICAL-WESTERN HYBRID FILM	58
CONCLUSION	85
3. “THE WEST AIN’T WHAT IT USED TO BE”	90
INTRODUCTION	90
NEW DEAL—NEW WEST	96
THE SECOND NEW DEAL	130

CONCLUSION	159
4. "SOUTH OF THE BORDER (DOWN MEXICO WAY)"	169
INTRODUCTION	169
SINGING COWBOY—SECRET AGENT	180
CONCLUSION	226
5. "MELODY RANCH"	230
INTRODUCTION	230
YOUTH'S MODEL 1940	236
CONCLUSION	296
6. "(I'VE GOT SPURS THAT) JINGLE, JANGLE, JINGLE"	304
NOTES	322
BIBLIOGRAPHY	348
CIRRICULUM VITAE	382

1

“Private Buckaroo”

*Way out on the range that he's a stranger to
Dreams he hears the cattle lowing,
But it's just the bugle blowing
True blue, Private Buckaroo*

—Gene Autry

AMERICA'S ACE COWBOY

In July 1942, Gene Autry worked straight through to finish his scenes in *Bells of Capistrano* (1942), so that he could plane out for Chicago to join his rodeo troupe. *Bells of Capistrano* was the cowboy hero's fifty-sixth film and the last one he made for Republic Pictures before joining the U.S. Army Air Forces. The film mirrored Autry's real life as a singing cowboy headliner with a traveling rodeo troupe that drew throngs of spectators to experience exciting displays of western sport. The premise of the film involved Autry bringing innovation to the World Wide Wild West and Rodeo with the addition of a “crooner attraction” that spiced up the traditional events. *Bells of Capistrano* dramatized an uneasy union between western music and western sport. Old timers and traditionalists did not care for the yodeling cowboy; yet, they could

not deny Autry's box office success. Large crowds and increased ticket sales eventually won over the most ardent opposition.¹

Gene Autry's Flying "A" Ranch Rodeo Stampede opened at Soldiers' field in Chicago on Thursday night, July 23, 1942. A raucous crowd of 28,000 spectators turned out to see the "western idol of motion picture and radio fans." Autry appeared at each performance during the weeklong show, described by Rita Fitzpatrick in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* as "a good old-fashioned rodeo with a Broadway flare." The Flying "A" Stampede featured 100 top-hand cowboys and cowgirls dressed in colorful costumes of scarlet, baby blue, pink, and gold. The greater purpose of these fancy duds became apparent when the stadium lights lowered and the field became flooded by a stroboscopic black light system. The luminescent costumes of the Flying "A" riders turned the traditional stampede into a surreal new experience. Fitzpatrick wrote that "the corral seemed alive with myriad brightly colored fireflies."²

Gene Autry's Flying "A" Stampede coincided with a special "V-Days" campaign launched with thousands of volunteers selling war bonds and stamps throughout Illinois. During the lunch hour on July 24, 1942, Autry worked on Treasury corner—State Street and Van Buren—in Chicago's downtown loop. Autographing war stamp boutonnières to sell for \$1, he sang his latest hit, "(I've Got Spurs) Jingle, Jangle, Jingle." Majorettes from the Flying "A" Stampede appeared riding around the loop on the "Victory Special," a street car painted red, white and blue, for the purpose of stimulating the sale of war bonds and

stamps. Autry also joined with other radio and stage stars of Chicago to boost the United Service Organization (USO) by appearing at USO-American Legion booths where members of the Legion auxiliary collected contributions during the loop parade. Autry's Flying "A" Ranch Rodeo also took up collections for the USO drive nightly at Soldiers' field.³

In addition to selling war bonds and fundraising for the USO, Autry planned a special event for the matinee performance on Sunday, July 26, 1942: his own induction as a technical sergeant into the U.S. Army Air Forces. The induction took place during a live broadcast of *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch*, the singing cowboy's nationally syndicated radio program, sponsored by Wrigley's Doublemint Gum and produced by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). An estimated audience of 2.5 million listeners tuned in from coast-to-coast to hear Autry take the oath of enlistment during the symbolic broadcast from Soldiers' field. Soldiers stationed around the world heard the program beamed overseas via short wave radio frequencies.⁴

To boost morale, promote recruiting efforts, and sell more war bonds, the Army brass requested that Autry be sworn in during the regular Sunday evening broadcast. After administering the oath of enlistment and inducting the cowboy hero, Colonel Edward F. Shaifer issued a first command: "Sergeant Autry, a song." America's Ace Cowboy chuckled in response and then launched into a rendition of "Private Buckaroo," a western folk ballad about a young cowboy recruit who joined the U.S. Army.⁵

The command for Autry to sing came from higher ups in the Pentagon, led by Hap Arnold, the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Air Forces, who worked with Wrigley and CBS to develop a public relations campaign featuring the newly enlisted singing cowboy hero. Wrigley retired *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* and surrendered its Sunday evening time slot to the Army Air Corps for the production of a new program, *Sergeant Gene Autry*.⁶

Wrigley's announcer explained the change: "In the interest of supplying *information and entertainment* (italics added) to the public and to acquaint young men of America with details of life around Army Air Forces flying fields, Sergeant Autry has been detailed to bring you dramatizations of true stories from the official records of this splendid organization. Sergeant Autry's participation in this radio program, for the time being, is a part of his regular duties in the Army Air Forces, and he receives no compensation for so doing, other than his sergeant's pay. Doublemint Gum now turns broadcast over to the United States Army Air Forces."⁷

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

This vignette of Autry's enlistment and the Army Air Corps commandeering of the *Melody Ranch* radio program serve as capstones in *New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy*. Showing the singing cowboy's support for Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), the 32nd President of the United States, *New Deal Cowboy* explains how Autry used his mastery of multiplatform

entertainment and the techniques of transmedia storytelling to make the President's policies more attractive to the American public. Autry chose the western genre as his *modus operandi*, because it appealed to rural, small town, and newly-urban fans throughout the Midwest, South, and Southwest regions of the U.S. Western folk songs provided the glue that held his enterprises together. Western music was the one element common to all the forms of art, entertainment, and recreation featuring the "Gene Autry" brand.

The singing cowboy's ability to reach lower culture audiences appealed to New Dealers promoting western travel and tourism as an antidote for rebellious tendencies, reactionary conservatism, and foreign aggression in the U.S. Regarding tourism as a key component for economic recovery, Roosevelt funded national advertising campaigns to stimulate cross-country travel and he supported the efforts of business and civic leaders to promote tourism in western locales.⁸ As the Second World War got underway in Europe, Autry promoted the New Deal and the New West in all of the American cultural industries—live performance, sound recording, motion pictures, radio broadcasting, and print mediums—with one singing cowboy persona. When the President's agenda shifted toward foreign policy, Autry promoted Americanism, war preparedness, and friendly relations with Latin America to audiences that favored isolationism. Autry helped make Roosevelt's internationalism more palatable for American citizens leery about engagement in another foreign war.

Music provided the glue that held Autry's multiplatform entertainments together. Synergy elevated the singing cowboy's persona to new heights as an international icon. By extending his singing cowboy persona through live performances, radio broadcasting, and music publishing, Autry created synergy within the motion picture and sound recording subsector of the U.S. information economy. The combined effects of Autry's work in multiple information mediums shaped a total result that was greater than the sum of each individual achievement. Synergy created a "Gene Autry" franchise capable of shaping public opinion, boosting morale, and sparking patriotism within the mainstream of American culture by 1939. Autry's messages tapped into a deep vein of Americanism that affected nearly everyone during the run up to World War II.

The mixture of consumers sampling Autry's cultural products resembled the "quasi-folk low culture" that sociologist Herbert J. Gans described in *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (1974, 1999). Autry fans enjoyed the singing cowboy's combination of old-time singing and yodeling blues, blended with western folk culture and commercial low culture, borrowed from the medicine shows and vaudeville. Fans found Autry's singing cowboy persona very attractive. The singing cowboy appealed to the taste culture of many lower-income people working in unskilled blue collar and service jobs with educations that typically ended in grade school.⁹

In addition to the quasi-folk, Gans identified lower-class audiences that also numbered among Autry's rural, small town, and newly-urban fans in the

Midwest, South, and Southwest. Comprised mainly of skilled and semiskilled factory and white-collar service workers, lower-culture Americans generally achieved nonacademic high school educations in the 1930s. Many dropped out of school after the tenth grade. These Americans dominated the taste culture of the United States until the 1950s, when the group rose en masse to join the ranks of the lower-middle class. Lower-culture publics usually rejected all notions of “high culture” in their arts and entertainments, sometimes with a degree of hostility.¹⁰

Autry presented lower-culture expressions of working-class values in his performances. Highly valued by lower-culture audiences, his musical-western, action-comedy dramas used simple and direct expressions to portray heroic fights against crime, related violations of the moral order, and attempts to save society from natural disasters. Different from traditional westerns depicting conflicts between cowboys and Indians in the “Old West,” Republic’s “Gene Autry” series represented a contemporary cowboy hero fighting depression-era gangsters and corrupt businessmen in the “New West” of the 1930s. Unlike traditional cowboy heroes in westerns produced for lower-middle-culture audiences, Autry never doubted the social usefulness of his activities or the validity of his identity.

Appealing to quasi-folk and lower-culture audiences, Autry represented a quintessential American folk hero, presenting rural American folk values and important working-class behavioral norms as increasingly palatable within the

American mainstream of popular culture. Autry remained sure of his masculinity despite the questioning of heavies who chided his fancy duds and the penchant of his goofy male sidekick to dress in drag. Unlike his movie rivals, Autry did not depend on luck and fate for success. He voiced support for the federal government and for voluntary collective action at the state and local levels.

Autry became a star by creating less expensive content of lower technical quality for large audiences to consume through sound recordings, radio broadcasts, motion pictures, live performances, and licensed merchandise. Admirers sought vicarious contact with their singing cowboy hero through radio and movie guides, fan magazines, comic books, and other mass-produced publications. Followers did not distinguish between Gene Autry the performer and the character he played in the movies. They blurred the line between Gene Autry the man and the public image of the singing cowboy, right on cue.

As national advertisers developed an interest in sponsorship, record and motion picture producers revised material written for lower-middle-class audiences to fit with Autry's working-class values. National advertisers demanded new content to reach audiences with more purchasing power than the quasi-folk and lower-culture consumers alone. The shift in content became increasingly evident after Wrigley agreed to sponsor and nationally syndicate *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* on the CBS Radio Network. *Melody Ranch* launched on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1939, followed by a song and movie with the same title, released by Republic Pictures in November 1940.¹¹

During this special preview broadcast for merchants selling Doublemint Gum, the *Melody Ranch* announcer explained how the western folksinger and star of musical-western films made his way and succeeded by contributing something unique to American culture: “Millions go to their favorite theater to see Gene and thrill to his singing in Republic pictures. And now, Gene Autry comes to visit you: to sit around your firesides with you, swapping stories of the colorful West. Telling you his adventures and singing you the grand songs we all love so well, here is a new program. A program to carry you out of yourselves; out of this troubled world of ours; out into the great open plains of the west; a program that brings you color, American humor, and American song—that successful interpreter of our nation’s most tuneful folksongs—Gene Autry....”¹²

Taking notice of Autry’s new found fame; the First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt invited the singing cowboy to Washington, D.C., to join the President’s annual birthday ball, a major fundraising event for the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. While in the nation’s capital, the cowboy hero accompanied the First Lady to the Fort Myer Horse Show. Mrs. Roosevelt, in turn, made a special guest appearance on *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch*. Broadcasting from Washington, D.C. on January 28, 1940, CBS produced a live simulcast using state-of-the-art information technology to include live remote broadcasts from sister stations in St. Louis, Missouri; Fall River, Massachusetts; and Chicago, Illinois. The Presidential Birthday Broadcast demonstrated the ability of Autry to celebrate diversity as an aspect of American music while simultaneously promoting unity

through the harmonizing of diverse musical forms. *Melody Ranch* featured musical groups performing in noticeably different styles; yet, the world recognized each form as a style of American music.¹³

Gene Autry's Melody Ranch created a place of convergence in American culture where content flowed across multiple media platforms; cooperative agreements brought together multiple media industries; and information circulated nationally and internationally through an active, participatory fan culture. Media convergence represented a cultural shift for Autry fans seeking new information and making connections between the disparate media content created by the singing cowboy. Cultural convergence occurred within the minds of individual fans and through their social media networks. Conversations about Autry created a media buzz valued by industry insiders.¹⁴

Autry's support for President Roosevelt exemplified a new type of "public diplomacy" identified by Joseph S. Nye as the performance of government relations through public information mediums and non-governmental organizations for the purpose of influencing political action. Nye saw the origins of public diplomacy in the broadcasting of FDR's proclamation of a "New Deal" for Americans in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on July 2, 1932. Nye's book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004) explained that the Roosevelt administration developed its tendencies for public diplomacy by garnering support for its New Deal domestic agenda.¹⁵

Franklin Roosevelt was the first Presidential candidate to prepare material to convey information directly to the nation via radio transmission. Earlier candidates had simply allowed radio stations to broadcast their speeches before groups. Radio enabled Roosevelt to break the hold of sectionalist politicians that relied on crowd psychology to direct control in American politics. National interest focused on the Presidential election campaign during the summer of 1932. As the candidates put forth plans to mitigate the impact of the Great Depression, Roosevelt ran what is now considered the classic political campaign in the history of radio broadcasting. Long experience with the medium made FDR a candidate tailor-made for radio. Describing his campaign speeches, Ben Gross explained to readers of the *New York Daily News* that “each word, each phrase, each sentence seemed to be built...with the invisible audience in mind.” As President, Roosevelt addressed U.S. radio audiences estimated at more than 40 million persons on at least ten occasions.¹⁶

Soft Power underscored the attractiveness of the United States as a crucial element in the nation’s ability to achieve desired outcomes in an age of global information. Roosevelt’s willingness to share information made the U.S. government more appealing to citizens at home and abroad. Open access to information improved the ability of people to cooperate with the federal government and it increased their inclination to do so. When the President decided to prepare the nation for war, access through global information mediums enabled FDR to develop a new, internationalist identity. President

Roosevelt used “soft power” to make his internationalist stance desirable for American citizens leery about engagement in another foreign war.¹⁷

These types of activities, commonly connected to a White House filled with media savvy, prompted *Life* magazine executive Fitzhugh Green to proclaim Franklin Roosevelt, the “Wizard of Washington.” In *American Propaganda Abroad* (1988), Green marveled at Roosevelt’s ability to subtly massage public opinion with soothing explanations as he moved the country toward a war footing in 1939. He documented the creation of a domestic information committee innocently labeled the “Office of Facts and Figures” (OFF) in 1941. The President calmed public concern by putting the poet Archibald MacLeish in charge. Autry provided FDR with another means of reaching quasi-folk and lower-culture Americans in the Midwest, South and Southwest. As the nation prepared for war the singing cowboy’s message extended beyond his rural, small town and newly urban base into the mainstream of American popular culture.¹⁸

FDR created a second agency called the Coordinator of Information (COI), headed by lawyer William “Wild Bill” Donovan, to deal with foreign intelligence and covert operations. Donovan recruited the playwright and Presidential speechwriter Robert E. Sherwood to launch the Voice of America (VOA), a U.S. government-broadcasting agency that distributed public information directly to European listeners. Donovan also managed the President’s covert operations, known as “black” propaganda, through the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Black propaganda referred to U.S. programs that sowed disinformation among

the news media in neutral nations to influence public opinion in Germany, Italy and Japan. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the President merged all these public information activities into the Office of War Information (OWI).¹⁹

Roosevelt's concerns regarding German propaganda in Latin America prompted the exception of Nelson Rockefeller's operations as Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA). Wilson Dizard pinpointed this CIAA exception as the beginning of U.S. efforts to set the pace and direction of global communications. Dizard's *Digital Diplomacy* (2001) examined the spirit of Roosevelt's "good neighbor" policy toward Latin America and the job done by Nelson Rockefeller to make the United States more attractive to the people of Mexico and the citizens of other nations in the Western Hemisphere. Rather than creating a government-run broadcasting system, Rockefeller relied upon NBC and CBS, two privately funded, commercial radio networks, to beam shortwave broadcasts of U.S. news and entertainment to foreign nationals. Dizard argued that this use of commercial radio mediums to broadcast government information marked the internationalization of U.S. public diplomacy and the beginning of a global information revolution.²⁰

When Monroe Price looked at the patterns of diffusion that sent these state messages across national boundaries in *Media and Sovereignty: The Global Information Revolution and Its Challenges to State Power* (2002), he linked studies of information flows and imagery to a history of acquiescence by the

American state in periods when new mediums for the distribution of information transcended established boundaries of state control. Looking specifically at international broadcasting, Price called for more in-depth study of the U.S. government's exploitation of genres, technologies, and messages: "We urgently need a far-reaching discussion about the relationship between state and imagery. We need to stop denying that such relationships exist."²¹

Conversations about the state and imagery in U.S. history center naturally in the American West. The federal government exploited no artistic genre more than the western genre. As Franklin Roosevelt implemented his approach to public diplomacy, he took advantage of westerns in every cultural form to convey information in the public interest. The President benefitted from high-tech advancements in microphone, amplifier, and loudspeaker technologies that revolutionized the sound recording, motion picture, radio broadcasting and live-performance industries. He profited from the support of Gene Autry, who emerged in parallel fashion as a personality larger than life—"America's Favorite Cowboy"—delivering the presidential dope through western entertainment, providing intelligence in multiple information mediums, and earning the top spot among Hollywood's cowboy heroes for six consecutive seasons (1937-42).

PUBLIC HISTORY

New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy also offers evidence demonstrating Gene Autry's participation in President Roosevelt's

public diplomacy from a broad range of primary sources culled from a survey of more than 15,000 records, including archives, ephemera, photography, published music, sound recording, radio broadcasting, motion picture, rodeo sport, western art and artifact collections, housed at the Autry National Center of the American West, in Los Angeles. An idea of Autry's association with FDR first emerged from research related to the production of *Gene Autry and the Twentieth Century West: The Centennial Exhibition, 1907-2007*. As the historian and curator of the Gene Autry Centennial, my earliest effort to make sense of the relationship of the singing cowboy to public diplomacy began with a presentation titled, "South of the Border: Gene Autry and U.S. Foreign Policy," delivered in 2006 to the Westerns and the West group at the joint conference of the American Culture Association and Popular Culture Association (ACA/PCA). Publication of "Mr. Autry Goes to Washington: The Cowboy and the New Deal" in *Convergence* magazine further developed my ideas about singing cowboy diplomacy. I developed the "New Deal Cowboy" concept at the ACA/PCA in 2010, and offered a presentation titled, "A Pioneer of Multiplatform Entertainment: Gene Autry and Transmedia Storytelling" at the 2011 conference.²²

The history museum exhibition, *Gene Autry and the Twentieth Century West*, established the social relevance of the singing cowboy as a major producer of western art, entertainment and recreation, and Autry's significance as a pioneer in the sound recording, motion picture, broadcasting, and live

performance industries. The curatorial scholarship used to produce the history museum exhibition differed from the methods of academic history in its service to the public through the medium of museums. The methods of history museum exhibition made different use of narrative, description, and analysis in comparison to academic histories. The museum exhibition accounted for a much broader range of primary source materials. Considered within the chronology of Autry's career from 1932 to 1942, the wide-ranging primary sources produced an exhibition narrative derived mainly from new forms of electronic media. Sound recordings, including radio broadcast transcription records, and motion picture productions provided more content and a broader interpretation than printed materials.²³

Combining art and artifacts, costumes, photography and audiovisual assets, with traditional archival resources, the method of storyboarding used to develop the history museum exhibition revealed a process of layering multiplatform entertainments with related content. The storyboard also highlighted the emergence of new forms of hybrid entertainment: country-western music, for example, and musical-western films. Compared to academic treatments like *Public Cowboy No.1: The Life and Times of Gene Autry*, published by Oxford University Press in 2007, the history museum exhibition offered an alternative form better equipped to present the historical artifacts of the twentieth century preserved in electronic mediums. The ability of "readers" to screen historical film clips, listen to period sound recordings and hear radio

broadcast transcriptions, demonstrated the superiority of the history museum exhibition in contrast to the written descriptions of live action, sound recordings, motion pictures, and radio transcriptions appearing in printed forms.

As a form of visual art, the history museum exhibition took measure of the differences between our own age and that of the Great Depression, and World War II generations. Highlighting distinctions between then and now, the public display created historical awareness, while emphasizing differences in the material conditions of American life in the 1930s and '40s. To forestall anachronism, the curatorial messaging of the interpretive displays referenced distinctions in mentality to explain how the values, priorities, fears, and hopes of an earlier generation differed from our own.²⁴

History museum curatorship underscored the importance of context in history, borrowing from E. P. Thompson a method of organizing the past into a series of historical episodes. Using examples from each of the mass mediums mastered by the singing cowboy, the Gene Autry Centennial represented cultural products in both their physical context and within a wider social context that mirrored the folk culture of rural, small town and newly-urban Americans, as their values converged into the cultural mainstream during the Roosevelt Presidency. As the President's initiatives evolved from the domestic concerns of the New Deal to the security concerns of the Good Neighbor policy, and the needs of War Preparedness, Autry's multiplatform entertainments reflected Roosevelt's change in governance. He conveyed information in the public

interest that gave meaning to these changing circumstances for tens of millions of fans at home and abroad.²⁵

Borrowing from these methods of history museum exhibition, *New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy* includes four episodes connecting cultural products to public diplomacy in multiple information mediums. Six chapters with titles drawn from popular songs focus attention on the role of music as a transcendent form used to create synergy in American media culture. Using song titles as chapter titles emphasizes the significance of eponymous titling in songs, sound recordings, motion pictures and radio programs, and the importance of this procedure in the process of transmedia storytelling.

Chapter 2 uses the song, “That Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine,” to explore Autry’s associations within the motion picture and sound recording subsector of the U.S. information economy. Connecting the song across multiple mediums tied up sound recordings, music publishing, live performances, radio broadcasts and motion pictures, with licensed merchandise from 1931-35. Chapter 2 introduces a relationship between Gene Autry and Herbert Yates that remained strong during this early period, as the artist and the industrialist pioneered innovations in hybrid country-western music and musical-western hybrid films. Autry’s cultural products are shown to exemplify support for President Roosevelt’s New Deal by promoting the American West as an attractive destination for travel and tourism.

Chapter 3 brings into play a song titled, “The West A’int What It Used To Be,” featured in the film, *Public Cowboy No. 1* (1937), to investigate Autry’s connection to motion pictures, and the singing cowboy’s use of film to promote travel and tourism within a contemporary New West, created as a result of New Deal programs. Having made his way to Hollywood, Autry temporarily abandoned his focus on music to concentrate on learning the craft of acting in motion pictures. As President Roosevelt began his bid for a second term, Republic developed its “Gene Autry” series to include twenty-seven films with New Deal themes. Chapter 3 ponders the role of public diplomacy in presenting the New Deal as a harbinger of a New West in the musical-western films starring Autry.

Chapter 4 relies upon the song, “South of the Border, Down Mexico Way,” to examine the power of music in Autry’s live performances and the ability of the singing cowboy to appeal to Spanish-speaking audiences as a part of Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor strategy, engaging new audiences along the U.S.-Mexico border. The type of public diplomacy represented through Gene Autry productions demonstrated the innovative redefinition of the role played by the U.S. government in formulating a policy of international cultural activity. The focus of Autry’s Good Neighbor pictures on U.S. relations with Mexico illustrated the importance of border security issues for the Roosevelt administration and the ability of the singing cowboy to reach cross-cultural audiences. In the historical figures of the cowboy, vaquero, and gaucho, Herbert Eugene Bolton’s

idea of a common heritage throughout the Americas found a simple and direct expression in Autry's musical-western form. Autry's British tour cemented the singing cowboy's international standing. The image of an American cowboy singing a song of Mexico to audiences in Ireland on the verge of global war with millions of British and American citizens listening on the BBC presented a powerful symbol of harmony and unity for people on three continents.

Chapter 5 features the song, "Melody Ranch" to analyze Autry's associations with radio broadcasting within a context of war preparedness, culminating with the transformation of *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* into the *Sergeant Gene Autry* program in 1942. Chapter 5 shows how radio broadcasting transformed Autry from the New Deal Cowboy of 1936 into "Youth's Model 1940." Symbolizing Americanism, war preparedness, and hemispheric cooperation as aspects of the American Way, Autry created new forms of synergy in the western genre to reflect the changes taking place in the American cultural and media industries. The singing cowboy's inclusion on the Hollywood A-list provides one reflection. His gold records sales delivered another. Sold out stadium shows with the World's Championship Rodeo offered a third mirror. Music supplied the source of synergy between motion pictures and radio broadcasting. Films like *Melody Ranch* and *Back in the Saddle* made available eponymous song and film titling tied up with *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* radio program.

As the Commander-in-Chief's main concerns shifted from the New Deal to Good Neighbor and War Preparedness priorities, Autry's cultural products mirrored Roosevelt's move from isolationist to internationalist in music, sound recordings, motion pictures, live performances, radio broadcasts, and licensed merchandise. Examining Autry's oeuvre within a context created by the Roosevelt administration policies, *New Deal Cowboy* reveals a process of public diplomacy at work in American media culture from 1932 to 1942. To get at the substance of public diplomacy in Autry's legacy, I used the following questions to frame the research: What information did Gene Autry productions present and how did this information relate to Presidential politics? How were the singing cowboy's cultural products similar to and different from one another in terms of their ideological operations? As President Roosevelt's priorities changed over time, how did Autry's productions reflect these changes? How did audiences respond to the mixing of public information into Gene Autry productions? What values did Autry endorse?

2

“That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine”

*If God would but grant me the power
Just to turn back the pages of time
I'd give all I own, if I could but atone
To that silver haired daddy of mine*

—Gene Autry

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Gene Autry's reputation as a lowbrow entertainer dates back to the beginning of his career as a singer-songwriter. Autry got his start in 1929, recording knockoffs of Jimmie Rodgers' blue yodels to sell at discount prices through mail order catalogs and other low cost retailers. He moonlighted while working as a telegrapher for the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad (The Frisco Line). Making good money from the sale of records like “Hobo Yodel” (1930) and “A Yodeling Hobo” (1931), Autry promoted himself as “The Sunny South's Blue Yodeler.” Working alone or in tandem with Jimmy Long, the two railroad men turned singer-songwriters modeling their performances after “The Singing

Brakeman.” Beside Rodgers and Long, Autry’s other musical influences included Vernon Dalhart and Gene Austin.¹

Autry and Long scored their first big hit for the American Record Corporation (ARC). Recording “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” on October 29, 1931, the song charted as Autry’s 142nd recording. Art Satherley produced “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine,” putting “Mississippi Valley Blues” on the flipside. ARC’s head of Artists & Repertoire (A&R), Satherley marketed the song nationally using twelve different record labels and collecting half of the music royalties for each record sold. Autry and Long split the remainder, each of them earning 25 percent. Similarly, Satherley and Autry split the royalties 50-50 for two big-selling Victor recordings, “Jailhouse Blues” and “I’m Atlanta Bound,” recorded a few days later. In quick succession, the trio scored two more hits: “I’m Always Dreaming of You,” recorded by Victor; and “The Crime I Didn’t Do,” an ARC recording. As before, Satherley, Long, and Autry split the royalties for these songs, 50-25-25.²

Stylistically and artistically, “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” marked a turning point in the career of young Autry. Satherley convinced the singer-songwriter to stop imitating Jimmie Rodgers’ blue yodel sound and embrace the trendy old time music favored by Jimmy Long, his boss on the Frisco Line and musical mentor. Satherley also persuaded the blue yodeler to capitalize on his Texas and Oklahoma roots by developing a singing cowboy persona; thereby,

launching Autry's career from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Chicago, Illinois, and Los Angeles, California.³

Following a trajectory from song to live performance, sheet music, sound recording, radio broadcast, and gold record, the success of "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" made the singing cowboy's segue into the role of movie star appear natural. Riding a sea change in American music, Autry moved from performing in Tulsa as "The Sunny South's Blue Yodeler," to become "The Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy" in Chicago, and then, "The Original Singing Cowboy" in Hollywood. Autry's musical-westerns offer a glimpse into the lives of rural, small town, and newly urban Americans in the 1930s as people dealing with the cultural transformations accompanying significant transportation improvements, communications revolutions, and steadily increasing mobility. The singing cowboy joined a group of avant-garde musicians, writers and filmmakers, doing innovative, experimental and unconventional work, presenting new hybrid forms of "country-western" music *within* new hybrid forms of "musical-western" films.⁴

Explanations for the hybridization of musical and motion picture genres argued that the economic decline of 1929 influenced record companies and film studios to mash up their formulas, beginning with the combination of "country" and "western" music. The country label included a variety of subgenres such as "old time," "hillbilly," and "mountain" music. Western music was comprised mainly of cowboy songs compiled by John A. Lomax in *Cowboy Songs and Other*

Frontier Ballads (1910); songs like “Jesse James,” “The Old Chisholm Trail,” and “Whoopie Ti Yi Yo, Git Along Little Doggies.”⁵

Since 1930, country-western music has grown into an important facet of the entertainment industry. Financial success led to increased status and respect for the hybrid genre, known today as country music among the popular arts of the United States. The history of country-western music and American attitudes toward the genre reflected contradictions in a growing audience segment labeled as “urban hillbilly” by D. K. Wilgus in *The Journal of American Folklore* (1970). Wilgus explained how urban hillbillies dealt with the polarization of living between two cultures: the old world of their parents back home on the farm; and the new world of their peers in the growing cities of the American South and West. Appeasement between town and country necessitated an accommodation of values expressed, in part, through the hybridization of county-western music and the identification of a fan base comprised of urban hillbillies.⁶

Simultaneously, the interconnectedness of conversion-era cinema with other entertainment mediums perpetuated a notion among critics that synchronous sound might undermine the art of filmmaking. Critical judgments pointed out the obvious links between sound films and live stage events, radio broadcasting, and sound recordings. Much like the early 1900s, when the motion picture industry got its start, early sound cinema reproduced stage, radio, and gramophone acts in ways that resembled rough cuts of the other

mediums. It took time for sound cinema to become self-realized as an independent art form. Film scholar Charles O'Brien referred to the clash of aesthetic and technical norms associated with all of the new electronic mediums as hybridism. In *Cinema's Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the U.S.* (2004), O'Brien described the film industry's integration of live performances, sound recordings, and radio programs into an amalgamation of entertainment. Globally, the synergy between sound films, sound recordings, radio broadcasting, and mass printing flattened the cultural differences between nations. During the 1930s, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer defined this flattening as a single totalizing "culture industry."⁷

In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Mediums Collide* (2006), Henry Jenkins showed that hybridity occurred when one cultural industry; for example, the motion picture industry; absorbed and transformed elements from other cultural mediums. As Jenkins explained, "a hybrid work exists betwixt and between two cultural traditions while providing a path that can be explored from both directions." *Convergence Culture* framed hybridity as a strategy of dispossessed peoples struggling to resist or reshape the flow of mass mediums into their culture—taking electronic mediums imposed from the outside and making those mediums serve the purposes of the dispossessed. Autry's singing cowboy persona met the conditions of this definition for many rural, small town, and newly urban Americans.⁸

Jenkins also described hybridity as a corporate strategy, one that came from a position of strength rather than vulnerability or marginality, a strategy seeking control rather than containment of transcultural consumption. Here to, Autry met the conditions of hybridity as a multiplatform entertainer able to mash up the desires of both rural and urban audiences, blending traditional and modern culture within a single corporate strategy, using hybridity to create synergy, combining multiple information mediums. In this regard, Herbert J. Yates had the greatest influence over the singing cowboy. As head of Consolidated Film Industries, ARC Records and Republic Pictures, Yates shaped Autry's image as a recording artist and movie star into a transformative western hero within a pantheon of western heroes that included Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, "Buffalo Bill" Cody, William S. Hart, and Tom Mix, to name but a few of the classic characters representing American culture in the media history of the United States.⁹

The mash up of country and western music occurred simultaneously with news from national outlets revealing extreme poverty in the southern states. Franklin Roosevelt referred to Appalachia as a particularly depressed region. Americans increasingly perceived of the Appalachian Mountains as a cultural site of backwardness and degradation. In response, musicians and their fans across the country turned away from urban hillbilly and embraced the classic image of the American cowboy hero, represented in motion pictures, popular fiction, Wild West shows, and rodeos. In *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*

(2005), Anthony Harkin clarified how Roosevelt tapped into this sea change in American culture by announcing “Home on the Range” to be his favorite song. As the 1930s unfolded, hillbilly singers still sang about cabins in the mountains—the Rocky Mountains—not the Cumberland Mountains. The Kentucky Ramblers became The Prairie Ramblers, backed up by Patsy Montana.¹⁰

Meanwhile, a new music scene surfaced in Los Angeles, held together by the movie studios producing musical-western films. Among the singing cowboys already in Hollywood, The Beverly Hillbillies arose as progenitors of a new sound and style of musical performance. Combining the attributes of hillbilly music with western folksongs and cowboy trappings, The Beverley Hillbillies premiered on Los Angeles Radio Station KMPC, showcasing a new country-western format with live radio play in 1930.¹¹

The infusion of country-western music into hybridized forms of musical-western films came about as a result of the Great Depression. As movie attendance dropped from a high of 100 million, down to 60 million tickets sold per week, theater exhibitors grappled with ways to stem the tide of slumping sales. Exhibitors borrowed a technique made popular by ARC: marketing high-volume, low-markup products to quasi-folk and lower-culture music buyers. They lured audiences back into theaters with a “double feature” concept—two movies for the price of one. The idea took hold in the Midwest, South and Southwest, where westerns formed the backbone of the movie business. Exhibitors coupled longer and more expensive “A” features with shorter,

cheaper, and more formulaic “B” movies. The economics of the double feature worked because theater owners purchased the rights to show “A” pictures on a percentage basis, while they paid a small, flat rate for “B” movies. The move by theater owners to offer double features created a new niche for B-movie film producers; especially, the western filmmakers that managed to overcome the challenges to filming sound motion pictures outdoors.¹²

Fox Pictures introduced the prototype for musical-westerns, *In Old Arizona* (1929). Paramount, Tiffany, Veribest, and Warner Brothers-Vitaphone followed suit, making films with cowboys singing around campfires, singing cowboys riding trails, and other musical-western scenes. Ken Maynard furthered the blending of western music and motion pictures by recording “The Last Trail” for Columbia and singing the song in *The Wagon Master* (1930), released by Universal Pictures. Ken Maynard Productions also pioneered the creation of synergy through eponymous titling. Maynard purchased the screen rights for “The Strawberry Roan” from The Beverley Hillbillies to make a motion picture using the same title. Incorporating the popular country-western ballad into his musical-western film, Maynard wrote a new arrangement, added a fiddle accompaniment, and sang the song twice in *The Strawberry Roan* (1933). Eponymous titling created opportunities for Universal to cross-promote the motion picture with sheet music and songbook sales, record sales, radio programs, and live theater performances. The results exemplified how synergy worked in the American media culture, including the sound recording, motion

pictures, radio broadcasting, and mass printing mediums. Popular songs with catchy titles played an important role in the convergence of country-western music and musical-western films.¹³

Seeing the sales numbers after the release of “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine,” Herbert Yates backed the play of Art Satherley to sign Gene Autry to a long-term contract and recast the yodeling bluesman as a singing cowboy with hillbilly chops. Yates gained notoriety during the hard times as the consolidator of film processing laboratories and sound recording companies; nevertheless, he produced superior sound recordings and high-quality motion pictures with synchronized sound. As events unfolded under the New Deal, Yates added motion picture production and distribution companies to his list of consolidated firms. He created Republic Pictures to monopolize the production of B movies for double bills in rural, small town, and newly-urban movie theaters in the Midwest, South and Southwest.¹⁴

Specializing in musical-western films, Republic provided Yates with a motion picture platform to advertise and promote ARC’s country-western recording artists. Nat Levine, Republic’s head of motion picture productions, developed a musical-western series featuring Autry as “The Screen’s New Singing Cowboy Star.” Republic targeted ARC record buyers with its “Gene Autry” series in an attempt to saturate the quasi-folk and lower culture markets with new cultural products featuring a singing cowboy hero across multiple information mediums.¹⁵

Sears, Roebuck and Company collaborated with ARC and Republic by creating a line of signature merchandise licensed to use the “Gene Autry” name and image. Satherley made a deal with Sears to sponsor personal appearances by The Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy on Chicago Radio Station WLS. Autry hosted *Conqueror Record Time* to promote record sales for Sears, making special guest appearances on *Sears’ Tower Topics* and the *WLS Barn Dance* program. In May 1932, when the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) syndicated the *WLS Barn Dance*, Autry expanded his fan base from coast-to-coast, making special guest appearances on the syndicated, *National Barn Dance* program.¹⁶

Moreover, Sears sponsored Radio’s Singing Cowboy to appear live, in-person, on concert tours with the *Round-Up of WLS Radio Stars*. The traveling troupe did live shows from remote broadcasting locations in rural, small town, and newly urban theaters throughout the Upper Midwest. Theater owners combined these localized “barn dance” programs with double features of westerns and musical-western films, featuring Ken Maynard and other Hollywood stars. The combined effects of these live performances, radio broadcasts, motion pictures, sound recordings, and advertising provided local exhibitors with a draw powerful enough to attract a crowd during the depression years.¹⁷

The licensed merchandise developed by Sears using Autry’s name and image included sound recordings, sheet music, songbooks and two guitars bearing the singing cowboy’s signature. The Harmony Guitar Company made

“Gene Autry-Round Up” guitars and “Gene Autry-Old Santa Fe” guitars for Sears. The giant retailer tied up “Gene Autry” advertisements in its mail-order catalogs with Autry’s personal appearances on WLS. “Gene Autry” merchandise targeted newly urban audiences of young women recently relocated from the countryside to Chicago and other Midwestern cities. Within this target market, “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” maintained enormous appeal from 1931-35. Autry’s signature song served as a form of wheat past, bonding the singing cowboy’s live performances, sound recordings, radio broadcasts, motion pictures and licensed merchandise, with a large and growing fan base across multiple entertainment platforms.¹⁸

The growth of radio broadcasting as a new information medium stands out as the greatest influence upon the hybridization of country-western music and musical-western films. A U.S. Census Map titled, “Radio Set Ownership 1930,” revealed a cultural shift occurring as Autry became a star. Displaying the percentages of American families owning radio receiving sets, the map showed concentrations of listeners in and around New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, where more than 50 percent of households listened to radio broadcasting. The map also revealed the existence of fewer radio receiving sets in the Southern and Southwestern States. Less than 20 percent of households in these regions had access to local or national broadcasting.¹⁹

Limited access to electricity meant fewer radio stations and less competition for Sears in selling phonographs, sound recordings, and related

merchandise in the South and Southwest. The number of households with radio receiving sets in many rural communities remained static until President Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Administration to make low-interest loans to local electrical cooperatives in 1935. It was the late 1930s before rural cooperatives began building and operating new power lines. The distribution of electricity from federal projects like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Boulder Canyon Project (Boulder/Hoover Dam) and other hydroelectric developments, brought dramatic changes throughout these underserved regions.²⁰

New Dealers promoted the American West as a destination for commercial agricultural and industrial development. With the development of water and power resources, the federal government literally paved the way for the expansion of travel and tourism along U.S. Highway Route 66—from Chicago to L.A.—and other highway construction projects. Improved roads, roadside attractions, and new accommodations were part of a New Deal plan to promote recreational tourism as an antidote for social divisions in American culture. The President believed that travel and tourism could temper revolutionary tendencies, right-wing reactionaries, and foreign aggression. Regarding tourism as a key component for economic recovery, Roosevelt funded national advertising campaigns to stimulate cross-country travel, and he supported local efforts of business and civic leaders to promote tourism.²¹

The themes and storylines in country-western music and musical-western films provided incentives for American worker-tourists with newly awarded two-week paid vacations to travel and take advantage of tourist promotions in the American West. A proclamation from the President announcing “Home on the Range” as his favorite song gave a nod to this cultural shift taking place among quasi-folk and lower culture Americans, groups defined by Herbert Gans in *Popular Culture and High Culture* (1999) and explained in the introduction. Similarly, Autry’s early films, including *In Old Santa Fe* (1934), *The Phantom Empire* (1934) and *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* (1935), projected images of a modern, contemporary culture: a New West brought about by the New Deal. More than star vehicles for Herbert Yates to promote country-western recording artists, Autry’s musical-westerns mirrored the difficulties faced by moviegoers confronting major social and economic turmoil caused by the Great Depression. “Gene Autry” entertainments represented the singing cowboy moving back-and-forth between rural and urban environments, just as Wilgus described in his essay, “Country-Western Music and the Urban Hillbilly.” Autry helped newly urban fans adjust to the conditions of industrial work, wage dependency, and city life.

COUNTRY - WESTERN HYBRID MUSIC

“Before there was ‘Country’ music there was ‘Country and Western,’ a term coined by *Billboard* in 1949 to head up its chart listing that had

previously been 'Folk' and before that 'Hillbilly,'" explained Peter Stanfield in "Dixie Cowboys and Blue Yodels," an essay included in Edward Buscome and Roberta E. Pearson's, *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western* (1998). The hybridization of country-western music came about as national radio networks grew in the 1930s. Popular with rural, small town, and newly urban radio listeners, country-western music offered national advertisers and politicians a means to access large and underserved audiences in the Midwest, South and Southwest. When Republic Pictures began producing musical-western films, the studio cross-promoted these cultural products with radio broadcasts, sound recordings, and live performances.²²

The singing cowboy gained influence as synergy amongst these mediums lifted Autry's folk culture programming from the periphery to the center of mainstream popular culture. While Holly George Warren, Don Cusic, Douglas B. Green, Peter Stanfield and others have documented the history of the singing cowboy in the 1930s, none have delved into the association of Gene Autry entertainments with public information promoting the New Deal, Good Neighbor, and war preparedness policies of President Roosevelt. Autry's story raises questions about the relationship of entertainment and to information during the Roosevelt Presidency and run up to World War II.²³

Attempting to sign Autry to a long term recording contract, Art Satherley convinced the singer-songwriter to add some western flare to his yodeling blues. Satherley persuaded Autry to get out front of major changes affecting the

recording industry. Consumers were rejecting hillbilly blues in favor of country-western music. Two weeks after recording “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine,” Satherley arranged for Autry to premiere his new routine for investors and advertisers in Manhattan. Imagine the studio audience at New York Radio Station WPCB seeing The Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy wearing an outfit sold by Sears and singing “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” during a live broadcast at 4:45 p.m. on Friday, November 13, 1931.²⁴

Autry’s new singing cowboy persona enabled Satherley to position the talented recording artist to ride a shifting tide in American media culture associated with the westernizing of hillbilly music and government promotions of western tourism and travel. The trend started in 1930, when radio programmer Glen Rice masked the hillbilly roots of one musical group with a veneer of cowboy culture. Broadcasting from Los Angeles Radio Station KMPC, Rice claimed to discover the musicians wandering in the Santa Monica Mountains, above Malibu, California. Dubbed The Beverly Hillbillies, the group made use of hillbilly terminology and mountain imagery; but, they dressed similar to cowboys and performed songs like “When the Bloom is on the Sage,” “Red River Valley,” and “The Strawberry Roan.” This fusion of hillbilly and cowboy styles gained notice with the rise of “Western Swing” music in Texas and elsewhere. Los Angeles grew in importance as a seedbed for musicians and radio programmers. Both Decca and Okeh paid more attention to the Southwest as they moved from recording hillbilly to country-western music.²⁵

The instant popularity of The Beverly Hillbillies convinced Art Satherley to promote the broader fusion of country-western music at ARC. Combining the regional musical styles of the South and the Southwest to create a musical hybrid form, Satherley transformed Gene Autry from The Sunny South's Blue Yodeler into The Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy. Subsequently, the A&R man used the Autry prototype to sign and record some of the biggest names in country-western music, including Bob Wills & His Texas Playboys, The Carter Family, Roy Acuff, The Sons of the Pioneers, Bill Monroe, Lefty Frizzell, and Marty Robbins.²⁶

Responding to the lure of the new, country-western format, Autry signed an exclusive contract with ARC on December 1, 1931. He agreed to migrate from Tulsa to Chicago and reinvent himself as The Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy. Satherley paid the singing cowboy a stipend of \$90 a month, plus music royalties, to record high-volume, low-markup songs for ARC to sell in rural, small town, and newly urban markets. "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" fit the bill as a nostalgic song, evoking tensions between the road and the old home place. Nostalgic for many rural and small town fans, Autry's hit song simultaneously guided newly urban audiences coming to terms with the rapid lifestyle changes brought on by industrialization and the traumas of dislocation, disenfranchisement, and dispossession.²⁷

Singing, "I'd give all I own, if I could but tone....," Autry expressed the lament felt by many young people that identified with urban hillbilly music. "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" represented the changes coming about as

one means among many to rid Southern vernacular music of its pejorative and negative connotations. Autry conveyed respectability through his singing cowboy persona that enabled white southerners to develop a new sense of identity and opportunity associated with the American West. Peter Stanfield explained:

The history of the singing cowboy is intimately tied up in this process of making Country music respectable and therefore marketable. It was the image and mythology of the cowboy that provided the most accessible means of repressing the vulgarity of Southern vernacular music, while simultaneously suggesting a classless and uncontroversial image of white supremacy.²⁸

A majority of white Americans with rural roots found hillbilly and mountain music attractive counterpoints to urban jazz and blues. The market share for hillbilly and mountain music accounted for 25 percent of the 65 million records sold in the United States in 1929. Record executives and journalists viewed rural white southern folk music as an outgrowth of the same rural culture that produced the blues and jazz. Record company catalogs often listed white and black rural musical selections in separate categories on facing pages, despite attempts by white musicians to distinguish their music as separate from that of black performers. When Sears adopted the “hillbilly” tag to sell records in its mail-order catalogs in 1929, Montgomery Ward followed suit a year later.²⁹

Jazz music, dance crazes, and popular songs disappeared after the stock market crash of October 24, 1929. Record sales plummeted, hitting bottom in 1933 when only \$5 million worth of discs were purchased nationwide. New “old

time” records produced during the depression combined with free radio play to target a subculture of performers and listeners that enjoyed rural white southern folk music throughout the Midwest, South, and Southwest. Displaced Americans and others feeling psychologically adrift enjoyed country-western songs of independence, romance, and nostalgia. Fans of country-western music preferred songs dealing with the economic issues of everyday life to the sugarcoated popular music of the day.³⁰

As the depression took hold, manufacturers and retailers increasingly employed old-time musicians to reach rural, small town, and newly urban audiences. Henry Ford pioneered the sponsorship of fiddle contests at his dealerships. Ford promoted fiddle tunes as wholesome family fun—an alternative to the “loose morals” of jazz and the themes of sex and violence reflected in blues music. Early recordings of rural, southern white vernacular music displayed an obsession with community and regional identity, reflected in songs about places and the values of faith and family, represented so distinctly in the music of The Carter Family. Simultaneously, the dark days of the Great Depression revealed some alternative themes reflecting the restlessness and rootlessness in American culture in songs about drifters and hoboes by Jimmie Rodgers, Goebel Reeves and others. As the depression wore on, the singing cowboy came to represent the tension between home and the road that agonized rural, small town and newly urban audiences, best reflected in the title of the popular song, “Home on the Range.” The possibility for broad appeal

attracted commercial advertisers, radio broadcasters, and record producers; especially, ARC Records.³¹

ARC controlled at least thirty music labels, having merged together the Cameo Record Corporation, Pathé Phonograph and Radio Corporation, Plaza Music Company, and Scranton Button Company (Emerson Records). As Autry signed on in December 1931, ARC added Brunswick and Vocalion to its catalog, leasing the labels from Warner Brothers. Controlling so many labels, ARC pursued high volume-low markup strategies to sell music to rural, small town and newly urban record buyers. The approach worked in 1932. ARC sold six million units, twice the volume of RCA Victor, the recording industry leader. ARC sold Brunswick and Columbia records for a premium at 75¢, while discounting the Melotone, Vocalion, Banner and Perfect labels, selling these brands for 35¢, or three for one dollar. Moreover, ARC produced exclusive labels for national—“five and dime”—retail department store companies. ARC made Oriole Records for J. G. McCrory’s and the McCrory Stores; Romeo Records sold by the Kress Stores; and Conqueror Records for Sears.³²

Satherley released “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” on twelve different ARC labels, including Okeh, Vocalion, Perfect, Banner, Oriole, Romeo, Conqueror, Broadway, Crown (Canada), Melotone (Canada), Royale and Sterling. The A&R man made a special deal with Jeff Shay, the record buyer for Sears. Shay took advantage of Sears’ history developing up-and-coming musicians since

1923, when he agreed to promote “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” and other Autry recordings through the giant mail-order enterprise.³³

The rural retailer created an alternative to the commercial radio model, established by American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T) at New York Radio Station WEAJ in 1922. Funding Chicago Radio Station WLS through a nonprofit, Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation, with call letters signifying “World’s Largest Store,” Sears kept advertising off the WLS airwaves by promoting WLS and WLS-brand products through its catalogs, newspaper advertisements, and store displays. Instead of using the radio station to promote products, Sears used its product catalog to promote WLS. Associating the “WLS” logo with high-quality popular programming, the mail-order company sold a wide variety of products; especially, its best-selling “Silvertone” brand of radio receiving sets, antennas, headphones, loudspeakers, battery chargers and power units.³⁴

This was the world that Autry arrived into when he landed in Chicago in December 1931. Schooled in Sears’ enterprising approaches to using WLS as an effective public relations tool to boost the sales of mail-order products, Autry saw how the giant retailer staffed its Radio and Electronic Goods Department with buyers providing both goods and information to consumers. The Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation employed people to produce radio programs, serve as on-air talent, and cater to public relations needs. Rural, small town and newly urban audiences really benefited from the Sears broadcasting model.

“The farmer was truly one of radio’s favorite children,” claimed James Evans in

Prairie Farmer and WLS (1969). “No one talked much about radio programs for accountants or carpenters, but the value of radio for the farmer was clear from the beginning.”³⁵

Recognizing that radio receivers were of little use to customers without radio programs and noting the popularity of old time music among rural and small town audiences, Sears launched the *WLS Barn Dance* as a regular Saturday night feature in 1924. Broadcasting from a 100-seat theater, Sears made fans a part of the live radio broadcasts. The giant retailer also created a traveling troubadour version of the hugely popular program, billed as the *Round-Up of WLS Radio Stars*. The *WLS Round-Up* played state and country fairs, and community theaters, throughout the Upper Midwest.³⁶

WLS radio announcers engaged listeners to find out what fans liked and disliked about specific shows. Radio audiences gladly cooperated, sending thousands of telegrams asking programmers to play favorite songs and read messages over the air. Once the novelty wore off, letters replaced telegrams as the dominant form of fan communication. In 1927, WLS received nearly 200,000 listener letters from all over the country and faraway places like Puerto Rico, New Zealand, Manila, England, and Hawaii. “Letters were in large degree a measure of a station’s popularity,” explained Edward Condon. The Sears executive noted, “No station of similar size received as many letters as WLS, and no station received the same quality of mail.” By 1928, the enormously popular

WLS Barn Dance commanded an incredible 59 percent of the market share among radio listeners in the Upper Midwest.³⁷

Modeling the success of WLS, the Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation developed new programs for other radio stations in Dallas (WFAA), Atlanta (WSB), Memphis (WMC), and Kansas City (KMBC). Sears promoted its catalog and merchandise distribution centers in each of these metropolitan areas by sponsoring news and entertainment programming. Sears replicated its WLS achievements by promoting a barn dance radio format, which was in large part responsible for the advent of country-western music in each new radio market, developing new audiences and a circuit for musicians to play in the South and Southwest. The expansion of Sears into regional radio markets prompted competing stations to create barn dance programs in New York, Louisville, Cincinnati, Wheeling, Nashville, Saint Paul, Des Moines, Shreveport, Tulsa, Fort Worth and Hollywood. By 1930, the barn dance format was hugely popular on radio stations from coast-to-coast.³⁸

The growing number of radio stations playing barn dance music created a boon for Autry and other musicians performing in the new country-western style. Radio programmers needed local talent to air live performances. Adding radio work to a schedule of recording sessions and play dates enabled Autry to stay employed full-time. Regular radio performances helped the musician secure local concert bookings. Autry landed lucrative show dates, primarily, because of

his popularity on the radio. Radio exposure helped the singing cowboy cross-promote his upcoming personal appearances and stay in the public limelight.³⁹

Autry got his big break when Jeff Shay booked him to perform on *Tower Topics*, a WLS morning program sponsored by Sears every weekday at 9:30 a.m. Anne Williams introduced “The Oklahoma Yodeler” during a special *Conqueror Record Time* segment. Williams provided a big build up to capture the imagination of Midwestern listeners who wondered about Autry’s singing cowboy persona. Autry sang “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine,” “The Crime I Didn’t Do” and other popular hits, while promoting record and sheet music sales, and special mail-order offers, during the morning show. He booked the \$90 a month received from ARC as “Radio Station Salaries WLS.” Regular work as a radio performer enabled the singing cowboy to join the Chicago Musicians Union. He paid a \$100 initiation fee and quarterly dues of four dollars in 1932.⁴⁰

Targeting the responses of record buyers listening to *Conqueror Record Time*, Shay developed a one-page catalog insert offering twenty Autry recordings for only 21¢ per song, or five records for one dollar. Designed as a self-mailer, Shay’s insert pitched: “Gene Autry, Famous ‘WLS’ Radio Star and Yodeler has made it possible for you to hear him whenever you wish.” Customers returned the mailer to Sears with cash enclosed. For delivery orders of two dollars or more, Sears paid the postage, offering even more incentive for customers to buy in bulk. Special instructions for rural route customers identified the market targeted for this promotion.⁴¹

Shortly after Autry began working at WLS, the station installed a 50,000-watt clear-channel transmitter. Clear-channel capability enabled WLS to reach a large audience in a six-state region surrounding Chicago that included about 10 percent of the total population of the United States. Working at the station, Autry met Joseph Lee Frank, also known as J.L. Frank or Joe Frank. A big promoter in the music business, Frank booked acts for WLS and dozens of other play dates for the WLS Round-Up in theaters throughout the Upper Midwest.⁴²

The singing cowboy's personal balance sheet for January 1932 showed a gross monthly profit of \$635, the equivalent of \$10,500 in 2011 dollars, using the Consumer Price Index method of conversion. Fifty-four percent of Autry's income came from record company royalty payments, totaling \$345 in the fourth quarter of 1931. He earned another \$150 in radio salaries from WJJD, plus the \$90 from ARC for his WLS performances. The Gayble Theater in North Judson, Indiana, provided Autry's only paying theater gig. Earning \$50 for one show, he paid Dave Kapp a booking agent commission of 15 percent. Other expenses for January 1932 included booking agent commissions, advertising agent commissions, advertising photographs, car expenses, and two pairs of custom made cowboy boots. Autry's net profit for the month equaled \$460, about \$7,606 in 2011 dollars.⁴³

Sears and ARC shaped Gene Autry, The Oklahoma Yodeler, into a benign, respectable, and modern spokesperson. The retailer and the record company cast the singing cowboy in a role eminently suitable for product endorsements

targeting newly urban female consumers with sentimental attachments to rural and small town lifestyles. The mail-order company propelled Autry's rising star toward celebrity on February 1, 1932, when radio programmers gave the singer-songwriter, radio pitchman and traveling troubadour, his own ten-minute segment at 9:20 a.m., leading into the popular *Tower Topics* program. Sears promoted the singing cowboy by selling a new "Gene Autry Round Up Guitar" for \$9.95 in its mail-order catalogs. The retailer packaged the Gene Autry Round Up Guitar with a folio from music publisher M. M. Cole titled, *Gene Autry's Sensational Collection of Famous Original Cowboy Songs and Mountain Ballads*. The retailer also included a book by Autry, *The Art of Writing Songs and How to Play the Guitar*.⁴⁴

By making the "Gene Autry" brand a new and permanent presence in the lives of millions of rural, small town and newly-urban music fans, Sears created a transitional cowboy hero capable of honoring nostalgic folkways, while simultaneously, representing a modern New West. Combining tradition and innovation, Autry helped many quasi-folk and lower culture Americans deal with the changes brought on by deprivation, relocation and marginalization during the Great Depression. Having turned to the West for his own reinvention, the singing cowboy encouraged his large and growing fan base to consider a similar option by crafting a new and more acceptable identity in tune with mainstream American culture during the New Deal.

As Autry's career took off he, and Ina Mae Spivey decided to marry on April 1, 1932. The young couple's first home was an apartment near WJJD in Aurora, Illinois, where they lived with Ina's uncle, Jimmy Long. About a month after marriage, the newlyweds learned that Gene's mother, Elnora Ozment Autry, died in Tioga, Texas. Feeling an obligation toward his siblings, Autry secured rooms for his extended family in a new apartment building at 4501 Malden Street, in the fashionable Sheridan Park neighborhood of Uptown Chicago. Living in the theater and arts district, near the Aragon Ballroom, Riviera Theatre, Uptown Theater, and the famed Green Mill Jazz Club, Gene and Ina Autry welcomed Wilma (20 years old), Vida (18) and Dudley (10) into their home.⁴⁵

Officially, Autry quit working for the Southwestern Division of the Frisco Lines after he married Ina. Ultimately, he made the decision to become a full-time musician. Autry regretted leaving the railroad, but the business was hard hit by declining freight and passenger traffic. His prospects as a radio performer and recording artist in Chicago looked much more appealing than work as a relief telegrapher in a small Oklahoma town.⁴⁶

After NBC syndicated the *WLS Barn Dance* in May 1932, the network renamed the program *National Barn Dance*, and moved the show into the 1,200-seat, Eighth Street Theater on the southern edge of the Chicago Loop. The cast did two shows every Saturday night, charging 75¢ admission for adults and 35¢ for children. Fans filled the seats for every broadcast and put their names on

waiting lists to buy tickets for future shows. Autry made special guest appearances on *National Barn Dance* to promote his new show, *Sears Tower Topics*, co-hosted with Anne Williams and Sue Roberts, weekdays at 8:00 a.m. on WLS.⁴⁷

Public opinion polling and electronic recording devices enabled radio advertisers to refine listening habits and listener preferences, taking much of the guesswork out of measuring *National Barn Dance* audiences. In Chicago and dozens of other cities, survey organizations conducted telephone-sampling studies and compiled monthly listener ratings. Large survey organizations made millions of listener calls each year. Radio stations also distributed millions of printed questionnaires. Pollsters assembled vast files of data showing when and how long listeners tuned into programs. New methods of information gathering revealed a mesh of tie-ups between individual radio stations and specific service areas. Radio advertisers learned to use product tie-ups as part of the entertainment programming for listeners segmented by race, class, gender, age and other means.⁴⁸

In "Mass Communications, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton described how powerful interests in the United States used mass persuasion to influence public opinion and social beliefs. Students of radio research since the 1930s, Lazarsfeld and Merton documented how Allied and Axis powers used radio broadcasting during World War II, rather than resorting to physical force. Power brokers employed radio

programming and advertising, instead of intimidation and coercion. As critics, these researchers raised concerns about the effects of radio broadcasting upon popular culture. They complained that radio deliberately catered to vulgar tastes and contributed to the deterioration and eventual surrender of the listener's critical faculties. As the awe-inspiring ubiquity of radio mesmerized tens of millions of listeners, Lazarfeld and Merton wondered about the radio medium's enormous power and the exercise of social control by the powerful interest groups that exploited broadcasting. As public relations and advertising firms increasingly refined their techniques to manipulate mass publics, broadcasters introduced subtler forms of psychological exploitation, achieved largely through the mass dissemination of information in the public interest.⁴⁹

With the presidential election campaign in full swing during the summer of 1932, news reports provided information about the wretched living conditions in the South; especially, the Appalachian region. As a presidential candidate, Franklin Delano Roosevelt described the southern states as the nation's largest economic issue. Increasingly, Americans perceived the Appalachian Mountains as home to a culture of backwardness and degradation. As the news unfolded, a derogatory "hillbilly" stereotype took center stage in the national news cycle. Rejection of the hillbilly label in 1932 was but one in a string of name changes brought about to rid Southern vernacular music of its pejorative and negative connotations. The negative image and growing disfavor among newly urban fans caused musicians to turn away from the hillbilly blues and embrace a country-

western alternative. Record companies followed the example of ARC, hybridizing the more marketable cowboy music and requisite singing cowboy form. The broad appeal of Sears attracted other commercial advertisers, radio broadcasters, and product sponsors.⁵⁰

Voters learned of Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" for the American public, when the presidential candidate gave his acceptance speech in Chicago at the National Convention of the Democratic Party on July 2, 1932. Roosevelt's extraordinary appearance before the national convention established a historic precedent. Going to Chicago and accepting the nomination in person, FDR broke the American tradition of candidates awaiting formal notification of their nominations. Moreover, the candidate called attention to his break with tradition by flying from Albany to Chicago in a new Ford Tri-Motor airplane operated by American Airlines. Roosevelt's decision to fly demonstrated his physical courage, stamina, and a desperately needed spirit of urgency.⁵¹

The familiar story of Franklin Roosevelt's 1932 presidential election campaign underscored the economic significance of radio broadcasting, including federal licensing, national networks, metropolitan and regional super stations, radio departments in large advertising agencies, electrical-transcription companies, and individual station representatives. Roosevelt knew that a system of national spot advertising fueled growth in the radio industry. Radio advertising appealed to the candidate, because he could adapt the techniques to serve the needs of public policy. FDR understood the magical quality of radio

that gave him simultaneous access to a constituency of forty million Americans—an amazingly large audience, compared to other forms of political debate.⁵²

Polls underscored the notion of audiences embracing radio advertising as the cost of free programming. Audience acceptance made it easier for radio advertisers to add information about products and sponsors into the content of shows. Pollsters determined that rural and urban audiences shared similar tastes in the early 1930s. Housewives, high school students, and families in small cities ranked among the largest radio audience segments.⁵³

Franklin Roosevelt had a long history with radio and advertising that dated back to the Committee on Public Information, during World War I. Using the airwaves, the candidate shared information in the public interest with the same large and underserved audiences patronized by Autry and other country-western musicians. No national politician before Roosevelt had ever reached out to quasi-folk and lower-culture constituencies in such a meaningful way. Radio broadcasting unquestionably influenced Roosevelt's election and contributed to the renunciation of the incumbent Republican President Herbert Hoover.⁵⁴

As the president-elect prepared for his inauguration in March 1933, Autry remained in Chicago, living uptown with his extended family, building a career as a recording artist, radio celebrity, and marquee-billed performer. "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" continued to sell like hotcakes, on its way to becoming a million-seller. Inspired by the president's leanings toward "Home on the Range," Sears tweaked its "Gene Autry" promotions, rebranding The Oklahoma Yodeler

as The Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy to increase sales for records, songbooks, sheet music and guitars, This name change completed Autry's transformation from hillbilly blues singer to singing cowboy persona in 1933. As a regular on NBC's *National Barn Dance*, The Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy developed a recognizable fan base in twenty-eight states.⁵⁵

Adding to his exposure on America's number-one country music show, Sears also sponsored Autry as a headliner with the *Round-Up of WLS Radio Stars*. Advertising the two-and-one-half-hour show with the tag line—"Your Radio Favorites-In Person-On the Stage"—this traveling troupe of veteran performers included Anne Williams, The Log Cabin Boys, Jimmy Long, Sue Roberts, Smiley Burnette, Patsy Montana and many others. Sears sponsored the live remote broadcasts of the WLS Round-Up from locations in small-town cinemas. *Radio Digest* reported: "The traveling units were the answer to countless pleas by out-of-towners who cannot come to Chicago." Rural and small town theater exhibitors booked Hollywood westerns to show in combination with the WLS Round-Up. Ken Maynard's films for Universal Pictures worked particularly well. Films like *The Strawberry Roan* relied upon a musical-western format to showcase country-western music. As a headliner and host for the WLS Round-Up, Autry modeled himself after Ken Maynard; in part, developing a singing cowboy persona that appealed to concert-goers, radio listeners, and movie fans alike. Years later, Autry recalled: "Most people made their money doing personal appearances in those days. I played most of the theaters and some

auditoriums and fairs. I played all through Wisconsin, all the way up to the upper peninsula of Michigan. And I played all down through Indiana, Illinois, all the way down to Cairo, as we used to call it, and over into Iowa. You could play about five or six states right out of Chicago, because WLS had that 50,000-watt clear channel.”⁵⁶

The “Gene Autry” cultural products developed by ARC, Sears, and WLS exemplified the changing advertising techniques used by radio broadcasters in the mid-1930s. ARC and Sears skillfully blended their product tie-ups to increase the entertainment value for WLS listeners. Listeners understood and appreciated the relationship between the advertising and programming. They demonstrated approval by joining fan clubs, accepting give-away premiums, and buying licensed merchandise. The C. F. Martin Guitar Company of Nazareth, Pennsylvania, for example, validated Autry’s rising star power by adding a new model number—D-45—to its sales catalog, a mere four days after the singing cowboy placed a custom order through the Chicago Musical Instruments Company on March 23, 1933. Subsequently, the Martin D-45 became one of the most popular acoustic guitars ever made.⁵⁷

In 1933, the *WLS Family Album* listed Autry as a singing cowboy and regular show performer. The program highlights mentioned the universal appeal of “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” suggesting: “No program with Gene Autry is quite complete until he sings it.” Copyright royalty statements from ARC, Southern Music Publishing, and M. M. Cole Publishing revealed that Autry’s

income from music publishing more than tripled within a year, from \$345 for the quarter ending December 31, 1931, to more than \$1,260 for the last quarter of 1932.⁵⁸

The enormous popularity of “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” was largely responsible for this windfall. ARC reported sales of 20,349 copies of the record on six different labels during the fall of 1932. M. M. Cole sold 5,370 copies of *Gene Autry’s Sensational Collection of Famous Original Cowboy Songs and Mountain Ballads*, which featured the big hit. Cole paid the musicians a 3¢ royalty for the songbook, which Autry and Long split, 50-50. Publishing royalties from M. M. Cole added \$93 to Autry’s quarterly income. Moreover, he earned an average of \$400 a month from play dates at various theaters. All totaled, the singing cowboy made more than \$800 a month in 1932, about \$13,228 per month in 2011 dollars.⁵⁹

To complete the development of Autry’s singing cowboy persona, ARC scheduled the singer-songwriter to make his first recording of western folk songs on January 27, 1933. Autry’s first cowboy recordings featured four songs that he wrote or co-wrote, and one from the public domain. Gene sang all of the voice and yodeling parts, providing his own guitar accompaniment. He recorded “Louisiana Moon” (Gene Autry), “The Little Ranch House on the Old Circle B” (Gene Autry—Volney Blanchard), “Cowboy’s Heaven” (Frankie Marvin—Gene Autry), “Your Voice is Ringing” (Percy Wenrich—arranged by Gene Autry), and “The Yellow Rose of Texas” (public domain). After the session, the singer-

songwriter gave up his radio gigs to concentrate on live play dates for a couple of months to get familiar with the new songs.⁶⁰

On tour, the singing cowboy promoted and sold two new songbooks, *Rhymes of the Range* (1932) and *The Art of Writing Songs and How to Play the Guitar* (1932), made available by Frontier Publishers of Evanston, Illinois. Financial statements showed that Frontier Publishers paid the singing cowboy \$780 for services rendered and the use of his name and image to sell publications, about \$12,898 in 2011 dollars. Frontier managed to get *The Art of Writing Songs* included in the Sears catalog with advertisements featuring “Gene Autry and His Famous Round Up Guitar.” A balance sheet dated April 30, 1933, documented the sale of songbooks valued at \$3,130 (\$51,578 in 2011 dollars). Forty-eight radio stations in 28 states recorded sales. Additional sales came from magazine advertisements in *Breeders Gazette*, *College Humor* and *Real Detective*. The Lyon & Healy Guitar Company and Marquette Guitar Company also sold “Gene Autry” songbooks. The financial statements of Frontier Publishers provided evidence that Autry’s exposure on WLS reached a national audience by 1933. WLS accounted for nearly 90 percent of all the Frontier sales receipts.⁶¹

Recognition by newspapers, radio, magazines and Chicago theater marquee testified to Autry’s stardom in November 1933, about the time he scored another huge hit with a recording of “The Last Round-Up,” which peaked at No. 12 on *The Billboard* pop chart. Important enough to be singled out from

the large, anonymous masses, Autry's behavior and opinions received such increased public notice that an observation of Lazarsfeld and Merton seemed to hold true: "The audiences of mass media apparently subscribe to the circular belief: 'If you really matter, you will be at the focus of mass attention and, if you *are* at the focus of mass attention, then surely you must really matter.'"⁶²

Most certainly, this was the conviction of Archie Levesque, an eighteen-year-old boy from Tunne, Maine, who wrote Autry on December 20, 1933. Levesque traded his German-style accordion for an old guitar that he rebuilt to play. He ordered new guitar strings and a copy of *Cowboy Songs and Mountain Ballads* from the Sears catalog. Archie taught himself to play using the songbook and listening to Autry's records on a Victrola. "I am not sending you this letter to boast about myself but merely trying to make you interested of a boy in Maine whom is enjoying the same work you have done. Your music interests me very much," the young man wrote.⁶³

It is important to recognize that Sears supported the creation of "Gene Autry" cultural products and the distribution of the singing cowboy's art, entertainment, and merchandising brands. As Autry's radio and live performance sponsor, Sears determined the quality of the singing cowboy's programming content. As the giant retailer adjusted to the social and economic realities of the Great Depression, Autry maintained his position by aiding corporate advertising efforts through newsworthy appearances that received coverage in magazines and newspapers. He also did guest spots on various radio

shows. Confirmation of approval from these additional information outlets verified audience acceptance of the messaging delivered by Sears' "Gene Autry" brands.⁶⁴

It seems ironic that a lowdown singing cowboy persona enabled Autry to rise above his overt associations with American folk culture. Autry transcended his cultural origins by adding sophistication to his western sound and dress. In the 1934 edition of the *WLS Family Album*, he sported a new Stetson and a fancy western-style suit in a captioned photograph. A second photograph with the *National Barn Dance* cast showed the singing cowboy wearing a striking, movie-style outfit. WLS billed Autry as The Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy, claiming authentic cowboy roots. The programming notes made it clear that the singer-songwriter's great success remained predicated on the continued strong sales of "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine, still a big hit after three years on the charts."⁶⁵

In 1934, *National Barn Dance* and other barn-dance programs fueled the biggest response from radio listeners in advertising history. *Variety* proclaimed: "The greatest box-office attraction in the smaller towns throughout the country.... The most loyal audience ever assembled.... The top attraction on some dozen of the major stations in the land.... A story without precedent in show business, in radio or in the advertising and commercial world...." The *Motion Picture Herald* ran stories debating whether radio was a poacher or a provider of potential western film audiences. The *Herald* published a letter from the advertising manager of the Kerasotes Theatre in Springfield, Illinois,

expounding on the benefits of broadcasting live performances of barn-dance-style shows, the theater exhibitor explained: “This type of show is very popular in the Mid West. We were able to run this show on our stage every Saturday night at seven for almost a year straight.”⁶⁶

The use of radio programming as a new medium to draw a crowd for western and musical-western films helped small-town exhibitors in the Midwest, South and Southwest, to stay open during the depression. As national radio networks expanded in the 1930s, this new form of hybridized country-western music grew in popularity with radio listeners. The new musical form enabled national advertisers and politicians a medium for reaching the large and underserved audiences. No one understood this market better than Herbert Yates, the head of Republic Pictures, and Nat Levine, the founder of Mascot Pictures and Republic’s executive producer.⁶⁷

MUSICAL - WESTERN HYBRID FILM

Representing rural, small town and newly urban fans throughout the Midwest, South and Southwest, Autry’s hybridized form of country-western music served the needs of dispossessed people struggling to resist or reshape the flows of mass media continuously pummeling their cultural heritage. Autry took the electronic mediums imposed from the outside and made those mediums serve the purposes of rural, small town, and newly urban Americans. Simultaneously, Autry served the needs of Herbert Yates. Operating from a

position of strength, having consolidated film processing, record production, and motion picture distribution, Yates employed the singing cowboy as part of a strategy to control the means of transcultural consumption experienced by Autry's fan base.

As a multiplatform entertainer able to mash up the desires of both rural and urban audiences, Autry blended traditional and modern culture into a corporate strategy that used hybridity to create synergy across multiple information mediums. Autry played a critical role in developing a potent cultural form recognized by business leaders and politicians as a potential means for reaching a large and underserved audience during the Great Depression and the run up to World War II. The content of Autry's early films established a precedent for future productions more in tune with President Roosevelt's policies. Upon closer examination, Autry's multiplatform entertainment reveals a relationship between the American State and imagery of the American West that has remained heretofore underreported by historians.

Music provided the means for transmedia storytelling as exemplified by Autry's success with "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine." This song propelled the rising star from Chicago radio to Hollywood motion pictures in 1934. Nat Levine, the head of Mascot Pictures, gave Autry a featured role in his first musical-western, *In Old Santa Fe* (1934). As a follow up, Levine featured Autry portraying himself in *The Phantom Empire* (1934), appearing as a recording artist and radio star and singing "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" during a live remote

broadcast from a mountain valley ranch on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Months later, when Levine merged his Mascot Pictures into Herbert Yates' new, Republic Pictures, the producer once again featured "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" in Republic's first feature, *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* (1935).⁶⁸

Starring in a series 56 films made with Republic Pictures over twelve seasons from 1935-47, Autry's performance of "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" in motion pictures validated the singing cowboy's star quality with a broad and growing fan base. Simultaneously, musical-western films enabled the performer to introduce his signature song to new movie-going audiences. The hubbub surrounding the singer-songwriter, recording artist, and radio personality turned movie star, created a sensation that Republic Pictures desperately needed to attract new audiences reluctant to spend their hard-earned cash during hard times. Adding motion pictures to a repertoire of in-person performances, live radio shows, sound recordings and name-brand merchandise, Autry extended his reach to another layer of multiplatform entertainment, further emphasizing the values of music as a bonding agent for transmedia storytelling. This history is important because it shows how producers assembled a multiplatform entertainment empire during the early years of radio broadcasting.

Under the purview of Herbert Yates, Art Satherley handed the singing cowboy over to Nat Levine in 1934. Yates was familiar with Levine's Mascot Pictures, because he financed several productions for the studio head, dating

back to 1927. Pointing to Autry's success selling records and merchandise for ARC, Sears and WLS, Yates persuaded Levine to find a place for Autry in his first musical-western, *In Old Santa Fe*. Regular performances with the WLS Round-Up made Autry a household name among rural, small town and newly urban moviegoers in the Upper Midwest. Moreover, Autry had radio fans tuned in from coast-to-coast to hear him sing on the *National Barn Dance*. Fans could not get enough of Autry's nostalgic hit, "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine." The introduction of the song to new audiences through the medium of motion pictures kept the mountain ballad in rotation at radio stations and in demand among record buyers. The song served as a symbol of synergy and the means of developing a multiplatform entertainment franchise.

The decision to move Gene Autry from Chicago to Hollywood rested largely with Herbert Yates. Yates wanted to leverage his investments in Mascot Pictures to promote the star qualities of his country-western recording talent in musical-western films. Concurrently, Levine needed Autry's name recognition from record promotions and radio play to help sell movie tickets. Audiences had seen Autry play on stage before movie screenings in and around Chicago. Now moviegoers nationwide got to see their favorite singing cowboy *in* a musical-western, alongside Ken Maynard, playing multiple movie theaters on the same day.

Levine envisioned a serial, followed by a feature, edited from the chapter play. The Mascot producer leased the old Mack Sennett lot on Ventura

Boulevard in North Hollywood to make musical-westerns. He approached W. Ray Johnston at Monogram Pictures with a deal to sublet space on the Sennett lot, and he signed Ken Maynard away from Universal Pictures. Levine agreed to match the \$10,000-per-picture paid by the big studio to tap Maynard's proven formula for making musical-western hybrid films. Nevertheless, Maynard's poor singing voice created problems for Levine. To sell movie tickets to music fans, Mascot needed a singing cowboy with a bona fide hit record. Adding Autry to the cast of *In Old Santa Fe* enabled Levine to leverage cross-promotions and create synergy with ARC, NBC, Sears and other entities, producing and distributing cultural products with the "Gene Autry" name-brand.⁶⁹

Mascot Pictures introduced Autry as The Original Singing Cowboy with a big buildup and a lengthy musical interlude. *In Old Santa Fe* served as a screen test for the rising star, much to the delight of many fans. In his directorial debut, film editor Joseph Kane used a combination of close ups and wide-angle shots to show the singing cowboy as a square dance caller and western balladeer. The folksinger serenaded an audience of easterners as the front man for the Gene Autry Trio, an ensemble that included longtime sidemen, Frankie Marvin and Smiley Burnette. Assembled in the great room of a modern-day dude ranch, somewhere in the Mohave Desert, along the suburban frontier in Southern California, eastern dudes in the film served as stand-ins for emulation by the movie-going audiences in theaters from coast-to-coast. In sync with the President's desire to increase travel and tourism in the American West, Levine

portrayed the dude ranch as attractive and adventuresome retreat for newly created worker-tourists considering a caravanning car vacation along Route 66 or another U.S. Highway. The picture represented country-western music as a standard form of dude ranch entertainment; a siren's song, coaxing Autry's fans to do travel westward along the routes of modern pioneers.⁷⁰

Levine pushed the boundaries of Ken Maynard's musical-western formula by adding a gangster element and creating a triple-hybrid. The filmmaker created the musical-western-gangster movie to mash up fans from different film genres. *In Old Santa Fe* dramatized the impact of cultural change experienced by the western ranchers as they adjusted their traditional livestock operations to accommodate the desires of eastern tourists paying to experience a romanticized world of cowboy trappings. Gangsters replaced outlaws as the villains in the film, narrowing the focus of a typical "East vs. West" storyline to highlight the tensions between rural communities and the encroaching urban sprawl.⁷¹

As vacationers headed out to the wide open spaces of the American West, they unknowingly spread the germs of future suburban growth. The process worked by first enticing tourists to make the western journey and then tempting these same travelers to make investments in western real estate. New supplies of water and power made investments in the Southwest particularly attractive from Los Angeles, California, to Las Vegas, Nevada, and Phoenix,

Arizona. Since the earliest days of cinema, western films served as come-ons to lure tourists and convince them to relocate as modern pioneers.⁷²

In Old Santa Fe showed the most physical forms of western work transformed into spectator sports. Tourists and collectors repositioned the trappings of a cowboy's outfit as a stylized form of fashion, connected with an authentic form of American folk culture. Cowboys provided the main attraction for eastern dudes visiting the American West. The cowboy world of work became a spectacle for consumption by touring publics in the form of interactive ranch round-ups, annual rodeo circuits and high-stakes horseracing. Musical entertainment added to the authenticity of the contemporary western experience sought by vacationers. Western music fit nicely with the ideals of suburban ranch life and adventuresome rodeo sports.⁷³

Following the historic precedent established by Ken Maynard with *The Strawberry Roan*, Levine purchased the screen rights for a popular song, "Down in Old Santa Fe," to feature Autry in cross-promotions with ARC. Sears responded by minting a new, "Gene Autry-Old Santa Fe" guitar (Supertone Model #257). Similar to the Martin D-45, used by the singing cowboy to perform "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine," the acoustic archtop came in a super auditorium size, with a maple body, spruce top, and heavy black pick guard. Sears stenciled "Old Santa Fe" on the headstock and a signature endorsement from "Gene Autry," near the tailpiece.⁷⁴

In Old Santa Fe provided Nat Levine with a blueprint for a series of musical-westerns starring Gene Autry. The film featured sunshine, scenery, horseback riding, tennis, swimming, music and horseracing, as attractions for the eastern and urban dudes staying at “El Reposo Ranch” (The Restive Ranch). The cattle ranch provided a picturesque component in the otherwise sublime scenery comprising the basin and range topography of Southern California. The opportunities for tourism depicted in this film and subsequent “Gene Autry” productions characterized the dude ranch, rodeo arena, and radio broadcast as three focal points for western heritage and cultural tourism promoted by the federal government during the New Deal.⁷⁵

Historian Michael Berkowitz associated mass tourism with the Roosevelt administration in his essay, “A New Deal for Leisure: Making Mass Tourism during the Great Depression” (2001). Describing leisure as, “the result of the accretion and confluence of decades-long development,” Berkowitz argued that the most significant and revolutionary aspects of the tourism industry culminated during the New Deal for two important reasons. First, to secure a reliable workforce and counter the rising militancy of labor leaders, American industrialists instituted a policy of annual paid vacations for wage earners. The federal government formalized these policies through a series of legislative acts tied to the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (Wagner Act), and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. By 1941, the majority of American workers had access to time off with pay.⁷⁶

In particular, “Gene Autry” productions reached out to the emerging market of newly-urban, worker-tourists described by Berkowitz as taking advantage of the two-week paid vacations conceded by American industrialists in the mid-1930s. *In Old Santa Fe* demonstrated that women were the primary audience for Mascot’s musical-western. My research showed that youthful male audiences remained important, but secondary, to Autry’s success until 1938, when the series began incorporating younger sidekicks in ways that echoed the role played by Smiley Burnette. Typifying the female lead of costars in later productions, Levine characterized “Lila Miller” (Evelyn Knapp) as an independent, eastern-educated, highly fashionable, newly-urban, young woman with western ranch roots. The story dramatized the ways in which Miss Miller learned to navigate the distances between the traditional old world of her rural-western father and the newly-urban world of her metropolitan peers. Levine made a point of contrasting the styles and tastes of eastern-urban women with those of rural and western men, circa 1934.⁷⁷

The film opened with “Kentucky” (Ken Maynard) singing a cowboy song, while horseback riding with his sidekick, “Cactus” (George “Gabby” Hayes), through a Joshua tree forest in Southern California. Kentucky and Cactus personified the emergence of a country-western hybrid taking root in the western states. Cowboys survived in this changing environment by turning their traditional crafts into art, entertainment, and recreation. Instead of working as ranch hands, Kentucky and Cactus made their living competing in horse-racing

spectacles, sponsored by local promoters. They also sold authentic cowboy trappings to willing tourists and collectors. When Lila Miller spotted Kentucky selling spurs and saddles, she quipped, “Awe, I thought that you were a real cowboy.”

Kentucky responded by saying, “Oh, I am Miss, that’s just a sideline.”⁷⁸

In *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth Century West* (1998), historian Hal Rothman identified three forms of cultural/heritage tourism, recreational tourism, and entertainment tourism, which *In Old Santa Fe* represented as, “three basic, overlapping, and intertwined types.” Rothman demonstrated that travel and tourism in all forms helped define the postmodern, postindustrial New West that Mascot Pictures dramatized. Rothman drew connections between the New West and the New Deal through the activities of Stephen Mather and Horace Albright—the first and second directors of the National Park Service—promoters of western tourism since the 1920s. Rothman recognized the importance of the dude ranch as a marker of the cultural shift occurring in the 1930s, thrust upward as a result of economic upheaval. With the market for range-fed beef in decline during the Great Depression, the New Deal promoted dude ranches as destinations for tourists visiting the American West. Still, Rothman underestimated the indicators found in county-western music, and the symbolism found in musical-western films. He ignored the appeal of horseback riding for young women, and the appeal of rodeos and Wild West shows for adolescent boys and girls. Adding those

elements to Rothman's initial work, *New Deal Cowboy* demonstrates more fully how the conversion of cattle ranches into dude ranches served as an indicator of cultural change.⁷⁹

Having legitimized leisure time, the New Dealers joined with community advertising organizations to promote tourism and travel throughout the United States. Public information touting a modern, contemporary culture in a "New West," gained prominence through mass media publications, sound recordings, radio broadcasts, educational filmstrips, newsreels, and Hollywood motion pictures. New Deal administrators encouraged the hype and contributed to it significantly, most notably through agencies in the U.S. Department of the Interior. The National Park Service, National Forest Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Works Progress Administration, Resettlement Administration, and the United States Travel Bureau promoted travel and tourism in the American West.⁸⁰

Assuming a central role in the promotion of travel and tourism, the Roosevelt administration sought to counter the aggressive campaigns of foreign governments that encouraged wealthy Americans to travel abroad. Three factors explain the forceful action of the federal government. First, New Dealers believed in recreational tourism as an antidote for social divisions, radical revolutionary tendencies, right-wing reactionaries, and foreign aggression. Simultaneously, the President regarded travel and tourism as key components in his solution for economic recovery. Moreover, business and civic leaders called

for the support of the federal government to help local tourism promotions succeed.⁸¹

As Mascot Pictures prepared to release *In Old Santa Fe*, publication of the Payne Fund investigations into the psycho-sociological effects of cinema created a backlash against Hollywood. The Motion Picture Research Council (MPRC) joined forces with the Catholic Church to promote a “Legion of Decency” to combat wickedness in the motion picture industry. Catholic bishops and priests threatened to boycott Hollywood films if producers did not make wholesome family entertainment. Priests stood outside of movie box offices and confronted parishioners in lines to buy tickets. The *Hollywood Reporter* expressed alarm in a story warning moviemakers to clean up their act or face the possibility of federal censorship.⁸²

Levine exploited the favor shown by the MPRC for smaller, independent moviemakers, film producers, distributors, and theater exhibitors operating outside the Hollywood mainstream. Mascot’s musical-westerns represented the wholesome family entertainment envisioned by the MPRC. Levine welcomed the council’s lobbying of President Roosevelt for the inclusion of provisions in the National Recovery Act of 1933 (NRA) to weaken the monopoly of Hollywood’s Motion Picture Producers and Directors Association (MPPDA). Critics challenged the production codes created by the NRA to regulate the motion picture industry. Unlike other industry codes, which dealt with labor and management issues, the NRA’s motion picture production codes focused on film

distribution. Targeting theater exhibitors, the NRA called for the creation of arbitration boards to settle questions about “runs” (the sequencing of different showings of a motion picture in a given geographic zone) and “clearances” (the period of time elapsing between one showing and the next in a given zone). Exhibitors disagreed with MPPDA block booking practices, score charges, and double bills. In response to these unfolding actions, the creative talent in Hollywood established the Screen Writers Guild (SWG), and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), to represent the actors, screenwriters, and directors in negotiations with motion picture producers and distributors.⁸³

President Roosevelt took advantage of this turmoil in the motion picture industry to gain a toe-hold as a motion picture producer. Lacking the support of big-city newspaper publishers, the President wanted motion pictures to augment his radio programming, as another means of getting his message out. Harry Hopkins, head of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), introduced a new documentary form of motion picture production. Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke, members of the New York Film and Photo League, presented the new form in a film titled *Hands* (1934). As a reflection of avant-garde cinema in Europe and the Soviet Union, *Hands* drew condemnation from the MPPDA. Hollywood filmmakers viewed the New Deal documentary as a dangerous new form of competition.⁸⁴

Harry Hopkins also contracted with Pathé to produce newsreel films promoting WPA reforms: “A series of New Deal newsreels designed to feature

the successes and triumphs of the Roosevelt administration.” Newsreels represented a powerful communications format for the U.S. President. Popular to the point that some theaters screened nothing else, “The newsreel brings to a modern world a truer picture of itself, and of its people, than any other agency heretofore known to mankind,” explained Stephen Early, Roosevelt’s press secretary. A former editor of Paramount newsreels, Early understood the power of this remarkable form of visual journalism. Hopkins and Early used newsreels to fundamentally transform the political personalities of the Roosevelt administration into national celebrities.⁸⁵

Recognizing a niche in making musical-westerns that reflected rural folk values and promoted western travel and tourism for worker-tourists, Nat Levine decided to drop Maynard in favor of Autry as the star of Mascot’s first musical-western serial. Levine portrayed the singing cowboy as western siren in *The Phantom Empire*, beguiling new worker-tourists into spending their two-week paid vacations at dude ranches in the desert or mountain-high vacation camps. Featuring Autry in the chapter play, Mascot’s producer targeted the large and underserved audience of country-western music fans familiar with the authentic, real-life recording artist, radio star, and musical performer from the *National Barn Dance* and *WLS Round-Up*, whose high-volume, low-markup merchandise was sold by Sears. Autry’s move from Chicago to L.A. reinforced traditional quasi-folk beliefs about individual success in American culture. The singing cowboy kept alive the myth of a mobile and classless society for rural, small

town and newly urban fans as they were coming out of the Great Depression in 1935.⁸⁶

The Phantom Empire featured Autry as Radio's Singing Cowboy. The fantastic, twelve-part serial paired the radio star and recording artist with a young rodeo performer, Betsy Ross King, "World's Champion Trick Rider." Levine included the athletic female lead to emphasize rodeos and Wild West shows as attractions for western tourists, an enticement for moviegoers. The film's "Radio Ranch" setting emphasized the close relationships between the artistry of country-western music, the entertainment value of radio broadcasting, and the recreational spectacle of rodeo sport, encapsulated within the motion picture. These attractions made the American West attractive to American vacationers coming out of the depression with lots of pent up purchasing power. Targeting rural, small town, and newly urban worker-tourists, *The Phantom Empire* demonstrated that vacation camps were accessible to working-class Americans, even if a dude ranch vacation was beyond the reach of most workers.⁸⁷

Similar to the triple hybrid, musical-western-gangster formula, developed by Levine for *In Old Santa Fe*, the producer added another special element to the musical-western formula underlying *The Phantom Empire*. Levine envisioned the western serial as a triple-hybrid, musical-western-science fiction film. Playing himself as part owner of Radio Ranch, Autry used live remote broadcasting and radio advertising to promote a Southern California "vacation camp" to lower-

income worker-tourists in the Midwest, South, and Southwest. The clothing, accoutrements, and speech of the vacation camp kids, in comparison with the more sophisticated engineers and scientists in the film identified the intended market of the vacation camp. Rustic in comparison to *In Old Santa Fe's* modern dude ranch setting, Radio Ranch did not cater to upper-income easterners and European tourists. The vacation camp offered similar amenities, just not so fancy. The concept appealed more to regional vacationers with large families, and worker-tourists with more modest means. Radio Ranch attractions included horseback riding, rodeo sports, western music, live radio broadcasts, and aerial tourism. An added benefit came from a fanciful subterranean tribe, oddly suggestive of the Hopi and Zuni cultures, whose origin stories began with the people emerging from the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River.⁸⁸

Rural and small town moviegoers may have recognized the word association between the "Scientific City of Murania," introduced in the opening credits of *The Phantom Empire*, and the infectious, fast-spreading disease, known as the "murrain," a biblical plague of death that affected cattle and other livestock. *The Phantom Empire* associated "Murania" with modern technology, including a 25,000-foot elevator cutting into the earth's core; various forms of primitive robotics; wireless television broadcasting; a disintegrating-atom-smashing machine; z-ray lithium guns; and radium bombs. The murderous scientists at work in *The Phantom Empire* illustrated their familiarity with the work of Frederic Joliot-Curie and Irene Joliot-Curie at the Radium Institute in

Paris, and the studies of “critical mass” by Hungarian physicist Leo Szilard, by using neutron-induced chain reactions to create explosions.⁸⁹

The Phantom Empire included a direct reference connecting Autry with President Roosevelt, after Betsy Baxter (Betsy Ross King) and her brother, Frankie (Frankie Darro), were captured and taken into the depths of Murania for an interview with Queen Tika (Dorothy Christy). When the subterranean monarch threatened to cut off their heads, Frankie responded by evoking Gene Autry, the singing cowboy hero: “He’d telephone the president and before you could wink an eye there’d be a regiment of artillery here knocking the top of this palace, and there’d be airplanes dropping bombs as big as bears, and then what would be left of your Murania?” Typically, President Roosevelt refused to sanction the use of his name or image by any Hollywood studios; thus, making this reference to the head of state more significant for moviegoers.⁹⁰

Chapter 2 opened with Autry singing “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” as part of a live remote broadcast from Radio Ranch, somewhere along the suburban frontier of Southern California. Levine framed the song as an explicit radio performance, embedded within the narrative of the film. This approach differed from Ken Maynard’s method, and the methods of other studios, where singing cowboys sang spontaneously while riding the trail or sitting around a campfire. Levine’s musical scenes included audiences of extras as stand-ins for emulation by movie-going fans. In subsequent films, the producer developed other strategies to portray the bond between Autry and his devoted fans. He

conjured roles for the singing cowboy as a traveling troubadour, medicine show headliner, radio celebrity, and band leader, performing at house parties, barn dances, and fiestas. In addition to the musical performances, Levine used modern record players, radio receiving sets and futuristic televisions, as narrative conceits to help moviegoers to breakdown the distinctions between Autry's film character and his status as a recording artist, radio personality, and movie star.⁹¹

The successful release of *The Phantom Empire* prompted Herbert Yates to approach Nat Levine with an offer to merge Mascot into Republic Pictures, a new and larger film corporation. Yates wanted to build upon Levine's leadership in the field of chapter plays and serial productions to expand Mascot's feature and musical-western programs. He also convinced Ray Johnston and Trem Carr to merge Monogram Pictures into the new company. Likewise, Yates eliminated more competition and accumulated additional assets by acquiring outright the Liberty, Majestic, and Chesterfield studios.⁹²

Monogram provided Republic Pictures with a syndicate of film exchanges in thirty-six metropolitan markets across the United States and Canada. These exchanges enabled Republic to operate as a major Hollywood studio, packaging its productions into blocks of six or eight films, made available exclusively to independent theater owners within specified zones or markets. The difference was that Republic operated mainly outside of Hollywood's major markets. The

Monogram exchanges served the mostly rural, small town and newly urban markets in the Ohio River and Mississippi River valleys.⁹³

Appealing to heartland audiences, Republic Pictures made a conscious decision to produce films that reinforced traditional American folk values. Unlike other segments of the motion picture market, quasi-folk and lower-culture Americans *preferred* to see “message” films. Evidence of message film popularity came from Warner Brothers, Republic’s principal competitor, and a major supporter of President Roosevelt and the National Recovery Act legislation. Among other techniques, Warner Brothers included the Blue Eagle emblem of the NRA in the background of several pictures.⁹⁴

Herbert Yates controlled Republic Pictures behind-the-scenes. Levine, Johnston, Carr and the other studio heads, all of them made deals with Yates because they owed staggering sums of money to CFI for film processing. Yates desired to make good pictures, while keeping exchange and exhibitor costs low. These factors influenced his choice of Johnston to serve as president of studio. Levine became the head of studio productions, while Trem Carr handled the executive and financial management decisions. Lindsey Parsons managed publicity and Bernard Bernbaum took care of advertising and exploitation.⁹⁵

Yates positioned Republic Pictures to monopolize the production of “B” movies for the double feature markets. Republic stimulated production by filling the demand for second features at an inexpensive fixed rate. Having cornered the market for high volume-low markup sound recordings with ARC, Yates knew

how to dominate the emerging market for “B” movie productions. Stressing quality and economy, Republic quickly became the leading “B” movie producer and distributor. Yates strengthened Levine’s production capabilities by adding CFI technical expertise and “Hi-Fidelity” sound from RCA Victor. Republic Pictures had polish that other independent producers lacked. Even so, the studio employed otherwise efficient and often clever means to save money with tight budgets and shooting schedules, no-nonsense writing and directing, the judicious use of stock footage, the reuse of individual scenes, and by re-releasing some features. Generally, the studio showcased celebrity actors within the Hollywood star system, backed up by an ensemble cast of inexpensive character actors.⁹⁶

Autry starred as a singing cowboy in four pictures for Republic in 1935 and another eight films in 1936. As a follow up to *The Phantom Empire* serial, Levine featured his singing cowboy star in *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*, the first feature film in the musical-western genre plotted and sold around the main character’s ability to sing. With a contemporary setting and story about ranchers battling nesters over water rights, *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* mirrored the dramatic changes occurring throughout Southern California as the Metropolitan Water District and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power introduced expansive new water and power resources. Stemming from the opening of Boulder/Hoover Dam, water and power resource development along the Lower Colorado River created opportunities for tremendous growth in Southern

California, Arizona, and Southern Nevada. In part, these opportunities reversed the trend of people moving from the countryside into urban areas. More than two million Americans left the cities for rural residences during the New Deal. In unison with New Deal promotions, Republic's "Gene Autry" series showcased "modern pioneers" leaving the cities to return to a better life in the small towns along the suburban frontiers in the Southwest.⁹⁷

Tumbling Tumbleweeds interposed actors populating the fictitious town of Gunstock, a familiar setting for audiences in the theaters of Republic's distribution area in the Midwest and South. Dressed in 1930s work clothes and gathered to watch a traveling medicine show, an audience of extras experienced Autry performing "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" in the film, recreating the experience for moviegoers. None of the townsfolk wore cowboy outfits, except for the heavies in the film, who taunted Autry with catcalls of "Lavender Cowboy," an obvious insinuation of effeminacy and homosexuality.⁹⁸

In *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (2002), Peter Stanfield paid particular attention to the role and importance of the musical performances in *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*. Stanfield argued that Autry's rapid rise to success derived from his ability through song and performance to credibly show that he was a member of the quasi-folk and lower-culture communities that constituted his core audience. Including historical performance traditions—blackface minstrelsy, traveling medicine shows, and traveling troupes—helped fans follow the through-line of traditional American

values in Autry's expanded multiplatform entertainment. Stanfield interpreted Autry's singing cowboy persona as a mask worn in an elaborate masquerade to articulate the fears and desires of rural, small town, and newly-urban Americans attempting to deal overtly with issues engendered by the Great Depression. Specifically, the film dealt with modern-day environmental concerns involving water rights throughout the newly irrigated lands of the Lower Colorado River Basin.⁹⁹

The opening scenes of *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* introduced behavioral guidelines familiar to many rural, small town and newly urban fans. Director Joseph Kane used the first ten minutes of the film as a prologue to establish Autry as the son of a wealthy rancher, living near the town of Gun Stock, somewhere in the Dust Bowl region of Oklahoma or Texas. The scenes portrayed a conflict between rural ranchers and Dust Bowl migrants, identified as "nesters," in a classic, native versus newcomers plot device, borrowed from traditional western film forms.¹⁰⁰

The *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* prologue culminated with an epic fight between the ranchers and the nesters that ended with Autry saving his father's life; only, to face banishment, for stubbornly supporting the civil rights of migrants. A sign posted on the outskirts of town anchored an advance of five years in the story; presumably, bridging the gap between the Great Depression and the New Deal. Because the region had not yet modernized—due in large measure to the lack of water and power resources—Autry returned to Gun Stock

in 1935, as the singing cowboy headliner of a traveling medicine show, “Dr. Parker’s Purveyors of Phun, Phrolic, and Painless Panacea.” Autry sang the film’s title song, “Tumbling Tumbleweeds,” as he rode his horse alongside a traveling troupe, unabashedly playing a “Gene Autry-Old Santa Fe” guitar, sold by Sears. The tone of the song implied a new attitude that accompanied the advance in time. Change was further evidenced in the contemporary dress worn by the townspeople gathered to enjoy the old-time medicine show. A portable, windup phonograph player appeared as another plot device to portray the status quo in the rural and small town communities of the South and Southwest without electricity before creation of the Rural Electrification Administration.¹⁰¹

As the star attraction of Dr. Parker’s Medicine Show, Autry wore lightly colored, nicely tailored cowboy suits with neatly creased shirts and pants, and piping around the pockets. Autry tucked his tight-fitting pants into highly decorated boots. He wore a neckerchief and Stetson—the kind that B. M. Bower described as a “musical comedy brand.” He did not appear as a proletarian cowpuncher; instead, Autry portrayed himself as a musical performer. The film emphasized Autry’s sartorial distinctiveness in contrast with both working cowhands and the quasi-folk and lower culture townspeople dressed in contemporary 1930s work wear. Despite the differences in apparel, warranted by the singing cowboy’s occupation as a showman, Autry nonetheless functioned as a representative of the New Deal, siding with the migrant nesters, in opposition to his father, the leader of the ranch-owner establishment.¹⁰²

Republic scored big when Autry's recording of "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" became a big hit. Written by Bob Nolan in 1929, the song languished until Rudy Vallee performed the piece on his nationally syndicated radio show in 1933. Afterward, Sunset published the music for "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" in May 1934. Sam Fox added a new verse to the song, which the Sons of the Pioneers recorded for Decca on August 8. Autry recorded the song on January 11, 1935, after Republic licensed the song for use as the title for the first film in its new "Gene Autry" series. Released by ARC on its Melotone label, "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" delivered Autry his fourth gold record. Autry's version of the song entered *The Billboard's* "Top 100" popular music chart on February 16, 1935. The song stayed on the chart for five weeks, topping out at No. 10.¹⁰³

It did not hurt that "The Sons of the Pioneers" were *the* musical sensation in Hollywood. Performing together since 1932, the band was on its way to becoming the most profound recording artists in the history of country-western music. Recording with Decca in Hollywood, The Sons of the Pioneers raised the bar in terms of musicianship, harmony singing, and songwriting. Their lyrics and music romanticized the American West as a fierce and lonely place full of tumbling tumbleweeds, timber trails, waterfalls, everlasting hills, open ranges, rippling rills and cataract spills. They painted portraits of the western landscape in song that remain unrivaled in the history of country-western music.¹⁰⁴

Including Bob Nolan, Vern Spencer and Leonard Slye (Roy Rogers), The Sons of the Pioneers anchored a thriving country-western music scene in Los

Angeles. Bob Nolan's songs portrayed the American West as a place of ethereal beauty and boundless freedom. His songs featuring the western landscape marked a radical shift in the presentation of western folk music. Nolan moved cowboy songs away from images of picaresque westerners. The group displayed flawless harmonies and their recordings exhibited technical brilliance far in advance of most contemporary artists.¹⁰⁵

Autry's performance of "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" in *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* provided another big surge for the popularity of his signature song. ARC re-released the song on its Vocalion label after the film premiered and it went gold on the *The Billboard* pop chart. "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" entered the chart on August 24, 1935, and remained there for five weeks, topping out at No. 7. Furthermore, Autry had a third song make *The Billboard* Pop Chart in 1935. "Ole Faithful," released by ARC on the Melotone label, entered the chart on February 9, 1935, and remained popular for seven weeks, topping out at No. 10. Republic's release of *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*, demonstrated that Autry could sell movie tickets, sound recordings, and other name-brand merchandise.¹⁰⁶

The scene in *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* where Autry sang "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" paid tribute to the singing cowboy's deceased father, showing that family was stronger than political affiliations. However, during the performance, a heckler named "Connors" (George Chesboro) shouted out: "Hey, what kind of a fella are you, using your dead father as a build up for a vaudeville

act? Hey, we ain't got no use for lavender cowboys in this town." Contemporary audiences understood this surprising reference directed toward Autry's sexual orientation, related to his status as a singing cowboy wearing dandified duds. The singing cowboy responded by leaping off the stage to attack the heckler and defend his manliness.¹⁰⁷

Prominent references connecting "lavender" with homosexual men stemmed from Carl Sandburg's use of the term to describe a young Abraham Lincoln in 1926. Cole Porter's reference in the song, "I'm a Gigolo" (1929), included the lyrics: "I'm a famous gigolo, and of lavender, my nature's got just a dash in it." Alfred St. John performed a song titled, "The Lavender Cowboy," in *The Oklahoma Cyclone* (1930), a western film by Tiffany Productions, starring Bob Steele. A dictionary of slang, published in 1935, defined a "streak of lavender" as a reference to an effeminate man or sissy. No evidence has surfaced concerning Autry's popularity among gay men in the late 1930s. The "lavender cowboy" reference may have served to offset traditional western film fans offended by the musical-western form; still, it quietly acknowledged the possibility of a larger male fan base.

More than a star vehicle, Republic crafted *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* to mirror the difficulties faced by Autry fans as they confronted the major socio-economic changes in the 1930s. Republic depicted the singing cowboy juggling cultural traditions with modernity, against a backdrop of New Deal responses to the Great Depression. Republic's "Gene Autry" series represented a broadening

of the film genre by defying both stereotypical gender readings and the dominant conception of the “western” as a frontier narrative. Interpreting Autry’s multifaceted public persona as a singer-songwriter, radio star, recording artist and motion picture celebrity, required an understanding of the synchronic operations that drew these activities together and made them coherent to 1930s audiences.¹⁰⁸

Tumbling Tumbleweeds emphasized the same messages as *The Phantom Empire*; although, the priorities differed and Republic added some new material. Law and order seemed to be the main theme in the film, coupled with rugged individualism—tempered with cooperation when appropriate. Republic included a strong undercurrent of support for the underdog in American society, a trait rarely found in serial productions. Likewise, the studio incorporated Americanism and patriotism whenever possible.¹⁰⁹

The musical-western hybrid emphasized action in combination with leisure, portraying Gene and the boys sitting around playing guitars and singing to relax in the film. This emphasis reinforced the musical heritage of the American folk, while suggesting that life on the open range could be peaceful and rewarding in the New West, instead of combative, as in traditional western films depicting frontier scenarios. Musical-Westerns brought about a change in the qualities of the cowboy hero. In addition to traditional features, singing added charm and friendliness to the cowboy-hero’s complexion. Singing-cowboy heroes wore theatrical costumes and frequently became involved with heroines;

although, not on a romantic plane. Heroines included two types: traditional females playing secondary and normally subsidiary roles; and more independent women with important jobs and open camaraderie, who helped the cowboy hero bring the plot to a conclusion.¹¹⁰

The medicine show in *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* functioned as a symbolic connection to a shared agrarian history in the Midwest, South, and Southwest. The performance sites and rituals of the medicine show suggested a tradition outside of history, a form of entertainment that appeared uncorrupted by the modern media; yet, this medicine show was, in fact, a product of new media technologies. *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* represented the minstrel and the cowboy as both old and new forms of entertainment in the medicine show. Echoing the radio barn-dance programs that drew upon the idea of rural get-togethers, recreated through new forms of radio broadcasting, the variety show format recreated in *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* belonged wholly to a commercialized system of multiplatform entertainment created around Autry's singing cowboy persona.¹¹¹

CONCLUSION

ARC's successful re-release of "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" on Vocalion Records provided Autry with his fourth gold record in as many years. Topping out at No. 7, the week of August 24, 1935, after five weeks on *The Billboard* pop chart, the song demonstrated a tractive force that enabled Autry

to draw together ARC, Sears, WLS, Mascot, and Republic Pictures into a foundation for multiplatform entertainment. Music proved to be the transcendent form that tied up sound recording, music publishing, live performance, radio broadcasting, motion pictures, and licensed merchandise into one name-brand enterprise.

Herbert Yates owned a controlling interest in the “Gene Autry” franchise that emerged in 1935, after the singing cowboy’s successful transition from country-western musician to musical-western movie star. Yates contracted for Autry’s services as an ARC recording artist and featured actor at Republic. ARC made the deal with Sears to use the “Gene Autry” name and image to develop licensed merchandise for the singing cowboy to sell during his sponsored engagements as a performer on WLS and member of the WLS Round-Up traveling troupe. Autry made his money doing personal appearance tours out of Chicago from 1932-34, and later, from Los Angeles.

The decision to move Autry from Chicago to Hollywood rested largely with Herbert Yates. Leveraging his investments in Mascot Pictures, Yates promoted the star qualities of his country-western recording talent in musical-western films. Concurrently Nat Levine needed the name recognition of a bona fide recording artist to garner cross-promotions with record companies and radio stations, and sell movie tickets to avid music fans. The combined effects of “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” in multiple information mediums shaped a total result greater than the sum of each individual achievement. Synergy molded a

“Gene Autry” franchise capable of shaping public opinion, boosting morale, and sparking patriotism within the mainstream of American culture.

Autry’s cultural products exemplified support for President Roosevelt’s New Deal by underscoring the American West as an attractive destination for travel and tourism. Autry’s sound recordings and films appealed to a new breed of worker-tourists taking advantage of annual two-week paid vacations granted by industrialists for the first time, and legislated by the federal government. The singing cowboy’s four gold records, “The Last Round-Up,” “Ole Faithful,” “Tumbling Tumbleweeds,” and “That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine” highlighted the appeal of the American West as a destination for travel and tourism in 1935. Similarly, *In Old Santa Fe* and *The Phantom Empire* brought to light the commodification of western work and cowboy trappings on cattle ranches converted to dude ranches, among the Joshua trees of the Mohave Desert, and the rustic vacation camps of the High Sierra. Name-brand songbooks, such as *Rhymes of the Range* and *Gene Autry’s Sensational Collection of Famous Original Cowboy Songs and Mountain Ballads*, added to the romance of a two-week western getaway. Similarly, Sears sold Autry’s “Famous Round-Up Guitar” and another signature guitar, the “Old Santa Fe,” marketed respectively in conjunction with Autry’s appearances with the *Round-Up of WLS Radio Stars*, and the Mascot film, *In Old Santa Fe*.

The ubiquity of Autry’s singing cowboy persona illustrated how synergy worked within the art, entertainment, recreation, and information industries.

Republic's cross promotions with theater exhibitors, radio broadcasters, record producers, and giant retailers stimulated a cultural revolution in the Midwest, South and Southwest. During President Roosevelt's first term, rural electrification roused tremendous growth in the radio broadcasting industry. Following the advent of rural electrification, in-home radio receiving sets were often the first purchase made by families. These same audiences went to see Gene Autry musical-westerns, in part, as a means of comprehending the magnitude of changes foisted upon them, like it or not, through the modern industrial enterprises that accompanied electricity into nearly every household.¹¹²

Growing audiences among new listeners fueled the largest growth in radio advertising history among the audiences for the *National Barn Dance* and other barn-dance programs. Similarly, the coming together of country-western music and musical-western films created big box office attractions and a story without precedent in arts, entertainment, and advertising worlds. The growth of radio broadcasting as a new information medium stands out as the greatest influence upon the hybridization of country-western music and its incorporation into musical-western films.

Autry's musical-westerns reflected quasi-folk and lower-culture values. Musical-westerns came across as *message* films about law and order, rugged individualism, Americanism and patriotism. Demonstrating a need for cooperation, the films typically promoted the viewpoint of the underdog in

American culture. As wholesome family entertainment produced and distributed by small independent movie studios, musical-westerns received a big boost from the protests led by the MPRC and the Catholic “Legion of Decency” against perceived Hollywood wickedness.

Republic’s specialization in musical-western films provided Herbert Yates with a motion picture platform to advertise and promote the country-western recording artists signed by ARC. As “The Screen’s New Singing Cowboy Star,” Gene Autry furnished the prototype for Nat Levine to develop a musical-western formula that Republic applied more broadly. Yates targeted consumers buying country-western music from ARC and Sears as the audience for musical-western films produced by Republic Pictures. He saturated the quasi-folk and lower culture markets with new cultural products featuring a singing cowboy hero across multiple information mediums.

Having made his way to Hollywood, Autry abandoned his focus on music in 1936, recording only seven songs in two sessions. Instead, the singing cowboy concentrated on learning the craft of acting in motion pictures. As President Roosevelt began his bid for a second term, Republic developed its “Gene Autry” series to include twenty-seven films with New Deal themes. Chapter 3, “The West Ain’t What It Used to Be,” ponders the role of public diplomacy in presenting the New Deal as a harbinger of a New West in the musical-western films starring Autry.

3

“The West Ain’t What It Used To Be”

*There’s a New Deal in the West today
Where the antelope used to play
I met a dear this very day
Now, the West ain’t what it used to be*

—Gene Autry

INTRODUCTION

Gene Autry sang “The West Ain’t What It Used To Be” in two refrains in *Public Cowboy No. 1* (1937). The first refrain followed action in the film depicting modern day rustlers using airplanes and refrigerated trucks to steal cattle from the open range. Headlines in the *Prairie Junction Courier* declared, “Sheriff Doniphon No Match For Modern Rustlers.” A newspaper editorial claimed that “Matt Doniphon Should Be Recalled.” These assertions made Deputy Sheriff Gene Autry (Gene Autry) irate in the picture.¹

“If the county would only give us modern equipment to work with we could get results. You can’t catch high-speed trucks and airplanes with a horse and buggy.” Autry contended. To try and set the record straight, he paid a visit

to the newspaper office to have a word with the antagonistic editor. Upon arrival, he discovered a young woman named Helen Morgan (Ann Rutherford) doing the job. As they faced off, the female publisher bested the young deputy sheriff. He made a mess of her typesetting, before she chased him out of the office.

Riding horseback on the road out of Prairie Junction, Autry and his sidekick, Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette), caught up with Helen Morgan. The boys flanked her as they bantered along. When Morgan chided the boys for being singing cowboys, Autry responded with a chorus of “The West Ain’t What It Used To Be,” backed up by Millhouse’s harmonica accompaniment. The song implied that President Roosevelt’s New Deal created a New West where people lived a more leisurely life; a place where women had greater opportunities and the fewer social constraints.

After a couple of lengthy chase scenes that included Sheriff Doniphon (William Farnum) getting shot by a crooked meatpacker named Jim Shannon (House Peters, Jr.), and Autry catching Shannon and delivering the shooter to the jailhouse, the singing cowboy returned to the newspaper office to warble a second refrain of “The West Ain’t What It Used To Be.” This time, Miss Morgan appeared more forgiving, which encouraged Autry to serenade his leading lady with a second tune, “I Picked Up The Trail To Your Heart.”

“The West Ain’t What It Used To Be” acknowledged changes brought on by independent young women taking part in the migration westward during the

1930s. The song celebrated opportunities for professional women to advance in the emerging markets of suburban Los Angeles, Long Beach, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ontario, California; and other western livestock centers; especially, Dallas, Houston, and Phoenix. The New Deal offered freedom for a “cowgirl editor” migrating to the Southwest: freedom to wear dungarees, as Autry put it; freedom from prescribed matrimony.

The most important goal of the New Deal in the American West involved modernization. Much of the West remained a frontier in the 1930s. The use of natural resources—grasslands, soil, timber, mining, and watersheds—involved exploitation and serious deterioration. New Dealers sidestepped the question of blame to concentrate on regional planning and strenuous efforts to manage the arid environment. Federal plans called for people to live in the western states using the bounty of nature without substantially depleting renewable resources for future generations. Roosevelt authorized more planning for the use of natural resources in the American West than in other sections of the country. Public works planning, city, state and regional planning, and planning with regard to social and economic concerns—all government plans relied upon natural resource development. Permission to develop natural resources on public lands rested with the federal government, further projecting the region into the orbit of a national economy, held together by mass media.²

Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes controlled New Deal plans to create a modern New West. The President put millions of dollars at the disposal of

Secretary Ickes to fund Public Works Administration (PWA) projects along the Pacific Slope. East of the Continental Divide, Roosevelt placed Henry A. Wallace in charge of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Wallace instituted strategies for crop reduction, soil conservation, and increased grazing in the Great Plains States. The essence of New Deal programs for the Great Plains called for the end of wheat and cotton production and greater emphasis on livestock grazing. Similarly, government management of livestock grazing left a marked and lasting imprint on the open ranges of the mountain states.³

A relative newcomer to Hollywood, Autry ranked number one as the biggest box-office earner in the western film genre in December 1937. Quigley Publishing Company listed the singing cowboy first in its annual poll of theater exhibitors, published in the *Motion Picture Herald*. Autry achieved the top spot among western film stars in large measure because of *Public Cowboy No. 1*. The singing cowboy unseated a veteran stable of movie cowboys to win the award. He beat out William (Hopalong Cassidy) Boyd, Buck Jones, Dick Foran, George O'Brien, Tex Ritter, Bob Steele, The Three Mesquiteers, Charles Starrett, Ken Maynard, Johnny Mack Brown, Tim McCoy, John Wayne, Bob Allen, Larry Crabtree, Hoot Gibson, Jack Holt, and James Ellison.⁴

Quigley's poll of theater exhibitors and separate ranking of western film stars signified the importance of the western genre in American culture during the Great Depression and the Second World War. "Westerns" represented the only film genre tracked by Quigley outside the Hollywood mainstream. Rising

with the popularity of its “Gene Autry” series, Republic Pictures also ranked as the number-one producer of western films in 1937. Autry wore his crown as “Public Cowboy No. 1” for six consecutive years—from 1937 to 1942—giving up the top spot to Roy Rogers, after he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps.⁵

During his reign at the top, the singing cowboy hero increasingly resonated with larger and more mainstream audiences. Through music and motion pictures, Autry mirrored a deeply ingrained spirit of optimism and hope inspired by President Roosevelt. Autry’s multiplatform entertainments gave his fans an audio-visual representation of the New West and a reason to believe in a future where leisure and recreation accompanied the development of new water and power resources after the completion of Boulder (Hoover) Dam. Historians have compared Hoover Dam to the Brooklyn Bridge as a symbol of optimism, marvel of technology, and indicator of modernity in American culture. By connecting Manhattan with Long Island, the Brooklyn Bridge helped transform New York into a world-class city. A half century later, the provisions of water and power supplied by Hoover Dam contributed mightily to the conversion of Los Angeles into the grand metropolis of the Pacific Rim and the complete geographic and economic makeovers of southern California, Arizona, and southern Nevada. Republic Pictures managed to harmonize traditional American values with New Deal initiatives in its “Gene Autry” series. Music proved the key to both synthesis and synergy.⁶

The focus in Chapter 2 on the sound recording industry is replaced in Chapter 3 by an emphasis on the motion picture industry. This chapter shows how Republic Pictures mirrored New Deal themes in country-western music and musical-western films to make President Roosevelt more attractive to rural, small town, and newly urban audiences in the Midwest, South, and Southwest. Autry's support for President Roosevelt exemplified a new type of "public diplomacy" identified by Joseph S. Nye as the performance of government relations to influence political action through public information mediums and non-governmental organizations. Nye's book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004) explained that the Roosevelt administration developed its tendencies for public diplomacy by garnering support for its New Deal domestic agenda. As President Roosevelt began his bid for a second term, Republic developed its "Gene Autry" series to include twenty-seven films with New Deal themes. "The West Ain't What It Used To Be" ponders the role of public diplomacy in presenting the New Deal as a harbinger of a New West in country-western music and musical-western films starring Gene Autry.⁷

While music and sound recording remained central to Autry's success with soft power, the delivery of New Deal messaging through the incorporation of country-western music into musical-western films represented some of the earliest and most advanced forms of public diplomacy via multiplatform entertainment. Considering the transitional nature of Autry's first two seasons with Republic Pictures, *Melody Trail* (1935), *Red River Valley* (1936), *Guns and*

Guitars (1936), *The Big Show* (1936), and *Git along Little Doggies* (1937) stand out among the earliest and best examples of soft power—public diplomacy during the First New Deal.⁸

A milestone in the history of Autry's celebrated career, *Public Cowboy No. 1* elevated the singing cowboy hero from his status as a western genre star to a more prestigious ranking as a full-fledged national icon during the Second New Deal. *Springtime in the Rockies* (1937), *Gold Mine in the Sky* (1938), *Man From Music Mountain* (1938), *Mountain Rhythm* (1939), and *Colorado Sunset* (1939) put forth ever stronger associations with the Roosevelt Presidency. Republic's approaches to making the New Deal appear attractive changed somewhat as series scriptwriter's accommodated larger and more mainstream audiences. As Autry rose to national acclaim in his fifth season with Republic, *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* (1939) ultimately represented the singing cowboy's New Deal piece de résistance. This film featured Autry as a singing cowboy-legislator elected by westerners and sent to Washington, D.C. to introduce measures dealing with dam construction, irrigation, flood control, and the resettlement of migrating refugees.⁹

NEW DEAL — NEW WEST

Describing motion pictures as a major historical force in *Film: The Democratic Art* (1976), Garth Jowett suggested that musical-westerns modeled behavior for film audiences by creating a mirroring effect that reinforced cultural

change. This mirroring affect in films prompted Jowett to refer to motion pictures as “important artifacts of the twentieth century.” Motion pictures influenced theater audiences directly by modifying audience behavior. Indirectly, movies affected a broader public through the diffusion of knowledge. Discussions of film topics caused additional behavior modification. Autry’s musical-westerns offer a glimpse into the lives of rural, small town, and newly urban Americans in the 1930s as people dealing with the cultural transformations described in Chapter 2.¹⁰

Republic Pictures offered four categories of film productions during its first season, 1935-36. “Jubilee” pictures, mostly westerns and musical-westerns, represented the foundation of studio productions. Filmed at a rate of two per month with seven-day shooting schedules, these films had budgets ranging from \$30,000 to \$50,000. “Anniversary” films included musicals, westerns, and other action and adventure films, produced on two-week schedules with budgets from \$120,000 to \$200,000. “Deluxe” movies dealing with mainstream subjects got 22-day production schedules and \$300,000 to \$500,000 budgets. “Premiere” pictures ranked on top, produced with John Ford, Fritz Lang, and other leading directors. Premier films received thirty-day shooting schedules and budgets of \$1,000,000 or more. Republic’s Premier line competed with the major studios in big-city markets. The studio used the profits from its low-budget productions to finance these big-budget extravaganzas.¹¹

Nat Levine transferred Autry's contract, along with the other assets of Mascot Pictures, as part of the merger agreement with Herbert Yates in 1935. Autry made mostly low-budget "Jubilee" pictures during his first season with Republic. As head of production for the new studio, Levine slotted his musical cowboy star for eight pictures. The filmmaker experimented with different formulas, before he concentrated on modern musical-western settings (i.e. dude ranchers and rodeos), where contemporary country-western recording artists might be found in nature. Distinguishing his modern musical-westerns from traditional western films, Levine juxtaposed older forms of musical entertainment—traveling medicine shows, traveling troubadours, blackface minstrelsy, and vaudeville novelty acts—with newer forms of sound recordings, radio broadcasting, motion picture productions, and rodeo spectacles.¹²

To emphasize the contemporary nature of Republic's "Gene Autry" series, Levine incorporated special effects that showed spinning displays of newspaper front pages. He focused the attention of audiences on modern-day story objectives ripped from New Deal headlines in *The Big Show*, *Public Cowboy No. 1*, *Rovin' Tumbleweeds*, and *Sunset in Wyoming*. Understanding the synergy between advertising and theater audiences, Levine gave moviegoers a backstage view of radio and television broadcasting stations and the work going on in advertising agencies. Likewise, he juxtaposed open-range roundups and rodeo arena spectacles to illustrate the transformation of nineteenth-century cowboy trappings into professionally organized twentieth-century sports. The timeliness

of Autry's modern-day, musical-westerns reflected aspects of President Roosevelt's New Deal in creating a New West; especially, dude ranching and rodeos, radio broadcasting, aviation, and architecture; elections and politics; water, irrigation, electrical power, and flood control; homelessness and migratory labor; and natural resource management.¹³

Melody Trail (1935) addressed issues of leisure and recreation by connecting western music and radio broadcasting with the spectacle of rodeo sports and the assembly of large audiences in arenas and stadiums across the country. The film showed modern cowboys leaving their work to compete for prize money in a series of western sporting events. A group of independent young cowgirls took over their jobs, rounding up cattle on the TTT Ranch. Similar to *The Phantom Empire*, Republic cast Gene Autry as himself in *Melody Trail*, a recording artist and radio personality traveling around the country making personal appearances and encountering situational adventures. Autry's role as a performer helped explain his dandyish appearance, which women seemed to love, and manly men questioned.¹⁴

More importantly, *Melody Trail* appealed to some female fans because it challenged patriarchy and the nature of social roles for men and women. Standing in marked contrast to traditional western films, the musical-western form confronted modernity head-on, showing audiences how to mediate between the ever-changing world at large and the desires of rural folks to maintain their customs and traditions. Foremost among these changes, critiques

concerning the proper roles for women in musical-western films got caught up with more general critiques of reactionary idealism. Mirroring the changing roles for western women, Levine leaned heavily toward women writers to develop screenplays for his musical-western films. Profiling Betty Burbridge as one of eighteen women writing western stories, Lizzie Francke's, *Script Girls: Women Screen Writers in Hollywood* (1994), showed how Burbridge and other female writers used the musical-western form to create cultural mirrors reflecting modernity for Autry's fans. He acknowledged this central role given to young women in his films: "As written, they gave me a lot of anything-you-can-do-I-can-do-better sass, smoked a lot of Kools—the era's Virginia Slims—and, in general, played a thirties' version of waiting for Gloria [Steinem]. That may have been due in no small part, to the presence of such screenwriters as Betty Burbridge, Luci Ward, and Connie Lee...those films were about the only ones in the B Western category, up to then, that had a mass appeal to women."¹⁵

As the screenwriter for *Melody Trail*, Betty Burbridge positioned Millicent Thomas (Ann Rutherford) as a free agent within a world of cowboy culture. To dramatize the transformations brought about by the New Deal, the author juxtaposed a representation of modern cowgirls with more traditional female characters. In doing so, Burbridge's screenplay dramatized the massive economic and social changes accompanying the shift from rural agrarianism to industrialized urbanism. Critics refused to recognize the work of women scriptwriters, because they considered writing for motion pictures as inferior to

other forms of literature. The bias stemmed from the collaborative process required to transfer the written word to the movie screen. Unlike theater productions, where an author's words remained sacrosanct, screenwriters collaborated with directors and producers when scripting filmic scenes. This collaborative process caused literary institutions to reject the filmmaking process for serious artistic consideration. As a means of neutralizing the big-ticket novelists who went to Hollywood looking to make a quick buck, many film producers supported this cynical view of screenwriting.¹⁶

In addition to Ann Rutherford, costarring as a new breed of contemporary western woman, *Melody Trail* introduced Autry's trick pony, Champion, as a second stalwart costar. Featured in all the singing cowboy's subsequent films, Champion built upon Betsy Ross King's performance in *The Phantom Empire*, attracting young rodeo audiences. *Melody Trail* showcased the grand spectacle of the imagined American West with humorous commentary from Abe Lefton, rodeo's most famous announcer. Audiences witnessed a series of rodeo scenes, including the grand entry parade, junior calf riding (featuring contestants under 10-years of age), bulldogging, bronc riding, calf roping, and bull riding. Mirroring a real rodeo experience, Lefton spoke from an elevated platform using a state-of-the-art in public address systems comprising a microphone-amplifier-loudspeaker arrangement.

In his introduction from the dais, Lefton referred to Autry as both a rodeo contestant and "star of the phonograph and radio." The association of rodeo

sports with country-western music, sound recording, radio broadcasting, and live performance—all *within* the motion-picture medium—demonstrated synergy at work in American media culture. Appealing to large audiences of spectators in stadiums and rodeo arenas across the country, *Melody Trail* put forth “real cowboy” credentials for Autry’s singing cowboy persona. Subsequent films continued to build up Autry’s rodeo associations. Ultimately, the singing cowboy hero authenticated these sporting credentials by premiering “Gene Autry’s Flying A Ranch Rodeo Stampede” in February 1941. After World War II, Autry became the largest producer of rodeo sports in the world.¹⁷

The plot of *Melody Trail* involved Autry with Millicent Thomas, the daughter of Timothy Thomas (Wade Boteler), owner of the TTT Ranch. Miss Thomas wore a fashionable knit dress and a stylish beret as the film introduced her to movie audiences. Sitting in the rodeo arena grandstand, she made eye contact with the singing cowboy hero. Moviegoers learned that Millicent was responsible for shipping cattle from her father’s ranch and that she lost her cowboys to the arena once the rodeo hit town. She tasked a band of cowgirls with responsibility for rounding up the cattle and sending the herd to market. Thus, *Melody Trail* demonstrated women taking on the toughest male-dominated work in the New West of the 1930s.¹⁸

After participating in the grand entry parade, Autry joined Lefton on the broadcasting platform to sing, “Hold On Little Doggies, Hold On.” In this scene, film footage highlighted the modern loudspeaker system amplifying the cowboy

crooner's voice to reach the large, assembled rodeo audience. The amplification of music within the context of a rodeo arena represented a new experience for many music fans in 1935. Mirroring real-life audiences responding to amplified musical shows, rodeo spectators in *Melody Trail* roared their applause as Autry sang. The other cowboys seemed to enjoy Autry's performance, except for Matt Kirby, the TTT Ranch foreman, a favored rodeo contestant, and a lowdown cattle rustler. Kirby's disgusting notions of the singing cowboy distinguished the debased outlaw from Autry's value-laden persona.¹⁹

As the singing cowboy hero mounted up in the bucking-bronc event, Lefton commented to the crowd, "If he can ride like he can sing, oh, baby." Of course, Autry defeated the dishonest Kirby to win the all-around cowboy contest and a \$1,000 prize. Later, a gypsy stole the prize money as Gene slept in a rented room, shared with a friendly rodeo clown named Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette). The next morning, as Frog got dressed in a comical scene, Gene sat leisurely in the hotel room playing his Gibson guitar and singing the eponymous title song, "On the Melody Trail." After finishing the ballad, Autry realized that someone robbed him. Frog suggested that Gene telegraph his radio station sponsor for money to replace the stolen funds. Instead, the cowboy crooner decided to look for work at the TTT Ranch.²⁰

While Gene and Frog rode out to the ranch, the camera panned to show Millicent's cowgirls lined up in a classic western pose. The girls sat astride their horses on a ridge top, gazing down on a gypsy camp in the valley. Similar to

traditional cowboys spying on an Indian encampment, the cowgirls watched the gypsies sing and dance in traditional folk styles. Meanwhile, Kirby and his men got busy rustling the TTT herd. When the cowgirls got back to work, they crossed paths with Gene and Frog as the latter demonstrated his calf roping and tying techniques. The cowgirls mistook Frog for a rustler and they ran him off the range. Back at the ranch, Millicent's kleptomaniac dog, Souvenir, returned from the gypsy camp with a baby in a basket; stolen during the big dance number.²¹

Dressed in a check shirt and jodhpurs, Millicent found the baby and took him into the house, while her father chased after the dog. Gene and Frog arrived in this moment. Posing as cooks, they applied for jobs at the ranch, so Gene could make time with Millicent. The boys did not know what to think when they saw her with a baby. While they discussed the matter a fight broke out between two stallions in a corral. Jumping in to break up the horses, Gene thrilled Millicent with his bravery. She rewarded the boys by hiring them on as cooks. Dressed in aprons and looking emasculated, they went to work in the ranch house kitchen.²²

After a hard day rounding up cattle, the cowgirls gathered in the bunkhouse. They relaxed by listening to the radio. Hearing Autry sing, "The Lone Cowboy on the Lone Prairie," broadcast from a radio station via electrical transcription record. The girls sang along until the trail boss entered and turned the music off. The boss lady demanded that her crew show remorse for the loss

of rustled cattle. Sitting down for a dinner of meat pies made by Gene and Frog, the cowgirls played the scene for comedy. They responded to the poor quality pies by running outside to hurl. The next day, Millicent left Gene and Frog to mind the baby, while she went to town with her father, to see the sheriff about the cattle rustlers. Hearing the cowboy crooner singing a western lullaby to sooth the crying infant, the cowgirls realized their bad cook was actually the recording artist and radio star. As Autry sang, the cowgirls respond with rapture, swaying to the music.

The gypsy thief showed up to reclaim his baby during the cowboy's serenade. The gypsy figured that Gene and Frog might be wise to his theft of the rodeo prize money, so he took off in an automobile. The boys gave chase via horseback; thus, creating a scene where the action switched back and forth, juxtaposing the automobile driver and the horsemen; giving the nod to tradition, when the cowboy heroes caught the car.

While this chase went on, the rustlers snuck up on the cowgirls as they skinny-dipped in a swimming hole. The cattle thieves stole the cowgirls' clothes to keep them from searching for the stolen livestock. The rustlers did not know that Gene and Frog witnessed their poaching, while chasing the gypsy. The boys captured the rustlers and brought them to the TTT Ranch. Timothy Thomas forgave all the would-be criminals, except for Kirby, the ringleader. In conclusion, the rest of the cowboys and cowgirls decided to marry in a big horseback wedding. The wedding party included Gene and Millicent; but as the

scene faded to black before they spoke any vows. They did not consummate the wedding, because Souvenir had stolen all the rings.

Melody Ranch provided moviegoers with an image of the American West with many opportunities for leisure and recreation conveyed through country-western music, radio broadcasting, and live performances. The addition of rodeo sports to the cadre of country-western music and musical-western film expanded the notion of Autry's multiplatform entertainment into a new realm, which he would capitalize by partnering with the World's Championship Rodeo in 1939. The strong roles for women in the film recognized the centrality and the significance of Autry's female base. Every film in Republic's "Gene Autry" series featured convincing parts for independent young women in mostly contemporary New West settings. Even so, the categorization of Autry films within the "fantasy" genre created only a suggestion of what might be possible as American culture transformed during the Great Depression.

Despite these mild efforts of Republic Pictures, Warner Brothers, and other studios producing motion pictures designed to influence public morale and mobilize public opinion, President Roosevelt did not have broad support from Hollywood. After taking office in 1933, Roosevelt rebuffed the movie moguls. He denied requests from studios that asked to use his name and image. Instead, FDR formed his own production company, U.S. Documentary Film, set up by Rexford Tugwell as part of the Resettlement Administration (RA), a division of the USDA.²³

Tugwell hired the filmmaker Pare Lorentz to run U.S. Documentary Film. Lorentz responded by writing, directing and producing, *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936). Virgil Thompson wrote an original score to accompany Lorentz's poetic narration and spectacular Dust Bowl imagery. Lorentz combined populism and patriotism with realism and social commitment to reflect the aspirations of President Roosevelt's New Deal. U.S. Documentary Film defined the techniques of social realism that inspired a generation of young filmmakers and photographers; especially, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and others working for the Resettlement Administration. Lange's exhibition and accompanying publication, *American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (1939), showed the techniques of social realism through documentary photographs. Lange showcased her work for the RA and the Farm Security Administration (FSA), another division of the USDA. By showing the Great Depression to depression-era Americans, the imagery of social realism promoted a national identity for American citizens, based upon a new set of shared American values connected to Roosevelt's New Deal.²⁴

Aesthetic and critical kudos accompanied *The Plow that Broke the Plains*. Lorentz considered the film, "good enough technically to bear comparison with commercial films and entertaining enough to draw an audience." Even so, the film provoked negative reactions in Hollywood. Studio heads refused to distribute the movie, arguing that Lorentz's documentary style could not draw audiences large enough to pay for distribution through major film exchanges.

Moreover, movie moguls thought of social realism as depressing and irreconcilable with the spirit of optimism needed to promote economic recovery. The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) considered U.S. Documentary Film a dangerous form of new competition. Poor distribution limited the number of people that actually saw *The Plow that Broke the Plains* in theaters after its release in May 1936.²⁵

Firsthand experience with the challenges of distributing films through the film exchanges made President Roosevelt sympathetic to the troubles faced by independent film producers. Claiming that Hollywood studios maintained a monopoly by controlling film production, distribution and exhibition, the President instructed the United States Department of Justice to prepared a lawsuit against the MPPDA to bring freer competition to the film industry. In 1938, Roosevelt merged U.S. Documentary Film into a new federal agency, the United States Film Service (USFS), sheltered by the National Emergency Council. The USFS provided Pare Lorentz the authority to produce *and* distribute motion pictures and shorts, through federal government agencies at home and abroad. Hollywood studio heads finally acquiesced after this move. The MPDDA agreed to propagandize New Deal, Good Neighbor, and War Preparedness messaging in 1939. Film studio propaganda made the Roosevelt administration appear more attractive to millions of regular moviegoers.²⁶

Pare Lorentz's films demonstrated the necessity of the New Deal as a means of winning support for President Roosevelt's controversial programs.

Republic Pictures took note, incorporating elements of social realism into the “Gene Autry” series. To take advantage of the ballyhoo in front of *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, Republic hurried *Red River Valley* (1936) into the movie theaters in March 1936. Compared to earlier films, *Red River Valley* reflected rural and small town American values with a decidedly political tone. Audiences would not mistake Republic’s musical-western-fantasy as anything but light-hearted entertainment. Even so, the nature of the film lent itself to comparison with *The Plow That Broke The Plains*.²⁷

 Filmed on location at Laguna Dam, on the Lower Colorado River, above Yuma, Arizona, Republic developed a storyline that took advantage of publicity surrounding Arizona’s disputes with California over Colorado River water in 1934. The contemporary setting also evoked President Roosevelt’s well-publicized dedication of Boulder (Hoover) Dam in May 1935. Likewise, moviegoers learned about construction of the Colorado River Aqueduct (1933-41) and All-American Canal (1934-40) by watching newsreels during the period.

 As unlikely as it seems, a comparison of *The Plow the Broke the Plains* with *Red River Valley* reveals some differences separating the policies of the USDA and the U.S. Department of the Interior. Responding to the Dust Bowl tragedy, the USDA promoted a policy of retrenchment in the Great Plains States. Meanwhile, Interior focused on modernization in the Southwest, planning for an enormous expansion of land use, following the construction of major waterworks and contracts with water and power companies to supply the

suburbanizing communities of southern California, central Arizona, and southern Nevada. *The Plow that Broke the Plains* seized upon a confessional tone, blaming the American people. Lorentz conveyed a New Deal promise of government aid and a commitment to resolve the natural catastrophe and resettle the Dust Bowl Diaspora, beginning with the film's prologue:

This is a record of land...of soil, rather than people—a story of the Great Plains: the 400,000,000 acres of wind-swept grass lands that spread up from the Texas panhandle to Canada... A high, treeless, continent, without rivers, without stream... A country of high winds, and sun...and of little rain... By 1880 we had cleared the Indian, and with him, the buffalo, from the Great Plains, and established the last frontier... A half million square miles of natural range... This is a picturization of what we did with it.²⁸

In contrast, the prologue for *Red River Valley* gave notice to a different view, one that associated more with rain rich and reclamation aided Pacific Slope. In southern California and central Arizona, the water and power infrastructure made possible by Interior presented an alternative to retrenchment for farmers and ranchers willing to relocate to the Lower Colorado River or the Los Angeles River Basin:

Drought—the grim enemy that devastated once prosperous farm and ranch lands. Men have learned the bitter lesson of unpreparedness. Throughout stricken areas today, they are rallying forces to fight back with their only weapon---water.²⁹

Red River Valley dramatized the concerns of leveraged ranchers desperate to avoid bankruptcy as they waited for the delivery of water promised

for the irrigation of arid lands. Storylines in the film dramatized public concerns about sabotage and labor radicalism developing in response to conspicuous wealth and the exploitation of water and power. Expressing the concerns of female moviegoers, Mary Baxter (Frances Grant), the female lead, raised *the* telling question in the film: “Why would anyone in this country want to keep the canals from being built? That water is our lifeblood.... Dad and all the other ranchers, everything they own is invested in this project. If it fails, now....” Given this sentiment, it seemed morally reprehensible to most Autry fans to discover that a double-dealing banker loaned money to the ranchers to improve their properties and then sabotaged the water delivery system he financed to restrict the flow of water temporarily so as to destroy the seasonal crop and force the cash-strapped landowners to short sale their now valuable property.³⁰

Autry played the part of a rancher delivering fresh beef to the Red River Land & Irrigation Company to feed the construction crews building the new canals. Fans saw their singing cowboy hero rounding up steers on the edge of town. When one of the beeves got loose, Gene chased the rampaging bull down Main Street. He managed to bulldog the critter to the ground, in the nick of time, before it trampled two small children playing in the street. Mary Baxter ran out to check on the traumatized kids; then, she chastised the cowboy’s for the near miss. Autry’s sidekick, Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette), approached commenting about his bulldogging technique. Frog emphasized for Mary and movie audiences Autry’s rodeo associations, claiming a contrived pedigree as

“World’s Championship Bulldogger.” When Gene learned of the troubles at the dam, he took on the job of ditch rider or *zanjero* (water master) to stop the saboteurs.³¹

Red River Valley reflected the emerging markets for agriculture and industry in southern California, central Arizona, and southern Nevada. Filmed against a backdrop of water and power delivery systems under construction, the picture illustrated the expanding prospects for suburban expansion in California’s Imperial Valley, Arizona’s Salt River Valley, and other locales in the southwestern deserts. *Red River Valley* represented the New Deal response to Dust Bowl resettlement tied up with a growing spirit of labor agitation along the Pacific Coast. In 1936, newsreels and press reports of violent clashes between strikers and strikebreakers held contemporary currency for many Americans. Some moviegoers remembered violent opposition during the Carolina Piedmont textile strikes in 1929. Many recalled the coal miner strikes in Harlan County and Bell County, Kentucky in 1931. More recently, the wave of strikes across the South by miners and laundry workers, and the general strikes in San Francisco captured the headlines.³²

Signaling a closer association with the proletarian cause, Autry abandoned his elaborate performance outfits in this film. He opted for a pair of Levi’s, worn over his fancy boots, and a plain western-style shirt. Moreover, the country-western star sang a traditional western folk song as a tie-up with the movie title. “Red River Valley” marked a departure for the “Gene Autry” series,

which typically featured new hit records for eponymous promotions. The traditional folksong appealed to rural and small town fans who questioned their ability to maintain a traditional lifestyle while facing the onslaught of modernization that transformed the American West during the New Deal. Other films titled from traditional folksongs included *Comin' Round the Mountain* (1936), and *Oh, Sussana!* (1936).³³

Ultimately, the landowners and the laborers had a showdown in *Red River Valley*. Staged on Laguna Dam, the two sides fought tooth and nail until Autry arrived with the stolen payroll to fairly compensate the workingmen. In a failed escape attempt, the crooked banker and his business associate-accomplice accidentally blew themselves up dramatically crashing a stolen locomotive into a wagon full of dynamite. Afterward, Mr. Baxter (Sam Flint) delivered a speech from the precipice of the dam. Promoting irrigated agriculture, the owner of a ranch with water rights proclaimed: "In celebrating the conclusion of our task, we can all feel proud and happy today, because we know that tomorrow; this project will put Red River Valley as one of the richest farming lands in the world. Three cheers for Red River Valley."³⁴

Hereto, *Red River Valley* provided moviegoers with an image of the American West with new opportunities for agriculture and industry under construction in the Lower Colorado River Valley and the Los Angeles River Valley. In line with the President's theories about western travel and tourism serving as an antidote for revolutionaries and radicalism, Autry demonstrated music had a

civilizing force, even among the roughest of roughnecks. The reemphasized the associations between ranching and rodeo, and the relationship of rodeo sports to other forms of western art and entertainment. All the same, the categorization of *Red River Valley* as a fantasy film served only to dramatize the future of a New West under development in the American Southwest.

A follow up to *Red River Valley*, Republic released *Guns and Guitars* on June 22, 1936, to coincide with the opening of the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia. Democrats re-nominated Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the party's candidate for a second term as President of the United States. A vote for Autry in the film, suggested a vote for Roosevelt in the fall. The singing cowboy considered this film an outstanding dramatization of a working ranch woman opposing greed, corruption, and violence; and using her skills and contacts to influence local elections. *Guns and Guitars* emphasized the role of women in President Roosevelt's reelection campaign in 1936. Autry later wrote:

If I had to pick an example of the slice-of-life plots that tended to pop up in my films, *Guns and Guitars* would probably serve. I did not engage, for the most part, in such mundane activities as saving the old homestead or chasing bank bandits. While my solutions were a little less complex than those offered by FDR, and my methods a bit more direct, I played a kind of New Deal cowboy who never hesitated to tackle many of the same problems: the dust bowl, unemployment, or the harnessing of power. This may have contributed to my popularity with the 1930s audiences.³⁵

The New Deal Cowboy provided entertainment to draw a crowd and promote Dr. Parker's Phamous Purveyors of Phun, Phrolic, and Painless Panacea

in *guns and Guitars*. The storyline involved crooked cattlemen trying to move a herd sick with “Texas Fever” across the county line. A professionally trained veterinarian, Professor Parker (Earl Hodges) quoted the *Farmer’s Bulletin*, a USDA publication to reinforce the legitimacy of cattle quarantine laws. Parker’s expertise exposed Dave Morgan (J. P. McGowan), the crooked president of the local Cattlemen’s Association, as a civic leader preying upon his constituents.³⁶

When Morgan’s henchmen bushwhacked the local lawmen, Professor Parker and Marjorie Miller (Dorothy Dix) persuaded Gene Autry (Gene Autry) to become a candidate for sheriff. In making a nominating speech before an assembly of townsfolk, Dr. Parker proclaimed, “We wish to endorse as candidate for sheriff a man that you all know, a man who has proven his fearlessness in times of danger, Gene Autry.” Marjorie Miller encouraged women to vote for Autry. She also asked her friends and neighbors to influence the votes of their husbands. With the polls closed and ballots counted, Autry won the election by a landslide, foreshadowing results that proved true for President Roosevelt in November 1936.³⁷

Celebrating the premiere of *Guns and Guitars*, Nat Levine announced plans to make six new “Gene Autry Musical Westerns” during the Republic sales convention at the Drake Hotel in Chicago. In response, the singing cowboy demanded a salary increase. The producer agreed to pay his musical-western star \$2,000 per week when filming. Another stipulation required Republic to buy a \$2,000 horse trailer to accommodate Champion and make personal-

appearance touring more comfortable for Gene. Republic also kept Smiley Burnette under contract as Autry's sidekick. Burnette provided novelty, comic relief, and supporting musical roles in the musical-western series. Moreover, the longtime sideman remained personally under contract to Autry. Smiley paid Gene ten percent of his salary, a monthly commission totaling \$9.81 in January 1937.³⁸

The comic genius and musical talents of Smiley Burnette proved integral to the success of Republic's "Gene Autry" series, according to Peter Stanfield. In *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy*, Stanfield explained that Burnette received a costar billing before the end of the first season. Beginning with *The Singing Vagabond* (1935), he carried increasingly lengthy segments. Burnette drew on the tomfoolery of the clown tradition in American culture to create a unique character of inestimable importance for fans. Added to Autry's musical interludes, Burnette's vaudevillian comedy and novelty act helped distinguish the musical-western form. Comedy and novelty replaced the fistfights and chase scenes that characterized the traditional western film formula. Stanfield clarified: "The sidekick's comedic antics punctuated the formulaic narrative of fight, pursuit, capture and escape as much as the music interludes did. Smiley Burnette's principal function was to act a comic foil to Autry."³⁹

Billed as "The World's Wonder Horse," Champion provided Autry with a second seasoned sidekick. Autry hired a top trainer for Ringling Brothers-

Barnum and Bailey Circus to work with Champion and his other trick horses. John Agee trained the original Champion to do tricks in *Melody Trail* and in subsequent films. Among the mounts trained by Agee and performing as “Champion,” a horse named “Lindy” connected the singing cowboy with the legendary Tom Mix. Born on the day that Charles Lindbergh flew the Atlantic, Agee originally trained Lindy for Mix to ride in his circus, stage, and rodeo appearances. Lindy went by the stage name, “Tony, Jr.,” when performing with Mix. Agee leased the horse for Mix’s tours and accompanied Lindy on the road. When Mix retired, the horse trainer convinced Autry to employ Lindy for his stage and rodeo appearances. When Autry agreed to headline the Madison Square Garden Rodeo in September 1939, Lindy-Champion became the first horse to fly from coast to coast for a personal appearance. Agee also trained Champion, Jr., to replace the original Champion in the postwar period.⁴⁰

Following his new deal with Republic, Autry signed a contract with the M. D. Howe Booking Agency of Hollywood, California. He hired the Howe Agency for exclusive representation and he expected the firm to negotiate and procure engagements for employment on the theatrical and vaudeville circuits, and other places of amusement and entertainment. Howe booked engagements for radio and television broadcasts, negotiated phonographic recording sessions, and managed all other recordings, reproductions, and distributions of the “Gene Autry” likeness by all mechanical means, except for motion pictures. Autry paid Howe a commission of ten percent (10%) of all moneys, properties, and other

forms of compensation, including salaries, bonuses, percentages, royalties, shares, and commissions.⁴¹

After signing with Howe, Autry left Los Angeles with Smiley Burnette, Frankie Marvin, and Audrey Davis for a month-long personal appearance tour in Oklahoma. Howe organized the live performance tour as a means of developing synergy between Autry's singing cowboy persona, his budding film career, and his success as a radio star and recording artist. Performing live sets, the singing cowboy had the opportunity to personally meet his growing base of music and movie fans. On the road, he performed live versions of the songs featured in his films. Selling records, sheet music and songbooks, Gene thanked his fans personally for making him a star. The citizens of Tulsa, Oklahoma, certified the singing cowboy's enormous popularity by making him an honorary deputy sheriff.⁴²

Republic opened its second season of Gene Autry musical-westerns with the August 1936 release of *Oh Susana!* The film featured a modern-day dude ranch setting, the fictitious Mineral Springs ranch, set within the spectacular scenery of the eastern Sierra Nevada. Including Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the Continental United States, and the hoodoos of the Alabama Hills, an otherworldly landscape in the foothills, near Lone Pine, California, these views of Owens Valley were familiar to many residents of southern California, because of the controversies surrounding construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct.

Magazines, such as *Touring Topics*, published by the Automobile Club of

Southern California, promoted the Owens Valley as a destination of choice for automobile tourists. By 1936, the Owens Valley accommodated a landscape filled with vacation camps, dude ranches and ski lodges, set amidst a host of Indian reservations, and infrastructure maintained by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

It is likely that the Roosevelt administration looked favorably upon *Oh Susana!*, because the film promoted the American West as a destination for tourism and recreation. An essay by Michael Berkowitz titled , “A ‘New Deal’ for Leisure: Making Mass Tourism during the Great Depression,” in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*“ (2001), explained how tourism and new leisure industries formed an integral part of the New Deal strategy for economic recovery and new development in the western states. Republic gained favor with local business and civic leaders for promoting the Southwest as America’s playground through stunning—on location—photography. Local businesses and governments catered to wealthier eastern and foreign tourists who traveled to enjoy spectacular scenery and recreational amenities. Real growth also came from the regional and weekend tourism that accompanied suburbanization.⁴³

Nat Levine changed up his musical-western formula by introducing more musical segments in *Oh, Susana!* The film showcased three songs by the Light Crust Doughboys, in addition to six songs from Autry, including duets with Burnette (Frog Millhouse) and Frances Grant (Mary Ann Lee), and a novelty

number from Burnette and Earl Hodges (Professor Daniels). Republic created tie-ups with the Burrus Mill and Elevator Company of Fort Worth, Texas, sponsor of the enormously popular Light Crust Doughboys. Company president W. Lee O'Daniel served as the announcer for the Doughboys weekly radio program. Broadcasting throughout Texas and Oklahoma, O'Daniel's Texas Quality Group Network included Radio Station WBAP in Fort Worth; WFAA, Dallas; WOAL, San Antonio; KPRC, Houston; and KOMA, Oklahoma City.⁴⁴

The addition of more onscreen musical talent benefited Herbert Yates as the owner of the American Record Corporation (ARC). Yates featured musicians under contract to ARC in the "Gene Autry" series. Republic paid the musical groups anywhere from \$1,000 to \$1,500 for a short engagement in Hollywood. Back home, the musicians helped the studio plug motion pictures by promoting their own appearances in films, during live performances and radio broadcasts. Working in Hollywood added to the resumes of the bands and bolstered their popularity and play dates. Republic benefited from increased box office returns, while Autry gained ever-widening exposure in the major markets of New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles; and in the regional markets of Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Missouri, and Iowa.⁴⁵

In combination with leisure time and dude ranch vacations, record players and radio broadcasting added to the elements of modernity reflected in *Oh Susana!* Modern forms of transportation also conveyed images of the New West. Early scenes highlighted "Gene Autry, the radio star," as a passenger on

the Southern Pacific Railroad's *Sunset Limited*, a deluxe, streamlined train with first-class passenger service from New Orleans to San Francisco, via Los Angeles. Automobiles, too, reflected the modern New West. Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette) and Professor Daniels (Earl Hodges) drove a late model convertible pulling a travel-trailer designed to look like an old-fashioned covered wagon.⁴⁶

The car-and-covered-wagon mash-up towed by Millhouse and Daniels provided an entertaining and literal visualization of the transformation of the Old West into the New West in 1936. A sideboard along the wagon read, "Millhouse, Daniels and Company; Entertainers De Luxe." Another advertisement on the car door, lettered in washable white paint, read: "Now playing The Western Theatrical Circuit, Next Appearance...Sage City..." These advertisements emphasized the role of entertainers in introducing new ideas and nurturing the development of American media culture.⁴⁷

Oh Susana! included modern-day gangsters as heavies for Autry to fight. The western outlaw Wolf Bensen (Boothe Howard) teamed up with an urban gangster named Flash Baldwin (Donald Kirke). Backed by a crew of crooked cowboys, they robbed the Mineral Springs Dude Ranch. Baldwin's sport shirt and fedora gave him distinctly eastern-gangster flair in comparison to the western outlaws. The symbolic richness of gangster portrayals in the hybrid, musical-western-gangster form, functioned as an alien interruption in the western landscape. Doubly marked as urban dwellers and ethnic immigrants, the personal mannerisms and artifacts of the gangster's world resonated with

movie audiences. Gangsters became the *vade mecum* for Republic Pictures, the scapegoats for all that might be wrong with the New Deal and the New West. Modern-day gangsters made guest appearances as heavies throughout the “Gene Autry” series, employed as emblems of urban corruption and salutary warnings to rural, small town, and newly-urban Americans as they simultaneously rushed to embrace modernization, while continuing to worry about its effects on traditional folkways along the suburban frontier.⁴⁸

In September 1936, after Republic wrapped the filming of *Ride, Ranger, Ride*, Gene Autry and Company struck out for Texas, opening at the Liberty Theater in Fort Worth, during the Fort Worth Frontier Centennial Exposition. Back out on the road, Gene Autry and Company managed six more play dates in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, earning an income of \$755, about \$12,305 in 2011 dollars for the two-week tour. Autry promoted Republic’s release of *Oh, Susanna!* and he encouraged fans to take part in the Texas Centennial, celebrating the 100th anniversary of Texan independence from Mexico in 1836.⁴⁹

At the end of the tour, the cowboy troubadours looped back through Dallas to film portions of *The Big Show* (1936) on location at the Texas Centennial Exposition. Sponsored by the Texas Press Association, the United States Congress matched the \$3,000,000 appropriation made by the Texas Legislature to kick off fundraising for the Texas Centennial. The U.S. government issued commemorative three-cent stamps and commemorative half-dollars to support the anniversary events. Government support helped the Central

Centennial Exposition in Dallas attracted more than 6.3 million patrons from June to November 1936. During the same run, the Fort Worth Frontier Centennial Exposition brought in nearly one million visitors. New Dealers credited the world's fair and frontier exposition with buffering Dallas and Fort Worth from the worst effects of the Great Depression. Adding 10,000 jobs in construction and the newly emerging leisure and tourism industries, the Texas Centennial contributed more than \$50 million to the local economy.⁵⁰

The Big Show gave moviegoers an ironic, behind-the-scenes look at moviemaking and radio broadcasting. Simultaneously, the film built desire for leisure travel among Autry fans by highlighting the musicians caravanning across the Southwest on a road trip from Los Angeles to the world's fair in Dallas. Life imitated art for Autry in the filming of *The Big Show*. He played dual roles as a cowboy movie star named Tom Ford (Gene Autry), and the movie star's stunt double, named Gene Autry (Gene Autry). The film opened with Autry leading the Beverly Hillbillies in a traditional version of "The Martins and the Coys," leisurely singing and playing to pass the time on location, backstage with the escapist "Mammoth Pictures" (a euphemism for Republic Pictures) filming near Kernville, California. Revealing a behind-the-scenes view of western location filming, the camera tracked away from the musicians to disclose the group of featured players idly making music for themselves, while a nearby crew filmed a scene with Tom Ford.⁵¹

In addition to featuring several musical performers, *The Big Show* acknowledged the pleasures of fandom by characterizing a “snooping female” audience that bought tickets to see Autry’s musical-westerns. The film depicted female fans fantasizing about Gene’s body and displaying fetishism for his costume. In one scene, women literally consumed the singing cowboy by surrounding him and removing all his clothing. This representation of women in *The Big Show* demonstrated an openness to change brought on by modernization. Here again, the female lead acted as a free agent within a world of work. Implicitly, the film acknowledged the massive economic and social changes accompanying the shift from rural to urban industrial life experienced by most rural and small town folks. Marion (Kay Hughes) mirrored the modern transformation affecting many women in American culture during the New Deal.⁵²

The Big Show also illustrated the effects of new technology upon the relationships between labor and capital during the New Deal. The film’s setting in the ultramodern Dallas Fair Park displayed the inroads of modernity as fundamental in the American West. The film mirrored modern architecture, petroleum products, and radio communications as aspects of the modern western cityscape. Panning across the Dallas Fair Park, the director showed audiences a golden statue of Mercury—the god of eloquence, skill, trading, and thieving—distinguished in Roman mythology as the herald and messenger of the gods. This representation of Mercury at the Texas Centennial encouraged

moviegoers to see the world's fair as a harbinger of a New West, signifying the New Deal in fifty modernist pavilions, built at an average cost of \$50,000 each.

Combining tradition with innovation, *The Big Show* included Autry displaying the cowboy arts in the popular "Cavalcade of Texas." His role in the historical pageant depicting four centuries of Texas life showcased some hard riding and stunts with Champion. In a touching final scene, he serenaded his trick pony with the popular ballad, "Ole Faithful." The film explored notions of urban and rural life in complex ways by questioning stasis versus change and the interplay between nostalgia and modernism in contemporary culture. The Texas Centennial did not simply recall the nostalgia of a lost frontier past. As the historicized Cavalcade unfolded, the camera lingered on the highly stylized buildings and futuristic statuary juxtaposed around the grandstand. The film emphasized a connection between pageantry in past traditions and modern architecture in the American West. Similarly, the film marked a milestone with The Jones Boys performing "Lady Known as Lulu" to commemorate the "Hall of Negro Life," the first representation of African American culture at a world's fair.⁵³

After filming of *The Big Show* wrapped, Gene Autry and Company embarked upon the largest live performance tour of the young singer-songwriter's career. *Gene Autry, In -Person* played forty-four play dates in Texas and Oklahoma from November 1936 to January 1937. Howe developed an elaborate press book for this tour that included predetermined program

announcements, a newspaper advertising campaign, special scene mats, press releases and ballyhoo designed to sell tickets. Publicity included advance features, advance stories, booking stories, and feature stories offering various publicity angles. The press book noted that the Gene Autry Company traveled with its own public address system for special use upon the stages and theaters played. Autry mounted this modern sound system on his truck for street ballyhoo purposes.⁵⁴

During the tour, the singing cowboy star earned \$3,591, about \$58,526 in 2011 dollars, more than \$1,300 per venue, paid through a series of money orders, cashier's checks, and cash en route. A bit discouraging in terms of per-show income, the tour provided enormous exposure for the singing cowboy with core audiences. Over the next twenty years, Autry continuously earned large sums of cash money doing similar tours. A willingness to go out and mingle among his fans distinguished the singing cowboy hero from other Hollywood stars.⁵⁵

George Goodale worked as Autry's advance man during the *Gene Autry, In-Person* tour. As Autry's publicity agent, cashier, and promoter, Goodale traveled in advance to places like Columbia, Tennessee; Wheeling, West Virginia; Steubenville, Ohio; Florence, Alabama; Pine Bluff, Arkansas; and Bowling Green, Kentucky. He prepared the way for the Gene Autry Company to perform a series of one-night stands. *Gene Autry, In-Person* filled the local movie theaters at a buck a head in small towns. The show grossed as much as \$1,500 a week.

Because banks and most Western Union offices closed on the weekends, Goodale sometimes carried more than a thousand one-dollar bills on his person. “They’d be in all my pockets, in my socks, under my hat—everyplace. But I never got mugged,” the advance man remembered. Republic Pictures did not share in the proceeds from these live performances.⁵⁶

The headlines made by Gene Autry and the new subgenre of musical-westerns championed by Republic revived the popularity of traditional western films among mainstream moviegoers. Featuring six to eight musical numbers in each picture, the “Gene Autry” series proved to be a big hit with female fans. The singing cowboy broke the attendance records of Texas exhibitors and theaters owners in Boston, Massachusetts. Fans confirmed the importance of Burnette’s role as Autry’s sidekick in films and sideman on tour. Newspapers gave Nat Levine credit for developing the sidekick concept and the singing cowboy innovation.⁵⁷

The Quigley Publishing Company’s poll of theater exhibitors in the *Motion Picture Herald* identified George O’Brien as the most popular western star in January 1936, followed by Buck Jones and then Gene Autry, a comparative newcomer after two seasons. Bill Boyd (Hopalong Cassidy) ranked fourth in the poll, trailed by Ken Maynard, Dick Foran, John Wayne, Tim McCoy, Hoot Gibson and Buster Crabtree: the top-ten, western film moneymakers. Autry’s rise to prominence received confirmation from the *Los Angeles Times*, which ran a front

page story in February 1937, about Autry being stranded with his film production crew by the spring freshets flooding Kernville.⁵⁸

The setting for *Git along Little Doggies* (1937) resembled the mountain hamlet of the Sierra Nevada above the rich oilfields near Bakersfield, California. The film's plot involved a rural radio station owner making a play to strike oil. At first, Autry questioned the environmental impact of oil exploration and the use of radio advertising to promote investment opportunities. He opposed oil drilling, fearing contamination of local water resources. Autry led the ranchers in opposition, until he learned that the oil executives could attract a railhead. This new development caused the singing cowboy to change his mind and support oil drilling. Gene justified the flip-flop by arguing in favor of a nearby shipping center, claiming that this advantage would more than offset the potential of oil drilling to contaminate the water supply. Autry endorsed the tradeoff made by ranchers from Texas, Oklahoma and California, bearing witness to the enormous expansion of oil industry operations and the resurfacing the western landscape during the New Deal.⁵⁹

To convince his community to support the oil industry the singing cowboy hero staged an afternoon of vaudeville entertainment for locals in the film. Sponsored by a euphemistic Western States Oil Company, audiences heard the program broadcast live over the company-owned, Radio Station KXB. Autry used the combination of a live show and radio broadcast to sell shares of stock in the hometown oil venture to fans across the country. He demonstrated a desire to

solve problems quickly through decisive action. If one solution did not work, Autry showed pragmatism, trying something new. In this way, he reflected a comparable New Deal philosophy that called for action over hesitation. New Dealers believed in taking charge to change and perfect society through reform efforts.⁶⁰

Git along Little Doggies inspired awe for the raw power of information when combined and communicated through multiplatform entertainment. All who witnessed the spectacle clearly saw the possibilities, so much so, that Republic ended the production on an extremely happy note. Promoting Wall Street-style investments by singing the “Stock Selling Song,” the final scene showed the Maple City Four asking townsfolk to thank the singing cowboy for the increased value of their Western States Oil Company shares. “Not the banker, nor the landowner,” sang the Maple City Four—Autry got the thanks for increasing capital investments. To emphasize Autry’s association with FDR, the entire cast broke into a rousing version of “Happy Days Are Here Again.” Roosevelt used this tune as his theme song during the 1932 presidential campaign and subsequently, it became the unofficial theme song of the Democratic Party.⁶¹

To promote the release of *Git Along Little Doggies* in March 1937, the singing cowboy opened another personal appearance tour at the Riverside Theater in Milwaukee that included seventeen more play dates in Wisconsin, Indiana and Iowa, over a three-week period. In May, Autry ran a second tour to

promote the release of *Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm* (1937). Touring Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Illinois, the Gene Autry Company saw significantly higher returns. The tour grossed a total of \$12,371, about \$201,625 in 2001 dollars, from April through June, nearly \$300 (\$5,000) per play date. Higher ticket prices and larger audiences suggested that the Ohio River Valley and the Upper Midwest had recovered from the worst of the depression.⁶²

Sound recordings added another \$450 per month to Autry's income from motion picture productions and personal appearance tours. The singing cowboy earned considerable income from music royalties. ARC, Campo Music Company, Forester Music Publishers, Decca Records, Brunswick Record Corporation, Southern Music Publishing, and RCA Manufacturing Company all paid royalties in 1937. In addition, he received royalties from M. M. Cole Publishing for the sale of sheet music and songbooks, and from the Harmony Guitar Company for "Gene Autry" signature guitars, sold by Sears.⁶³

THE SECOND NEW DEAL

During Autry's third season with Republic Pictures Herbert Yates bought out Nat Levine with a million-dollar offer. Yates brought in Moe Siegel from ARC Records to replace the film producer. Moe's brother, Sol C. Siegel, took over production of the western serials, including the "Gene Autry" series. Levine's buy out disquieted the singing cowboy as awareness of his relatively low pay grew. Suddenly realizing his value to the studio, Autry demanded a new deal

from Yates. When the movie mogul refused to talk about a new contract, resentment swelled until the singing cowboy waged a one-man strike in May 1937.

Autry walked out on Republic Pictures in protest against the studio's block-booking practices. The job action drew support from theater exhibitors who screened the singing cowboy's motion pictures and staged his live performances. The U.S. Department of Justice took note when Herbert Yates filed legal actions and sent process servers to compel his cowboy crooner to return to the studio. Before the new season got underway, Yates relented and agreed to pay Autry \$7,500 per picture. In addition to the salary increase, Autry also negotiated a level of script approval.⁶⁴

Public Cowboy No. 1 became Autry's first film under his new deal with Republic. Released on August 23, 1937, this musical-western marked a turning point in the career of the yodelin' cowboy and a watershed in American culture. Rural, small town and newly urban fans in the Midwest, South, and Southwest turned out to watch their cowboy hero sing, "The West Ain't What It Used To Be." The song's refrain, "There's a New Deal in the West today," highlighted the role of President Roosevelt in the making of a modern New West. The melody reflected the increased leisure made available to American workers by Roosevelt's New Deal. Government promotions encouraged worker-tourists to spend their free time traveling in the American West. The attractive cowboy troubadour aided the advertising campaigns of the Roosevelt administration.

Autry's music and motion pictures made the New Deal and the New West more appealing to American voters.⁶⁵

Recognizing the promise of local tourism marketing and stimulated by the aggressive campaigns of foreign governments encouraging Americans to travel abroad, the Roosevelt administration refocused its efforts in travel promotion in a modern, contemporary New West, accessed by airplanes and high-speed automobiles, in addition to luxury railcar service. New Deal initiatives expanded the vacationing infrastructure in the region to stimulate tourism. A *New York Times* reporter mentioned the "great PWA projects—Muscle Shoals, Norris, Grand Coulee and Bonneville Dam, the Tennessee Valley development, the great Navajo erosion and reclamation project in Arizona and New Mexico, the incredible Boulder Dam" that dotted the itineraries of tourists to the South and West.⁶⁶

An important aid in the development of western tourism came from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Writers Project, which undertook the publication of the American Guide Series. The Federal Writers Project set out to redefine tourism from the viewpoint of the American state. Before the New Deal, foreign correspondents from France, England, and Germany framed the tourist experience in the United States; so much so, that the German-based Baedeker's *United States* guide served as the model for the American Guide Series. The first WPA guidebook (Idaho) appeared in January 1937, followed by individual guides for other states.⁶⁷

In February 1937, Interior Secretary Ickes also used WPA funds to establish the United States Travel Bureau (USTB). Secretary Ickes staffed the USTB with Civilian Conservation Corps workers until Congress authorized an independent appropriation for the agency. To stimulate the economy and help bring an end to the Depression, the USTB reshaped the role of the federal government in tourism promotion by imitating foreign competitors. The Travel Bureau set up a National Travel Advisory Board to distribute information to travel agencies, transportation companies, tour operators, and other service providers. The bureau sponsored lectures, screened motion pictures, staged exhibits, distributed travel literature, and promoted special radio programs for both government and nongovernment tourist attractions. The USTB published newsletters, bulletins, events, calendars, research reports, and promotional aids to encourage travel and tourism. President Roosevelt encouraged the USTB to launch a "Travel America Year" campaign, followed by a "See the Old West" campaign. Additional support came from the WPA's Federal Art Project, which created dozens of posters to promote notions of tourism and travel to specific national parks and monuments.⁶⁸

In the midst of all this government travel and tourism promotion, *Public Cowboy No. 1* elevated Autry from his status as a singing cowboy hero to a more prestigious ranking as a full-fledged national icon. In due course, he starred in a series of motion pictures that conveyed ever stronger messages associated with New Deal themes. Important New Deal films in the "Gene Autry" series

included, *Springtime in the Rockies* (1937), *Gold Mine in the Sky* (1938), *Man Fran Music Mountain* (1938), *Mountain Rhythm* (1939), and *Colorado Sunset* (1939). Republic's approach to public information changed somewhat as the series scriptwriter's accommodated larger and more mainstream audiences. As Autry rose to national acclaim in his fifth season with Republic, *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* (1939) ultimately represented the singing cowboy's New Deal piece de résistance. *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* featured Autry as a singing cowboy-legislator elected by westerners and sent to Washington, D.C., to introduce measures dealing with dam construction, irrigation, flood control, and the resettlement of migrating refugees.⁶⁹

The underlying story in *Public Cowboy No. 1* dealt with the desperate need to modernize livestock production in the western states. Set against a backdrop of the U.S. Department of the Interior attempting to implement the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, the film dealt with issues related to the end to the open range. The Taylor Grazing Act organized 80 million acres of previously unreserved public lands into grazing districts. The Division of Grazing in the U.S. Department of the Interior (renamed the U.S. Grazing Service in 1939) administered these public lands. Despite encountering multiple problems related to low lease fees, opposition from farmers, budget reductions and unlawful land use, the Division of Grazing worked to control erosion through scientific range management. A federal workforce coordinated rehabilitation programs, improved forage, and restrained rodents. Government workers

constructed new roads, trails, fences, corrals, and watering places. *Public Cowboy No. 1* showed Roosevelt's New Deal expansion of livestock production as the primary means of economic development in the rural West. The film also showed how outside influences brought corruption and lawlessness as byproducts of economic development in western states.⁷⁰

Public Cowboy No. 1 opened with depictions of modern cattle rustlers using aeronautics, short-wave radio communications, and refrigerated trucks to steal livestock belonging to contemporary western ranchers. The film scapegoated corrupt executives at the Western Packing Company—a big corporate outfit, controlled by outside interests—running a criminal syndicate responsible for the high-tech thievery. Autry fans familiar with the livestock trade might have interpreted Western Packing as a pseudonym for Swift and Company, a big Colorado meatpacker; Armour and Company or Oscar Mayer in Chicago; or the Cudahy Packing Company in Milwaukee and Los Angeles.

Modern cattle rustlers used techniques of scientific management to baffle Sheriff Matt Doniphan, an elderly, small-town peace officer. Playing the role of deputy sheriff, Autry made a big speech about the need to modernize law enforcement to keep pace with high-tech criminals. Ranchers in the film responded by hiring the Quakenbush Detective Agency, a big-city firm with modern crime-fighting techniques. Frog Millhouse sang a humorous song called "Defective Detective" that mirrored the low esteem Autry's fans projected toward big-city businessmen. In the end, neither the urban crime fighters, nor

the high-tech outlaws, proved a match for Autry combining traditional down-home savvy with modern technology and innovations.⁷¹

To promote *Public Cowboy No. 1* in advance of the film's premiere, Autry left Hollywood for a personal appearance tour in July 1937. The tour began in Dallas, where the Gene Autry Company drew attention to the refreshed and newly reopened Greater Texas and Pan American Exposition, a second season of the Texas Centennial. The singing cowboy's circuit included a stop in New York for a guest appearance on *Rudy Vallee's Varieties*. The Walter Morris Agency paid the cowboy crooner \$667, more than \$10,000 in 2011 dollars, to appear on Vallee's program with Ricardo Cortez, Joe Cook, and the comedy team of Russ Brown and Dorothy Libaire. Originating from New York Radio Station WEA, audiences heard the nationally syndicated program broadcast over the NBC Radio Network. Back in Los Angeles, Gene's family and friends listened to the program on Radio Station KFI. In October, the J. Walter Thompson Agency booked the singing cowboy for an encore engagement paying \$981, more than \$15,000 in 2011 dollars, for a second appearance on *Rudy Vallee's Varieties*.⁷²

The national exposure that Autry received from these personal appearances gave commercial sponsors the opportunity to validate his growing appeal among mainstream audiences. National exposure primed a rumor mill of reports speculating that Autry might leave Republic Pictures. Darryl Zanuck supposedly offered Herbert Yates \$500,000 for the singing cowboy's contract. Other rumors hinted that Autry might leave the studio for a ten-week tour of

Brazil. Rumors became so constant that Yates felt compelled to address them in a press release. He refuted all claims that Paramount had signed Autry to a contract. Despite the ballyhoo, the movie mogul moved to protect Republic Pictures in the event that Autry did leave. Sol Siegel auditioned musicians for a second singing cowboy series. He signed Leonard Slye of The Sons of the Pioneers to a movie contract. The studio promptly changed the cowboy singer's name to Dick Weston. Later, Dick Weston became Roy Rogers.⁷³

In 1937, Hollywood musicals reached their vogue using song names to inspire new film titles. The industry finally recognized that a hit song associated with a motion picture release provided the means of integrating sound recordings, motion pictures, radio broadcasting, and live performances. Contemporary accounts credited Autry as one of the first movie stars to achieve success with the eponymous approach. George Burns and Gracie Allen, Bob Hope, and Sonja Henie also received credit for early success with eponymous titling.⁷⁴

In Autry's oeuvre, *Boots and Saddles* (1937), *Springtime in the Rockies* (1937), and *Gold Mine In The Sky* (1938) provided excellent examples of the eponymous titling technique. Autry featured the songs, "Take Me Back To My Boots and Saddles," "When It's Springtime in the Rockies," and "Gold Mine in the Sky" on personal appearance tours. Combining motion pictures with live performances and radio promotions resulted in some of the biggest sales in the singing cowboy's career. The hit records dramatically upped Autry's worth to

Republic Pictures and theater exhibitors nationwide. The “Gene Autry” series provided the only proven moneymakers for smaller theater owners in rural, small town, and newly urban markets.⁷⁵

Springtime in the Rockies continued the growing trend of Republic’s “Gene Autry” series featuring information in the public interest. The singing cowboy demonstrated the value of music as a tool for public diplomacy by diffusing a standoff between cattlemen and sheep herders. Autry succeeded by forcing the opposing ranchers to sing together in harmony, “When It’s Springtime in the Rockies. Autry explained the strategy saying, “You know it’s hard to sing and be mean at the same time.” Other New Deal offerings showcased the movement of young professional women bringing the techniques of animal husbandry and scientific range management from an eastern university to conduct experiments on western ranchlands inherited by one sorority sister.⁷⁶

Only three years in the motion picture business and Autry outranked seasoned western performers like William Boyd, Buck Jones, George O’Brien, Bob Steele, Charles Starrett, Ken Maynard, Johnny Mack Brown, and John Wayne. Using the advantage that accompanied his enviable position, America’s favorite cowboy hero went public for a second time concerning conflicts with the studio over block booking practices. In January 1938, he complained about Republic using the “Gene Autry” series to leverage other pictures with exhibitors, “My effort to get a salary raise has met with the statement from the

studio that my films don't get much money in the exhibition field, despite the fact that the box-office reports have proved them to be leaders among westerns." Autry complained to the *Los Angeles Times*, "It is known that my pictures are being used as a blackjack to force exhibitors into buying other Republic products, and on this tour I've found out exhibitors are greatly discontented because of the procedure."⁷⁷

Film industry insiders closely watched Autry's dispute with Republic. The singing cowboy's protest against block-booking practices drew attention to similar inquiries by the U.S. Department of Justice. Bringing scrutiny to Republic's block-booking practices demonstrated how the singing cowboy could create synergy for New Deal initiatives using multiple forms of art, entertainment, and recreation to influence public opinion. Autry paved the way for people to accept the ideological shifts necessary to adjust to transformative new technology and the global information revolution that accompanied international radio broadcasting and synchronous sound films.⁷⁸

With Autry on strike again, Republic assigned the lead in his next musical-western to Roy Rogers. Hiding his real identity, the studio profiled Leonard Slye as a twenty-five-year-old native of Cody, Wyoming. Sol Siegel claimed he "discovered" Roy Rogers performing on the popular radio program, *Hollywood Barn Dance*. Republic paired their new singing cowboy hero with Smiley Burnette to attract fans from the "Gene Autry" series. The studio recast a film written for Autry titled, *Washington Cowboy*, to make the film, *Under Western*

Stars (1938). A star-making vehicle designed to launch the career of Roy Rogers as Autry's eventual successor, Yates approved spending \$100,000 to make and market *Under Western Stars*; more than double the average expenditures for any picture starring Gene Autry.⁷⁹

In a conciliatory gesture, Autry licensed the song "Dust" to the studio for \$250. Johnny Mercer originally composed the music and the song lyrics. Autry bought the copyright from Mercer and recorded the song with the intention of featuring it in *Washington Cowboy*. Rogers scored a huge hit with "Dust," garnering Republic's first Academy Award nomination for "Best Song in a Motion Picture." Even so, the name Roy Rogers caused consternation for the studio, when a vaudevillian with the same name filed a lawsuit against the studio. Perhaps because of the lawsuit or the impermanency of filmmaking, Leonard Slye did not legally change his name to Roy Rogers until after Autry enlisted in 1942.⁸⁰

Rogers claimed the No. 1 spot in Quigley's western film poll in 1943 and he held onto that ranking as America's favorite western star until 1954. The reign ended when the Walt Disney Company starred Fess Parker as the lead in the hugely popular, "Davy Crockett" series. Remaining on top from 1937-54, the longevity of the singing cowboy era was pronounced in western film history and it deserves further study. Likewise, the ability of Autry and Rogers to rank among the Hollywood A-list of biggest box office earners (Autry from 1940-42; Rogers from 1945-46) showed the influence of the singing cowboy in the

American mainstream. A majority of Americans considered themselves fans of Autry or Rogers during the Second World War.⁸¹

Autry's ability to attract the attention of mainstream media benefitted from his commitment to appear in full western regalia at public events like the running of the famous Santa Anita Handicap, featuring "Stagehand" beating "Seabiscuit" by a nose. Reporters commented about the singing cowboy's high-heeled boots, fancy shirt, and ten-gallon hat. They compared the western hero with Clark Gable, Fred Astaire and other pacesetters modeling the fashions of well-dressed men at Santa Anita. Fans also saw the cowboy crooner at the National Orange Show in San Bernardino, where he appeared with Leo Carrillo, Dick Powell and Dorothy Lamour. Even the cowboy's golf game made the news when Autry's foursome included producer Scott Dunlop, W. Ray Johnston, head of Monogram Pictures, and Trem Carr, now a producer for Universal Pictures. Former executives with Republic, Johnston and Carr helped create the "Gene Autry" series.⁸²

In May 1938, the national press reported that Autry settled his dispute with Herbert Yates. Autry and Yates reached a compromise before Republic's annual convention of sales representatives and exhibitors in New York. They agreed to a gradual increase reaching \$10,000 per picture by December 1938, more than \$160,000 in 2011 dollars. To announce the deal, the movie star and movie mogul burst into the convention in a blaze of six-shooters, walking arm-in-arm. Talking to the press at the convention, the Autry explained, "They

[Republic] wanted to settle it because they not only were making money on me, but they were selling their whole product on me. In other words, they'd go to an exhibitor and say, 'Look we've got eight Autrys but in order to get the eight you're going to have to buy so many of these others.'"⁸³

Philip Hanson shed light on Hollywood's anxiety over block booking practices in *This Side of Despair: How the Movies and American Life Intersected during the Great Depression* (2008). Hanson described how anxiety materialized after several studios went into receivership in the early 1930s. A subsequent contraction in the industry affected the studios as they recovered from receivership trauma. Additionally, movies were under pressure from moral censorship codes and new enforcement of a tougher Hays Code by the MPPDA. Movie studios accepted these conditions because the alternative meant government intervention, coupled with the assault on block booking practices.⁸⁴

Hanson explained that bankers installed themselves in the top management positions and took charge of distressed companies when motion picture firms went under. Bankers installed an assembly line system, heavily dependent on churning out films in proven film genres. Burned by economic trauma and threatened with a loss of their own identities, the studios reduced risk by adopting a safer approach to production. Intended to maximize profit, the assembly line system worked because every successful film not already identified with a specific filmic genre triggered a process of mashing up existing genres and testing the premises of each new series against its specific source of

success. When a studio discovered a successful formula, it never escaped other studios, thus leading to the development of an industry-wide genre. At the same time, films were circumscribed by censorship, powerful interests, and predictable for-profit production practices. “The studios exercise maximum control of content,” Hanson explained. “But such control could not erase the cultural transactions that went on every day in every movie house in the United States.”⁸⁵

The bankers in Hollywood found their model for running a movie studio in Herbert Yates’ profitable operation of Republic Pictures. Yates’ success with the “Gene Autry” series created the cash flow he needed to compete with the MPPDA. His secret to successes involved running the studio like a business. Consequently, Republic made typical westerns on budgets of \$80,000 to \$125,000 per picture. The final costs never missed the mark by more than 5 percent. Yates’ formula produced salable westerns on an assembly line basis, similar to the approach used by P. T. Barnum.

The movie mogul explained: “The public has always liked Westerns—you know, cowboys, horses and fine scenery—hillbilly comedies and serials. The proof of the pudding is that Gene Autry is one of the best-loved stars in pictures today. Sure, the story is pretty much the same. There’s a hero and the girl and the heavy who’s trying to gyp them out of a mortgage or land or cattle. But you change it around a little to give it new trimmings. You’ve got a formula the

public likes and it's as standardized as granulated sugar. If you like sugar in your coffee why use salt?"⁸⁶

Republic's formulaic approach relied upon good stories, according to Yates. Good stories and positive messages mattered to both Yates and Autry. Fans valued Autry's character, more than the spectacular western settings in his films. Again, Yates clarified: "If you have a good yarn you can do it on a low budget and make a picture as entertaining as one costing six times as much. The public doesn't care if your characters are walking around in a set that cost \$50,000. The audience is interested in the characters, not the set. Some of those people out on the Coast seem to forget that show business started in a tent. Today they have everything overcapitalized. You don't have to spend \$3,000,000 to make a good picture or build a \$10,000,000 cathedral to show it in."⁸⁷

Republic timed the release of *Gold Mine in the Sky* (1938) with Autry's participation in a gigantic vaudeville show and Fourth of July celebration for 60,000 American Legion conventioners at the Los Angeles Coliseum. The film featured J. L. Frank's, "Golden West Cowboys," costarring Pee Wee King in a supporting musical role. Johnny Marvin and Fred Rose wrote two songs for the picture, "Dude Ranch Cowhands" and "As Long as I have My Horse." The studio promoted the film more than previous releases in the "Gene Autry" series. The story highlighted the conflicts between urban-eastern values and rural-western values in a modern dude ranch setting. Tensions underlying the story addressed

some of the concerns faced by western ranch families attempting to adjust to the new tourism and travel industries. Here again, Republic represented a modern New West where eastern gangsters attempted to rustle dude ranch cattle using diesel powered trucks to steal the herd.⁸⁸

As Autry began a personal appearance tour in Pennsylvania, *Gold Mine in the Sky* broke attendance records in theaters across Texas. The singing cowboy became so popular in the Lone Star State that his hometown of Tioga, Texas, considered changing its name to Autry Springs. The cowboy's musical-western style inspired Texas Governor James Allred to commission a pair of special boots to celebrate Autry's association as a native Texan. After the summer tour, most of Autry's fan mail came from Pennsylvania, demonstrating the importance of live performances to the maintenance of the singing cowboy's base. Texas ranked second among the states and New York third. Nonetheless, interest in Hollywood also grew significantly. The Paramount Theater in Los Angeles paid the singing cowboy-movie star \$15,000 to appear for one week with Betty Grable in a musical stage production called *Four Star Revue*, more than \$241,000 in 2011 dollars.⁸⁹

A memorable stop on the *Gold Mine in the Sky* tour occurred in Kenton, Ohio, home of the Kenton Hardware Company, makers of "Gene Autry" cap pistols. Six thousand people from a town of 7,000 turned out to see America's Favorite Cowboy. The mayor of Kenton publicly thanked Autry for providing employment for the citizens of his town. The hardware company produced

more than a million “Gene Autry” cap pistols between June and September 1938. Kenton Hardware paid the cowboy crooner \$11,589 in fees for licensing his name and image, more than \$186,000 in 2011 dollars. Autry made about one penny for each of the toy guns sold.⁹⁰

On the verge of national celebrity in 1938, Autry starred in a film series that proved highly profitable for Herbert Yates. Autry’s association with motion pictures resulted in record sales for ARC, three times greater than any other radio crooner in America. Going mainstream meant that Republic needed to connect the singing cowboy star more closely with traditional western film fans; especially, adolescent boys. In May 1938, the studio began a campaign targeting young boys. A story in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Kids Vote Him Tops,” explained Republic’s attempt to add boys to his core of female fans supporting the musical-western form. Amazingly, Autry’s fan mail exceeded 40,000 letters per month, far greater than any other movie star; yet, his movies rarely played in the large downtown theaters of big cities.⁹¹

Changing circumstances in 1938 elevated Autry to idol status for young boys and teenage girls. Comparing the singing cowboy to William S. Hart, Tom Mix, and Harry Carey for previous generations, the cowboy star Harry Carey asked, “Do you know why Autry gets the kids? They see more in him than most of the older folks—He’s an eagle that sings!” Because neither performer ever drank nor smoked on screen, film writer E. V. Durling referred to Autry as the “Tom Mix of the talking films.” Mix and Autry shared a belief about the bad

influences of drinking and smoking among their young fans. Affiliation with rodeo sports helped Autry establish rapport with young boys. To hone this aspect of his singing cowboy persona, Autry appeared as the ringmaster for a charity rodeo at Jim Jeffries ranch. He also did a guest spot at the World's Championship Rodeo during the Shrine Convention, joining "Hopalong Cassidy" (William Boyd) and Leo Carrillo on stage.⁹²

Autry's ability to reach audiences of adolescent boys encouraged the William Morris Agency to pay \$2,400 to license the "Gene Autry" name and image for new lines of cap pistols and cowboy hats, more than \$38,000 in 2011 dollars. The Western Printing and Lithographing Company signed the singing cowboy to a national deal paying \$250 per title for the use of the "Gene Autry" brand in a "Big Little Book" series. The series included *Gene Autry in Public Cowboy No. 1: retold by Eleanor Parker from the Republic motion picture (1938)*, *Gene Autry in Law of the Range (1939)*, *Gene Autry, Cowboy Detective (1940)*, and *Gene Autry, Special Ranger (1941)*. Autry also received a \$300 royalty from the House of Hollywood to license his name and image in conjunction with new lines of hair oil, shaving cream, and perfume for men.⁹³

As a national audience comprised mainly of young women and adolescent boys began following Gene Autry, Republic released *Man from Music Mountain (1938)* to draw attention to the millions of Americans that decided to leave the crowded cities and return to a simpler rural life in the South and West. A life made possible by the New Deal investment in water and power resources,

Man From Music Mountain expanded the public understanding of southwestern dude ranch settings in the rural and small town areas of the Lower Colorado River Basin. The film showed how rural ranch populations dealt with the enormous cultural shift that occurred following the opening of Boulder (Hoover) Dam.⁹⁴

Republic dramatized the real estate booms that accompanied the distribution of new water and power resources to southern California, central Arizona, and southern Nevada. The studio expanded the notion that “The West Ain’t What It Used to Be” to new levels by incorporating dramatic newsreel footage of the Boulder Dam inauguration. Republic used the newsreel footage to set the stage for an escapist story of real estate development and the selling of a dream to make the desert bloom. Twirling newspaper headlines heralded a New West where migrants were portrayed as “Modern Pioneers,” heading out west to cash in on a new Gold Rush. The combination of water and power resources on display in the film pitted locals against outsiders in competition to find the accommodations necessary to live and work together as natives and newcomers. Autry’s sidekick, Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette), decided to hang up his spurs and open a new electric appliance store. Frog got the girl and a plethora of new gadgets to sell to newly urban westerners building garden bungalows equipped with running water and electricity.⁹⁵

Man from Music Mountain made the New West lifestyle appear increasingly attractive to young American voters. The New Deal created a New

West with good roads, water, power, and modern laborsaving machinery. The film suggested that the Roosevelt administration closed the variance in living standards between eastern and western states, between urban and rural lifestyles. The “Gene Autry” series helped audiences believe in the possibilities of a new kind of suburban living. The series combined the best of town and country. Even so, fans remained trapped in the foreboding atmosphere of the Great Depression. Republic did not go far in the direction of social realism to portray the hardscrabble conditions that accompanied economic reality throughout much of the rural West. Newsreel inserts continued as a mainstay of Republic’s approach.⁹⁶

Republic developed Autry’s singing cowboy persona to reflect the attitudes and opinions of ticket-buying audiences. Herbert Yates advanced a list of eight rules to follow within the musical-western formula that associated traditional American values with the New Deal. Autry embraced Yates’s standards of wholesome family entertainment with a new spirit of Americanism. The singing cowboy followed Yates’ eight rules to instill patriotism among tens of thousands of Gene Autry Friendship Club Members. As President Roosevelt began preparing the United States for war, Autry modeled patriotic behavior for fans through heroic portrayals that reflected Yates’ rules in a system of cultural values adhered to by tens of millions of rural, small town and newly-urban Americans:

1. Gene Autry, the cowboy actor, would not hit anyone smaller than himself;
2. The cowboy hero refused to take unfair advantage, even of an enemy;
3. Gene Autry never went back on his word;
4. When representing a government official, Autry never misused the power of his office;
5. Gene Autry always took the side of the oppressed in any conflict;
6. Gene was kind to children, old folks, and, of course, animals;
7. He expressed no racial prejudices whatsoever; and,
8. His actions were always honorable.⁹⁷

Box office success provided evidence that Gene Autry's evolving "cowboy code" resonated with audiences that favored the musical-western form. Fan support made "The Cowboy" an increasingly valuable spokesperson for sponsors seeking to tap an emerging market of independent female consumers. Girls between the ages of 17 and 20 formed the bulk of the hundreds of Gene Autry Fan Clubs. Republic recognized that Autry's fan base differed from the audiences enjoying traditional western films. Women wrote more than two-thirds of the letters received in support. More importantly, women arranged personal appearances for Autry and his backing band. Local women's organizations played essential roles: renting space for live performances; creating publicity for live events; handling the finances; and dividing profits with the musicians at the end of the night. ARC Records confirmed these findings, as did ARC's deals with Sears and WLS. Women represented the largest and most vocal segment of Autry's fan base.⁹⁸

Photoplay discussed the potency of Gene Autry as both a lesson and a promise in 1938. The lesson, never forget the down-to-earth people upon whom the movies have always depended. Films prepared to please lower culture consumers held the promise of unlimited rewards. The evidence showed Autry selling more movie tickets than other, more famous movie stars. Mostly, Autry sold tickets in movie markets that the major studios ignored. He swelled the returns for Republic, while building a name for the studio in the rural, small town, and newly-urban markets of the Midwest, South and Southwest. Yates understood the desires and needs of these audiences. He appreciated how Autry represented traditional American values to moviegoers. Fans enjoyed seeing Autry in “message” films. They wanted their singing cowboy hero to reflect an upfront attitude and reinforce traditional beliefs.⁹⁹

To close the 1938-39 season, the “Gene Autry” series featured a story of western ranchers battling eastern resort developers over the control of the open range. *Mountain Rhythm* (1939) pitted ranchers against developers in a bid for public lands controlled by the U.S. Department of Grazing. The film showed westerners pooling their money to buy ranchlands at auction that provided access for their cattle to larger holdings within the public domain. In contrast, resort developers competed to buy the same ranchlands to gain the same public access for “The New Pueblo City,” a luxury destination for high-rent tourists that arrived via the outside developer’s private bus lines. These buses brought “suckers in from every part of the country,” explained one resort developer.

Another developer clarified, “This ought to send real estate prices in the valley sky high.” In a plot twist, *Mountain Rhythm* also characterized life in a refugee camp, reminding audiences of the pervasive homelessness, still abundant in 1938, and the challenges associated with resettling nearly one million Dust Bowl migrants in California.¹⁰⁰

Further evidence of Autry’s affinity for the New Deal appeared in December 1938, when the singing cowboy took part in a radio broadcast to benefit Dust Bowl refugees in the San Joaquin Valley. Melvyn Douglas organized the event after five thousand migrant children petitioned to have Autry and Burnette perform on Christmas Day. When asked which star they wanted to see, a big majority of the youngsters voted for Mr. Autry. They called him “The Cowboy.” The live radio performance took place at the Farm Security Administration camp in Shafter, California. Sponsors used the broadcast to call attention to the serious problem of migratory families. Forced from their homes in the Midwest, South and Southwest, the refugees lived in subnormal conditions in California. NBC broadcast 45 minutes of the five-hour event over its national radio network.¹⁰¹

Overseeing a busy churn of propaganda pictures in 1938, the Roosevelt administration focused its desire on using the film medium to create a national consciousness, to compete with the regional and local politicians that historically controlled large blocks of voters. The western genre in all its forms provided a structured medium for New Dealers seeking to expound a unique sense of

national identity based upon the notion of Americanism. Films like *Mountain Rhythm* displayed right thinking, clean living, and a devotion to duty as essential aspects of Americanism. Typically, the “Gene Autry” series strove for adroitness, preaching in general terms and communicating through inferences about the New Deal. This subtleness disappeared as the specter of wars with Germany and Japan loomed.¹⁰²

Critics attributed the renaissance of celluloid sage-brushers to natural causes in 1939, an inevitable cycle, following the success of the musical-western form. Reviewers credited Hollywood with rediscovering the scenic beauty of the American West among the vast panoramas stretching from the Sierra Nevada Mountains to Arizona’s spectacular Monument Valley, the location of John Ford’s, *Stagecoach* (1939). Residents of Kernville and Lone Pine, California, and those in Tombstone, Arizona, offered their towns to Hollywood for a price. These communities maintained permanent western main streets for film companies to use. Merchants and ranchers near filming locations prospered under the arrangements. Ranchers rented their cattle and horses to the moviemakers, and local cowhands found off-season employment. “Quickie” independent film companies operated on shoestring budgets in the rock crags near Chatsworth in the San Fernando Valley and other nearby shooting locations.¹⁰³

Escapism provided the essential philosophy responsible for the success of the “Gene Autry” series. In *Republic Studios: Between Poverty Row and the*

Majors (2007), Robert M. Hurst quoted a telling article published by the *New York World Telegraph*, wherein, Herbert Yates explained his philosophy: “The kind of entertainment that we, at least, will stick to will veer away from heavy dramatics or pictures of war. They will have to provide an escape..., and until new things develop the company will stand pat on its present plans.” Hurst quoted *The Film Daily Cavalcade* as crediting Republic with successfully reviving the action drama and thus gaining an important place in the Hollywood studio structure. Insiders credited Autry for much of Republic’s success with praise for “America’s Number One Singing Cowboy, emulated by many, rivaled by no one.” Republic also got credit for giving new life to western serials after the studio purchased the rights to the popular *Lone Ranger* radio program. With the *Lone Ranger*, Republic acquired a pre-sold, pre-publicized episodic production with a popular fan base large enough to justify bookings in first-run theaters across the country.¹⁰⁴

Success provided evidence that Herbert Yates understood “the pulse of the film-going public” for Hurst. Republic recognized its markets for film products, identified its regions, and handled its products well. The studio knew how to read audiences and modify offerings to insure continued profit. Seeing how direct contact helped Autry build a following and increase market share, Yates demanded that other actors also tour to meet and greet fans personally. In contrast, major stars from the other movie studios rarely traveled to promote new film releases.¹⁰⁵

Colorado Sunset (1939) combined the plot devices of *Guns and Guitars* and *Public Cowboy No. 1* into a story about coded messages in radio programs, and the willingness of female fans to “Vote for Autry” in an effort to break a monopoly of milk producers and distributors, sanctioned by legislators in twenty-one states. Highlighting the lack of federal controls over milk and dairy production in the second Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, *Colorado Sunset* took aim at the state milk boards that fixed producer prices and provided wholesale and retail price fixing, pooling arrangements, production quotas, and entry controls. Some states justified their laws with a rationale of protecting public health. In most cases, state laws amounted to little more than a public underwriting of private arrangements between producers and distributors.¹⁰⁶

“Vote for Autry”

Today's the day we have our say
It's up to everyone
We must elect a sheriff and
When all is said and done

There's only one deserves to hold that job
I am here to tell
Gene Autry is the man for you
I know he'll serve you well

Autry's your man
Vote for Autry
Tell all you can
To vote for Autry¹⁰⁷

The popularity of Autry's singing added capital to his electoral campaign.

The singing cowboy targeted women voters who turned admiration into votes by

cajoling their men-folk into supporting his candidacy. He attracted diverse audiences by emphasizing music and comedy that appealed to cross-generational, cross-gender, working-class audiences. In a story that emphasized the struggle between agriculture and business, the singing cowboy hero compounded his class-specific address by drawing upon performance traditions that spoke directly to the constituency of his films.¹⁰⁸

As a follow up to *Colorado Sunset*, Republic elevated Autry into a role as an elected representative in *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* (1939). This film combined the themes of flood control, radio broadcasting, and resettlement with the allure of rodeo sports. Compared with Roy Rogers' *Under Western Stars* (1938) and the Jimmy Stewart classic, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), the political nature of *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* signaled the changing mood and shifting demographics of Autry's increasingly mainstream fan base.¹⁰⁹

Release of *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* in November 1939 marked the emergence of Autry as a major motion picture star outside the western film genre. In becoming a national icon, Autry rode a wave of popularity that elevated the entire western genre outside its traditional niche markets. The *New York Times* marked 1939 as the year that Hollywood recognized the western as a legitimate film genre. Suddenly, westerns became adult entertainment and high art in some instances. Something curious happened in 1939. Reporter Frank Nugent summed up the feeling: "Frankly, we don't quite know what to

make of it all. We've formed the habit of taking our horse operas in a Class B stride."¹¹⁰

Rovin' Tumbleweeds provided a portrait of Autry as a congressional representative sent to Washington, D.C. to pass flood control legislation, deal with concerns about migrant workers, and take care of corrupt lobbyists. The film's contemporary New West setting allowed scriptwriters to develop these prominent storylines from the headlines of the western press. As storylines associated the popular singing cowboy with Roosevelt's political agenda the approach succeeded with both the public and the president.¹¹¹

As *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* hit the theaters, Boulder (Hoover) Dam became fully functioning in 1939; thereby, establishing one of the biggest milestones in the history of the American West. On a tremendous scale, Boulder Dam fulfilled the new multipurpose goals of the New Deal. The Bureau of Reclamation also constructed dozens of small earthen dams during the 1930s to catch and store flood waters from smaller streams in an effort to help stabilize intermountain and other western states. Nevertheless, hurried agricultural settlement, overgrazing, the plowing up of rangelands, speculative farming, and repeated farm failures still characterized the western region. Federal reclamation sought to anchor farm families by irrigating areas that were unsuitable for dry farming, thereby helping to support an increased number of people living in agricultural valleys of the West and stabilizing many areas. Cooperation between the Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Agriculture, Works Progress Administration,

Civilian Conservation Corps, and the National Resources Planning Board made these activities possible.¹¹²

A great increase in the number of reclamation projects under construction in 1939 relied upon a labor force supported by funds from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Funded by self-liquidating bonds, these projects attracted many investors. Developers ultimately repaid all of the monies advanced by the government. Pointing to these efforts to stabilize farm families, Bureau of Reclamation projects helped the Roosevelt administration attract congressional support for its New Deal policies. The future of the Bureau of Reclamation and the integrity of New Deal reclamation policies depended upon repayment by those who benefited directly. Moreover, these projects employed thousands of men and utilized large quantities of machinery, steel, cement and other supplies, which also stimulated the economy in the western states and elsewhere. The total of contracts for labor, materials, and machinery in 1939 amounted to \$130 million, more than \$2 billion in 2011 dollars.¹¹³

Rovin' Tumbleweeds reflected the problems faced by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Farm Security Administration in attempting to stabilize migrant farm laborers in California. The film attracted widespread attention to the problem and a deeper understanding of its dimensions for concerned citizens. Mirroring the efforts of a Senate subcommittee chaired by Wisconsin Senator Robert M. LaFollette, Jr., Autry brought the problems of California

agriculture to public attention in Washington, D.C. Within the context of the film, Congressman Autry appeared to address LaFollette's committee in the nation's capital, while focusing attention on the impediments to farm-labor organization. Together with John Steinbeck's novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Carey McWilliam's, *Factories in the Field*, and Dorthea Lange's brilliant, *American Exodus*, Autry's *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* yielded public information in ways that extended to rural, small town, and newly urban Americans untouched by prominent literary, intellectual, and artistic figures.¹¹⁴

Sentimentalizing the simple life in the American West, the "Gene Autry" series expressed the desires of more than two million newly urban residents who took advantage of Farm Credit Act and Emergency Farm Mortgage Act of 1933 to buy properties in the southern California and central Arizona, within the newly irrigated reclamation areas of the Southwest. By 1940, the rural population of the United States numbered more than 57 million persons, growing by 6.4 percent during the decade of the 1930s to equal 43.5 percent of the nation's total population. Part of the increase was due to higher birthrates in rural areas, combined with urban unemployment, which decreased the urge of young people attempting to make good in the city.¹¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Extending his singing cowboy persona through low-budget "Jubilee" pictures, Autry created artifacts of the twentieth century that show synergy at

work within the motion picture and sound recording subsector of an emerging information economy. Republic's musical-western film form—featuring country-western musicians under contract to ARC Records—remained anchored by Autry, mirroring himself as a real-life recording artist and radio celebrity, touring the country on the rodeo circuit with his faithful horse, Champion. Autry's essential movie sidekick, Smiley Burnette, doubled as his sideman during the live musical shows. Together, they used the popular country-western music form to convey significant messages about New Deal policy to an audience unlikely to receive the information from more traditional forms.

Synergy created a “Gene Autry” brand capable of shaping public opinion, boosting morale, and sparking patriotism within the mainstream of American culture. Autry's support for President Roosevelt exemplified a new type of soft power—public diplomacy meant to influence the American public and make the New Deal more appealing to voters; especially women and the men influenced by women. *The Big Show* captured these qualities more than any other film made during the first two seasons of the “Gene Autry” series. Filmed on location at the world's fair in Dallas, *The Big Show* influenced public opinion concerning the American West to reflect a modern, contemporary New West, superimposed upon a traditional Old West, most aptly represented by the popular “Cavalcade of Texas” pageant. Autry's ability to move back and forth between the Old West and the New West made the singing cowboy a transitional character in American culture, a bridge between tradition and innovation at a time when President

Roosevelt put forth natural resource management as a national objective toward the goal of modernization.¹¹⁶

Music endured as the one element common to all the forms of art, entertainment, and recreation featuring the “Gene Autry” brand. Autry chose to become a country-western musician and musical-western film star, because the western genre appealed to his fans throughout the Midwest, South, and Southwest. The singing cowboy remained most popular among the quasi-folk and lower-culture audiences in the less settled areas of the country. Autry fans appreciated the lower-culture expressions of working-class values in the singing cowboy’s performances. The cowboy represented a quintessential American folk hero, presenting rural American folk values and important working-class behavioral norms as increasingly palatable with a majority of Americans during the Great Depression.

Republic’s “Gene Autry” series mirrored the ways in which the singing cowboy’s fans managed the changes that accompanied the convergence of sound recording, radio broadcasting and live performances into the motion picture medium. Hereto, *The Big Show* stands out as a film sending a message to fans about the mirroring affect by having Autry play dual roles: starring as Tom Ford, a nationally-known western movie star; and Gene Autry, Tom Ford’s stunt double. Moreover, the film provided a behind-the-scenes look at Republic’s motion picture productions, including scenes of filming on location in the mountains surrounding Los Angeles, and filming on Republic’s back lot in North

Hollywood. Parodying the role of Herbert Yates as the head of Republic Pictures, ARC Records and Consolidated Film Laboratories, *The Big Show* connected these electronic information industries to the modernization of the American West by filming on location at the Dallas Fair Park, during the world's fair celebrating the Texas Centennial.¹¹⁷

Autry used his mastery of multiplatform entertainment and the techniques of transmedia storytelling to connect the Texas Centennial with other aspects of modernization in the film. Autry's other New Deal films mirrored the creation of a New West, where leisure, recreation, travel, and tourism represented the emerging markets of a post-industrial age. Dude ranches, Wild West shows, and rodeos offered ample opportunities for Autry to make the American Southwest appear more attractive as an option for leisure; ultimately, a land of opportunity for women willing to relocate from Midwestern and Southern States.

Represented as a new medium as capable of sharing information directly to the public, radio broadcasting commanded special attention in the "Gene Autry" series. Radio helped make the New Deal Cowboy more attractive to his fans in *Melody Trail*, *The Big Show*, and other films. Autry made the connection for fans by singing, "Happy Days Are Here Again" in *Git Along Little Doggies*. Using radio as a symbol of New Deal modernization, the singing cowboy reflected the influence of the new information medium in the creation of a New West.¹¹⁸

The “Gene Autry” series portrayed women as confident and self-reliant, rejecting patriarchy in favor of independence in the New West. Autry’s leading ladies—Ann Rutherford (*Melody Trail*), Frances Grant (*Red River Valley, Oh, Susana!*), Dorothy Dix (*Guns and Guitars*), Kay Hughes (*The Big Show*), Judith Allen (*Git Along Little Doggies*) and others—portrayed women as free agents, taking on the toughest male-dominated work during the New Deal. Working as ranchers and cowgirls, farmers and irrigators, radio station programmers, and in other independent occupations, Autry’s leading ladies overwhelmingly supported Republic’s efforts to represent women as influential actors in the New West. Support for women showed most prominently in films like *Guns and Guitars*, where a strong, independent western woman influenced the political process. Fans connected Dorothy Dix’s gathering votes for Autry in a fantasy election with western women campaigning for Franklin Roosevelt in the presidential election campaign of 1936.¹¹⁹

Women identified with Autry because he portrayed the New West as safe, law-abiding and orderly. Respect for law and order permeated the plot of every film in the series. Even so, he often committed acts of “heroic” law violations. Reflecting the willingness of many Americans to violate the letter of the law to achieve justice, the ends justified the means for the cowboy hero. Fans expected to see this messaging reinforced in Republic’s law-and-order screenplays. Fans patronized movie theaters featuring Republic Pictures, because they understood and supported the messaging in the “Gene Autry”

series. People kept buying movie tickets, so Autry remained on board with the approach. He molded an image that championed traditional American values. Voicing support for patriotism, he encouraged the American public to support the federal government, while taking voluntary collective action at the state and local levels.

Autry willfully propagandized his name and image to influence his enormous fan base in support of the New Deal. “The West Ain’t What It Used To Be” sums up the transformation of the western star into an internationally known and highly respected iconoclast. Increased media exposure elevated the singing cowboy from his status as a country-western musician performing in musical-western films to that of a national icon. The benchmark in this transition from regional to national star appeared in 1937, with the release of *Public Cowboy No. 1*.

Between 1935 and 1942, Republic’s “Gene Autry” series incorporated New Deal themes in twenty-seven of 56 films. As a westerner with ties to Texas, Oklahoma and California, the singing cowboy recognized the New Deal as the progenitor of a new western culture, a culture different from and superimposed upon the landscape of the ancient and the Old West. Autry’s New Deal filmography showcased stories promoting travel and tourism through performances of western music, western dude ranch locations, annual rodeo spectacles, and touring Wild West shows.

Autry joined with those who believed in the promise of new technologies and the ability of humans to reshape the natural world. He understood the deep and structured role played by the American state in the delivery of water and power in rural and small town areas. The “Gene Autry” series offered particular representations of the western New Deal expressed through storylines supporting livestock and range management, water for irrigation and flood control, and rural electricity. A loathing of eastern-establishment types appeared routinely in the musical-westerns. Republic characterized businessmen and civic leaders in cahoots with urban gangsters. The gangsters wanted to monopolize western land and cattle companies, meat packers and trucking firms. Other films in the series took issue with western mining and oil company operations, groundwater contamination, shady stock offerings, short sales, foreclosures, forced migrations and homelessness.

Republic’s musical-westerns represented modernity through depictions of new media in the American West. Autry’s films displayed public address systems broadcasting to large rodeo crowds enjoying supersized stadium shows. The films depicted modern radio broadcasting and futuristic television transmissions in combination with behind-the-scenes views of electronic sound recording and motion picture productions. These representations showed how the New Deal connected westerners to the world—and vice versa—through an emerging American media culture. Ultimately, the singing cowboy’s support for President Roosevelt appeared most directly in *Guns and Guitars* (1936), *Colorado*

Sunset (1939), and *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* (1939). In these films, Republic promoted a "Vote for Autry" in escapist local balloting as the equivalent of a vote for FDR in actual presidential elections.¹²⁰

The notion of Gene Autry as a symbol of the modern, postindustrial New West is consistent with the work of scholars who pegged the emergence of this environment to the New Deal. With Roosevelt at the helm, the economic downturn of the Great Depression occasioned something of a development boom throughout much of the Far West, especially in southern California and central Arizona. New Deal relief and construction programs pulled a flood of unemployed workers from Eastern and Midwestern cities into the region. Western states outpaced all others in their per capita share of federal funds for the construction of public works, epitomized by four of the biggest water and hydroelectric power projects in the world today: under construction simultaneously in 1936; built with New Deal money, equipment, and planning. Helping to secure Roosevelt's national agenda for economic recovery, Autry and Republic Pictures contributed to the cultural dialogue about shared national identity that affirmed and legitimized the relationship of the American people to a modern consumer culture in social, economic, and political terms.¹²¹

Radiating outward from Los Angeles, Gene Autry productions characterized the New West as a place where tradition and innovation converged; a region destined to become the pacesetter for the nation. Autry's singing cowboy persona helped many Americans navigate the material

transformation of their lives from rural to urban, from old-fashioned to modern in the 1930s. His entertainments depicted the preconditions necessary to stimulate metropolitan growth, especially in southern California, and generally in the Southwest. A basic feature of this New West included the New Deal as a purveyor and promoter of tourism and recreation on public lands.

Autry became a “star” by creating content of lower technical quality for the large audiences that consumed his sound recordings, radio broadcasts, sound motion pictures, and live theater performances. Admirers sought vicarious contact with the singing cowboy through radio and movie guides, fan magazines, comic books, and other mass-produced publications. Followers did not distinguish between Autry the performer and the character he played in the movies. They blurred the line between Gene Autry the man and the public image of the singing cowboy. As national advertisers developed an interest in sponsorship, Autry’s sound recording and motion picture producers began revising middle-class material to fit working-class values. National advertisers needed to reach audiences with more purchasing power than lower-culture consumers. The shift became apparent when Wrigley’s Chewing Gum agreed to sponsor the nationally syndicated, *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch*, on the CBS radio network. *Melody Ranch* launched on New Year’s Eve, December 31, 1939, followed by a movie with the same title, released by Republic Pictures in November 1940.¹²²

The soft power—public diplomacy represented through Gene Autry productions demonstrated the innovative redefinition of the role played by the U.S. government in formulating a policy of public diplomacy through cultural activities. As the president moved the federal government into the fields of art, entertainment, recreation, and information, Republic Pictures incorporated government information into its cultural products to help combat the Great Depression and promote the New Deal. Increasingly, films in Republic’s “Gene Autry” series appealed to a majority of Americans who did not understand the nuances of government affairs; but, they trusted Gene Autry.

Building upon Autry’s success in promoting New Deal themes, Republic began using the singing cowboy’s series to draw attention to President Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor” policy, promoting friendly relations throughout the Western Hemisphere. Chapter 4, “South of the Border (Down Mexico Way),” focuses on Autry’s Good Neighbor pictures, depicting U.S. relations with Mexico and illustrating the importance of border security issues for the Roosevelt administration. Promoting Americanism, war preparedness, and friendly relations with Mexico and Mexican Americans, Autry aptly reached cross-cultural audiences at a time when most of fans favored isolationism. The need for Mexican cooperation with U.S. war preparedness efforts stimulated attempts through the “Gene Autry” series to familiarize rural, small town, and newly urban Americans with the culture of ethnic Mexicans.

4

“South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)”

*For it was fiesta
And we were so gay
South of the border
Down Mexico way*
—Gene Autry

INTRODUCTION

A quarter century before the Beatles kicked off the British Invasion of the United States, citizens of the British Isles and the Irish Free State generated similar scenes of mass hysteria in London, Glasgow, and Belfast, where tens of thousands of fans created mob scenes in front of concert halls and movie theaters featuring the personal appearances of Gene Autry, America’s Favorite Cowboy. The country-western superstar received a hero’s welcome everywhere he appeared to promote his musical-western film, *Colorado Sunset* (1939). Police estimated 500,000 to 750,000 fans turned out in Dublin to see Gene Autry parade Champion through the streets of the Irish capital. Following each performance in Dublin’s Theatre Royale, more than 10,000 fans assembled in the alley behind the concert hall to see the cowboy hero appear upon the fire

escape. When Gene emerged from the stage door, fans began to sing spontaneously, “Come Back to Erin.”¹

During his days in Dublin, Autry met with two songwriters, Michael Carr and Jimmy Kennedy, to purchase a new song, “South of the Border (Down Mexico Way).” He knew the work of Michael Carr, who penned “Ole Faithful” with Jimmy’s brother, Joseph Hamilton Kennedy. That song went gold for the singing cowboy in 1935, rising to No. 10 on *The Billboard* pop chart. Autry added the new song into a set that included “Rancho Grande” and “Gaucho Serenade,” performed during a special short-wave transmission from the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). “South of the Border” became a hit instantly with worldwide audiences listening to the International broadcast.²

The image of an American cowboy singing a song of Mexico to British and Irish audiences on the verge of global war provided a powerful symbol of harmony and unity for people on three continents. Unfortunately, Republic cut this British tour short, just days before the Nazi invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. As World War II began, Autry sailed for New York aboard the ocean liner, *Manhattan*, in the company of Herbert Yates, the head of Republic Pictures. Upon their arrival in New York, B. R. Crisler wrote a *New York Times* feature story referring to Autry as an “omen of world change.” Thankful to have escaped the German submarines during their home voyage, the movie star and movie mogul parlayed their experience into an eponymous film version of “South of the Border (Down Mexico Way).” For the story about hemispheric

cooperation and the prospects of global war spreading to Latin America, Autry signed up for a course to learn Spanish to prepare for his role in the movie, *South of the Border* (1939).³

Public response to Autry's live BBC broadcasts piqued the attention of U.S. government officials. The Roosevelt administration recognized the singing cowboy's efforts in its arsenal of new approaches designed to counter German advances. Using motion pictures, sound recordings, live performances, and radio broadcasts to mobilize broad support from the Latin American public, Autry aided the Roosevelt administration by supplanting the cultural diplomacy of academics and educators with an enormous media campaign, supporting war preparedness among lower- and middle-culture Americans.⁴

The press ran wild with the story of Autry's elevation to the Hollywood A-list in 1940. Autry's singing cowboy persona shifted the western film genre from the margins of U.S. culture into the mainstream. Pundits marked his personal appearance tour to Great Britain as the turning point. More specifically, analysts suggested that the American cowboy hero arrived on the world stage the moment he rode Champion into the foyer of the Savoy Hotel in London. As an advocate for the Roosevelt Presidency, Autry symbolized to his fans heroism and character, and he offered some moments of hope for the millions of people who survived the hardships of the Great Depression to face global war. Support for FDR through public diplomacy elevated Autry from his role as a singing cowboy in low-budget western films and a moderately successful radio and recording

artist to a new level of national and international celebrity. The key to Autry's stardom lay in his ability to create synergy through multiple information mediums. Because his delivery was always simple and direct, people easily understood the information embedded in Gene Autry entertainments. His rising popularity demonstrated an ability to shape public opinion.⁵

The techniques of public diplomacy learned by the Roosevelt administration during the New Deal rolled over into international relations with new developments in radio broadcasting, sound motion pictures, sound recordings, and live performances. The President adopted a soft power policy of letting facts stand for themselves in 1936. The New Dealer used public diplomacy to deliver U.S. statements of fact through all of the new information mediums. As war took hold on the European continent, the strategy adopted by the United States provided support for Great Britain in countering Axis propaganda with factual statements. Roosevelt trusted the citizens of the world to gauge truthfulness by comparing and contrasting the Axis and Allied information. Before 1936, the U.S. maintained a laissez-faire policy concerning the free-flow of two-way cultural relations and public diplomacy. The federal government allowed foreign nations to carry out public information programs in the U.S. with minimal intervention, excepting the Soviet Union.⁶

Public diplomacy represented an innovative redefinition of the role of government. In formulating a policy of international activity through American cultural and media industries, FDR moved the federal government into the fields

of art, entertainment, recreation, and information, disciplines traditionally reserved for states and private industry. Intervening in the American cultural industries became an important part of Roosevelt's overall domestic relief strategy. Creation of the Federal Music Project, Federal Theater Project, Federal Writer's Project and Federal Art Project, signified a major restructuring of American culture stimulated by the American State.⁷

To combat the Great Depression and prepare the U.S. citizenry for the prospects of global war, President Roosevelt encouraged the incorporation of U.S. government information into American cultural products. Roosevelt legitimized the use of propaganda in the arts, entertainment, and recreation industries, and took advantage of new media to convey optimistic messages of hope to distraught people across the nation and around the world. Anglo-American relations remained the cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy in combination with a strategy to rebuild trade relations in Latin America. Most trade between the U.S. and Latin America collapsed because of the depression. To reestablish trade, Roosevelt reversed much of U.S. foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere. Seeking greater unity as an objective, FDR outlined a "policy of the good neighbor" in Latin America during his first inaugural address on March 4, 1933. The President intended to ally the 21 nations of the Western Hemisphere into a league of nations with the United States as the dominant stakeholder. As a good neighbor, Roosevelt pledged to remove the causes of

Latin American complaints against the United States and reopen the channels of trade between the two continents cut off by the Great Depression.⁸

University of California historian, Herbert Eugene Bolton, contributed significantly to FDR's concept of unity in the Western Hemisphere. During his tenure at Berkeley, Professor Bolton probably did more than any single figure in the United States to popularize the university-level teaching of Latin American and borderlands history. In his 1932 presidential address to the American Historical Association, Bolton presented a theory of Pan-Americanism titled, "The Epic of Greater America." His theory argued that Americans—North, South, and Central—were bound together by a common history and shared New World experience.⁹

The Roosevelt administration used Bolton's theory to anchor the Good Neighbor policy and further the progress of a Western Hemisphere Idea. Defined as a convergence between North, South and Central America around the values of modernity, gentrification, and market capitalism, the Western Hemisphere Idea promoted an unprecedented degree of amalgamation among democratic republics. Principles of nonintervention and trade reciprocity formed the basis of the Good Neighbor policy during Roosevelt's first term. FDR's reciprocal trade policy set a precedent as the first expression of a modern economic internationalism in the United States. Reciprocal trade underscored the president's understanding of the intimacy between the U.S. economy and the international economy. Prosperity at home depended upon reciprocal trade

between the U.S. and other nations. To inform the public about the need for this new approach, FDR turned to American cultural products and new media to convey the spirit of his Good Neighbor diplomacy. In line with this new approach, Republic's "Gene Autry" series began promoting the common ground between American cowboys, Mexican vaqueros, and South American gauchos in 1936.¹⁰

Inter-American radio broadcasting became a major focus for the U.S. government at the first Pan-American Conference in Montevideo, Uruguay. As the U.S. delegation cleared the way through committees, U.S. manufacturers agreed to finance construction of an international broadcasting system to extend the range of American advertising and public diplomacy. A combination of Pan-American conferences, special consultation meetings with the foreign ministers, and inter-American radio broadcasts enabled President Roosevelt to get the 21 republics to adopt widespread policies that joined their common interests.¹¹

In developing these international bonds, Roosevelt recognized that the citizens of the United States needed a greater appreciation for the different cultures of the Americas. U.S. citizens needed to understand and value the historical experiences that molded the minds of other people in the Western Hemisphere. An informed American citizenry that understood different cultures and appreciated diversity became a national security priority for the President. Autry aided President Roosevelt in reaching this goal by demonstrating the

common traits of vaqueros, cowboys and gauchos, through popular country-western music and trendy musical-western films.¹²

U.S. companies used radio advertising to sell more products in Latin America and recover from the significant declines in U.S.-Latin American trade caused by the Great Depression. U.S. exporters depended upon Latin American print and broadcasting media to advertise and sell products. Conversely, the Latin American media industry depended upon U.S. advertising dollars to meet its bottom line. Newspapers routinely reported on the popularity of American motion pictures. Foreign news outlets stationed sixty correspondents in Hollywood to cover new releases for consumers abroad. Brazil and Argentina represented the strongest Latin American markets for U.S. goods. U.S. producers purchased 64 percent of the advertising space in prominent daily newspapers and weekly magazines to sell American imports. Likewise, U.S. advertisers bought an estimated one-third of Argentina's total commercial radio time. To stimulate advertising sales, promoters tried to lure Autry to tour Brazil and South America, offering the singing cowboy \$25,000 in advance and \$5,000 a week to make a personal appearance trip.¹³

In 1936, radio advertising became increasingly significant to Roosevelt's Good Neighbor strategy, when NBC launched a network of radio affiliates in South America at the Pan-American Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina. NBC put together an extensive broadcasting apparatus, involving local stations and the rebroadcast of shortwave signals from the U.S. New programs developed for

the South American market included *The Hemisphere Review* and *Good Neighbors*. Broadcast Abroad, a large advertising firm, secured advertising contracts with 47 radio stations in 16 Latin American countries. Broadcast Abroad specialized in foreign radio advertising for U.S. companies, including Parker Pen, Quaker Oats, Standard Oil, Ford Motor Company, Heinz Ketchup, Listerine, and Oxydol. Working out of New York, the headquarters for most radio advertisers and record transcription companies, the advertising agency took advantage of good transportation systems to distribute its cultural products to local agents. Broadcast Abroad sold U.S.-produced radio programs sponsored by U.S. manufactured goods to local radio stations throughout Latin America.¹⁴

German advances in Latin America convinced President Roosevelt to double down on efforts to create a network of government-owned shortwave radio broadcasting stations. Produced to influence public opinion and establish a spirit of hemispheric cooperation, the U.S. government created documentary programs like *The American Record*. Skeptics labeled Roosevelt's Good Neighbor strategy a smokescreen. Critics argued that domestic propaganda was the real purpose of government radio. Federal control of commercial broadcasting licenses through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) kept private sector station owners from confronting these new forms of government competition directly. Already, the FCC renewed commercial broadcasting licenses every six months. An indictment of "not operating in the public interest" might limit a broadcaster to a two-month probationary license.¹⁵

To mend fences with Mexico, the Roosevelt administration targeted Los Angeles, San Antonio, and other communities of the Southwestern Border States with soft-power, good-neighbor programming. About 57 percent of the ethnic Mexicans in the United States were U.S. citizens. Deportations and repatriations of Mexican nationals during the Hoover administration served to concentrate Mexican American populations in urban areas. Although Mexican Americans sought to maintain some elements of their cultural heritage, most were proud to be citizens of the United States. Anxious to succeed by U.S. standards, people of Mexican descent hoped that the wake of economic upward mobility brought forward during the New Deal would lead to upward social mobility and first-class U.S. citizenship.¹⁶

President Lázaro Cárdenas of Mexico advised Mexican nationals living in the U.S. to become citizens of their new homeland and to demonstrate loyalty to the United States. This announcement brought forth a rush to U.S. citizenship among Mexican nationals living in the Border States of the Southwest. Support from Cardenas sped the process of acculturation for Mexicans living in the U.S. Americanization campaigns encouraged Mexican immigrants to become more fluent in English. Radio advertisers persuaded Mexican Americans to buy more standardized products from national chain stores. Residents of the barrios tuned in to hear national broadcasts of programs like *The Jack Benny Show* and *Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour*; but mostly, they listened to daily or weekly Spanish language programming.¹⁷

Mexican radio broadcasters setting up powerful stations on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border posed problems for U.S. interests. These “border blasters” served all who cared to listen, without regard for race, ethnicity or nationality. Transmitter power ranged from 100,000 watts to 1,000,000 watts—enough signal strength to reach most of the United States and Canada under normal evening atmospheric conditions. Border radio stations operated on a model similar to Sears, wherein stations measured audience response through direct mail orders for products pitched by radio personalities. Republic Pictures dramatized the operations of these cross-border broadcasters in the Autry film, *Mexicali Rose* (1939).¹⁸

The willingness of NBC to combine patriotism with capitalism influenced other cultural and media industries in the United States. Hollywood got on board with the Roosevelt administration, producing films that supported stronger Anglo-American relations, anti-Nazi propaganda, and the Good Neighbor policy. As the calamity of the Great Depression subsided, the prospects of global war caused socioeconomic instability to linger. A movement toward universalism prevailed in American culture. Large sectors of the middle class remained sympathetic to working class values as the economy recovered in the U.S. Profitability in Hollywood meant producing pictures that reached both lower- and middle-culture consumers throughout the world. As studios developed new class-crossing synergy formulas for film productions, movie moguls equated universalism with Americanism in ways that synthesized

conservative and progressive ideas, while encouraging democratic and nationalistic tendencies.¹⁹

SINGING COWBOY — SECRET AGENT

Gene Autry responded to this unfolding situation by using his mastery of sound recording, radio broadcasting, motion pictures, and live performances to assist President Roosevelt and shape public opinion to favor U.S. policies. As a small entrepreneur selling cultural products in global markets, Autry knew something about the international economy and he favored intervention. Autry honed his message as an avid supporter of FDR's New Deal agenda from 1933 to 1942. As the president's agenda shifted toward foreign policy, Republic Pictures began producing "Gene Autry" pictures with Good Neighbor themes in 1936. The studio added war preparedness messages in 1939.²⁰

Knowing that the vast majority of Mexican American consumers enjoyed going to the movies every week, Republic attracted these moviegoers to musical-westerns with positive representations of American cowboys and Mexican vaqueros bound together through a common history of cattle ranching, a New World experience shared by many cultures throughout the Americas. The studio allotted one-fourth of the productions in the "Gene Autry" series to tie in with FDR's Good Neighbor policy. Added to the 50 percent of Autry pictures

reflecting New Deal themes, the Roosevelt administration benefitted from a super majority in Gene Autry productions.²¹

Mexican settings, characters, themes, music, and fiesta scenes provided opportunities for cross-cultural relations. Scenes featured vaqueros and cowboy working and singing together. Songs like “*Rancho Grande (Allá en el Rancho Grande)*” demonstrated hemispheric unity through harmony and melody. Convergence also came with the use of eponymous film and song titles. Popular songs like “*Mexicali Rose*” and “*South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)*,” created synergy through cross-promotions in multiple information mediums. The film, *Rancho Grande* (1940), signified modernity, gentrification, and market capitalism as progressive aspects of the Western Hemisphere Idea for many audiences, including Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the Border States.

Republic Pictures took advantage of the singing cowboy’s mindset and his growing international celebrity to expand its distribution network in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Republic’s westerns and serials played to packed houses filled with young moviegoers across the continents. Musical-westerns and western serials became popular in foreign markets, because the action and music easily surmounted language barriers. Instead of viewing weekly installments, film enthusiasts in Latin American preferred watching serials complete in one sitting.²²

Autry promoted Americanism, war preparedness, and friendly relations with Latin America at a time when most of his audience favored isolationism. Release of *Comin' Round the Mountain* (April 1936) marked the first film in the "Gene Autry" series to address isolationism. The staging and storyline of the film put forth an attractive portrayal of ethnic Mexicans in California. The film featured Autry as a mail contractor working for the U.S. government and providing assistance to the lovely Dolores Moreno (Ann Rutherford), the proprietor of Vista Grande Rancho. Reflecting a principal concern for many Depression-era moviegoers, Moreno faced the prospect of her property being sold at public auction to pay delinquent taxes. As the story opened, Dolores had sold her cattle to pay the tax bill and she awaited delivery of the proceeds from the sale via Pony Express. Tasked with delivering the funds to Vista Grande, Autry was en route when bandits shot his horse and stole the money needed to save the ranch.

The Vista Grande setting encompassed the spectacular scenery of the Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains, near Lone Pine, California. In scenes paralleling the contemporary dude ranch settings in other Autry pictures, Dolores Moreno hosted a Mexican fiesta at the ranch. Despite the historical 1860s setting, fans easily viewed the fiesta scene in a modern light, watching dancers in charrería outfits performing musical numbers with full orchestral backing. Fans saw Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette) perform a comedic, bullfighting novelty song with a chorus of cowboy singers, disguised wearing

pioneer women's dresses and "Madonna of the prairie" bonnets. The fiesta included a marksmanship contest and a horse race, typical of frontier fashion on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Autry taught a young Mexican boy named Pedro (no credit) how to play the guitar and sing the song, "Chiquita." The lesson became a prelude to a serenade when Delores Moreno appeared. Architecture, music, traditions, customs, and dress comprised the elements of the Mexican fiesta displayed positively for the American moviegoers in *Comin' Round the Mountain*.

In August 1936, Republic opened the second season of the "Gene Autry" series with the release of *Oh Susana!*, a film featuring a modern-day dude ranch setting. Similar to *Comin' Round the Mountain*, staging at the fictitious, Mineral Springs Ranch, included the spectacular eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains. Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the United States, provided the backdrop, while the hoodoos in the foothills created an otherworldly landscape for medium range action sequences. Combining New Deal themes with Good Neighbor flourishes, *Oh Susana!* entertained audiences with an extended set by the Light Crust Doughboys. Featuring a series of rousing Mexican-themed songs, the Doughboys performance took place on a decorated outdoor patio with Chinese lanterns and Mexican blankets signifying the atmosphere of a Mexican fiesta. The band wore charro outfits, suggesting an affinity with Mexican culture that extended to their performance as strolling troubadours. After performing the title song, "Oh, Susanna," the band followed with a jamming version of the

“Tiger Rag,” meant as a showoff piece. Oddly, Autry became a sideshow during this energetic performance, doing rope tricks a la Will Rogers, while the Light Crust Doughboys jammed. Another number, “Ride on, Vaquero,” emphasized a spirit of unity and harmony among the vaqueros and cowboys of the Southwest.²³

These displays of Mexican culture in 1936 represented a defensive reaction against growing German cultural and economic influence in Central and South America. Much of the German activity remained low-key until March 1937, when the Nazi-dominated German communities of Latin America felt secure and strong enough to celebrate a “Day of the German People,” with pro-Nazi demonstrations and displays of swastikas. News sources reported from German community schools about rapid and open “Nazification” campaigns going on throughout the hemisphere. Similar to U.S. methods, Hitler used shortwave radio broadcasts, educational exchanges, speakers’ bureaus, movies, the subsidized publication of books, newspapers and magazines, and bloc advertising in local newspapers to sway public opinion in favor of Germany. Extensive public relations campaigns funneled Axis funds into local Latin American economies. Economic aid helped develop closer ties between Latin Americans and Nazi Germany.²⁴

Another major challenge in March 1937 threatened U.S. economic interests in Bolivia. The Bolivian government leveled charges of tax fraud and other illegal actions on Standard Oil of New Jersey. The Bolivians annulled

Standard Oil's petroleum concessions and confiscated the company's property. In keeping with the Good Neighbor policy, the Roosevelt administration responded cautiously.²⁵

The Mexican government followed suit in 1938, challenging the rights of Standard Oil to exploit a portion of Mexico's oil reserves. When the oil company refused to accept the arbitration terms of the Mexican Labor Board, Mexico's President Lázaro Cárdenas expropriated Standard Oil properties worth an estimated \$500 million. These disruptions of trade relations and other problems enabled Germany to replace Great Britain as the second major supplier of goods to Latin America, trailing only the United States. Germany's economic penetration into the Western Hemisphere complicated the neutrality position of the United States as the possibility of war in Europe grew.²⁶

Roosevelt considered national security first as he developed a crisis-containment policy for dealing with Bolivia and Mexico. When the entire Senate Military Affairs Committee assembled for a White House briefing on January 31, 1939, Roosevelt argued that it was better for the United States to defend Europe and fight the Germans across the Atlantic, rather than waiting to develop a defense when Germany invaded the Western Hemisphere. The President explained that security factors forced the United States to compromise with Mexico. This was not so hard, because FDR saw Cárdenas as a kindred soul in his desire, at a time of crisis, to return Mexicans to the land and to improve the lives of people already living on the land. Among his conservative-isolationist critics,

Roosevelt planted the notion that dealing with recalcitrant Latin Americans required the U.S. to take on security commitments in Europe.²⁷

The need for Mexican cooperation with U.S. war preparedness efforts motivated the Roosevelt administration to seek an amicable settlement from a joint U.S.-Mexican arbitration committee to compensate Standard Oil. The president aided these negotiations by providing loans, economic aid, and planning assistance to Mexico. U.S. aid helped keep the Germans and other Europeans from investing in and having influence over the Mexican government. More importantly, by selecting projects for funding and technical assistance, the Roosevelt administration played an important role in shaping the nature and direction of economic development in Mexico.²⁸

Events in Bolivia and Mexico created an international backdrop for the production of *Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm*, released by Republic Pictures in May 1937. Autry portrayed a ranch owner living along the U.S.-Mexico border who had a problem with cattle rustlers. The rustlers drove Autry's stolen herd to a relay ranch owned by Joe Stafford (Monte Blue), the head of a local Cattlemen's Protective Association. Posing as a representative of law and order, Stafford was in cahoots with the rustlers and an outlaw enforcer named Apache Kid (Max Hoffman, Jr.). Symbolizing the corruption of U.S. business interests, Stafford took advantage of his powerful position to cover up double-dealing and illegal smuggling across the border. When Stafford's niece, Rosa (Armida Vendrell),

secretly witnessed her uncle cavorting with criminals, she made a beeline for town to alert the sheriff.²⁹

Well known in Los Angeles, Armida Vendrell was a native of Sonora, Mexico. She grew up in a theatrical family, working in a family-owned movie theater in Douglas, Arizona. After the Vendrills' moved to Los Angeles, Gus Edwards' discovered Armida performing in a vaudeville show with her sister Delores at the Hidalgo Theater on the main plaza. An experienced stage and screen actor, songwriter and dance instructor, Edwards took Armida to New York and booked her into several theaters. She gained experience performing daily vaudeville routines on Broadway, then returned to Los Angeles to make films like *Mexicana* for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (1929) and *Border Romance* (1929) for Tiffany Productions.³⁰

Armida's portrayal of Rosa in *Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm* conveyed a beautiful and talented Mexican American woman with strong moral judgment and good character. Her performance of the best-selling song, "Mexicali Rose," in a duet with Autry, personified the spirit of unity and harmony between Mexico and the United States that President Roosevelt hoped to achieve through the Good Neighbor policy. Autry's attraction to Armida and the suggestive kiss they presumably shared (behind a closed door) conveyed a sense of closeness and intimacy that appealed to young female fans. As Autry fans began to fixate on Armida, they learned something about Mexican culture and Mexican Americans living in the American Southwest. In addition, the singing cowboy

received a favorable viewing from the residents of border town barrios that turned out to see *Armida*.³¹

Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm reflected two concerns of FDR's Good Neighbor policy. The film introduced Mexican culture to a broad American audience unfamiliar with their neighbors south of the border. Simultaneously, the film positioned Autry to deliver a particular brand of western-style universalism and Americanism that appealed to ethnic Mexican audiences. Displaying the soft power approach sought by President Roosevelt, *Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm* left a favorable impression that attracted audiences in Mexico and the U.S.³²

The impression left by Autry emboldened the Mexican film director Fernando De Fuentes to borrow from Republic's musical-western form to create a new genre for the emerging Mexican film industry. De Fuentes staged his *comedia-ranchera* film in a contemporary rural setting on a cattle ranch in northern Mexico. The filmmaker combined comedic action with *ranchera* music, a genre of rural Mexican folk music, comparable to country-western cowboy music in the U.S. De Fuentes also copied Republic's method by creating an eponymous film title, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (*Over at the Big Ranch*, 1936). The movie title doubled as the title of a popular song performed in the film by Tito Guizar. As the foreman of Rancho Grande, Guizar portrayed José Francisco Ruelas, a singing vaquero hero. Comic relief came from Florentino (Carlos López) a drunken, live-in boyfriend of the wicked godmother in this Cinderella story.³³

Except for the border separating the Mexican North from the American Southwest, cattle ranchers in the region had a shared history that supported Bolton's theory and the Western Hemisphere Idea. One glaring difference in comparing films in the "Gene Autry" series with De Fuentes' film involved the reflections of modernity, gentrification, and market capitalism, portrayed as aspects of rural life in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Autry's films depicted the American Southwest as a place where elements of modern industrial culture influenced longstanding traditional folkways during the mid-1930s. Smoothing over the rough transitions, the soaring popularity of Autry's music conveyed a sense of romantic agrarianism that encouraged fans in the U.S. to think kindly about rural Mexican Americans who, supposedly, remained rooted in the land, uncorrupted by urban vice.

In comparison, the portrayal of rural Mexico by De Fuentes incorporated meager references to the Western Hemisphere Idea. The script called for the mention of an automobile a couple of times; yet, no mechanized vehicles ever appeared on-screen. Radios and telephones were also absent from homes and businesses in the contemporary Mexican setting. The only notable reference to market capitalism involved an antithesis of sorts—fleeting references to Communism and the Soviets. Moreover, the opening scene showed a vaquero herding cattle with a looped *reata* (rope) on foot, rather than astride a beautiful mount. De Fuentes showed more grit from daily life on the Mexican rancho, compared to Autry films, where the hero never smoked, and the MPPDA

censored scenes of public drunkenness and violence toward women and children. De Fuentes' *comedia-ranchera* appealed to adult audiences more, unlike the young women and adolescent boys that bought tickets to see Gene Autry.³⁴

Even so, Fernando De Fuentes exposed a large and underserved audience among Mexican moviegoers that embraced the *comedia-ranchera* form.

President Cárdenas responded by awarding De Fuentes the *Medalla al Mérito Cinematográfico* (Medal of Cinematic Merit). On the strength of popular support for *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, Cárdenas propped up a nascent film industry by creating the first film-workers union in Latin America. In 1938, the prestigious Venice Film Festival honored Gabriel Figueroa with an award for "Best Cinematography" in the filming of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*. De Fuentes' film received the first international award ever given to a motion picture from Mexico. As Cinexport began distribution of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* to Spanish-language movie theaters in the U.S., Republic infused the next film in its "Gene Autry" series with a more complete range of U.S. foreign policy associations.³⁵

Rapid developments in world affairs motivated Armand Schaffer and Nat Levine to produce a film with a truly hemispheric storyline and the added dimension of Anglo-American relations. *Boots and Saddles* (1937) included characters that symbolized an alliance between the United States, Great Britain, and Mexico for worldwide moviegoers throughout the Western Hemisphere and the British Empire. Autry portrayed a ranch foreman managing the work of

ethnic Mexicans on a southern California rancho owned by an absentee Englishman, the fictitious Earl of Grandby. When the Englishman died, the rancho passed to his son, Edward (Ra Hould), who journeyed to California with his trustee, Wyndham (John Ward), the solicitor of the estate. The English came intending to sell the California rancho to relieve its debts; but their minds changed after spending time with the vaqueros and cowboys inhabiting the wide-open spaces of the American Southwest.³⁶

Vaqueros and cowboys met the train carrying Edward and Wyndham as it arrived from the East and they escorted their English patron back to the rancho. As their buckboard rolled into the courtyard, the ethnic Mexican *rancheros* living and working on the estate erupted into a rousing version of “Salud Vaquero,” welcoming their patron to a fiesta in his honor. Young Edward stood in the buckboard and thanked the assembly of ethnic Mexican workers. Speaking Spanish, the youthful Englishman conveyed his gratitude and respect for traditional Mexican culture. The opening festivities climaxed with Autry singing the eponymous title song, “Take Me Back to My Boots and Saddles.” This folksy western tune sounded soothing and unthreatening in a gentle, reassuring way; yet, the subtlety did not overshadow the “Boots and Saddles” association with a standard bugle call used routinely by the U.S. Army to alert cavalrymen to equip themselves and their mounts for immediate action.³⁷

Later in the film, Cecilia Callejo performed a classic *ranchera* folksong, “Cielito Lindo,” while portraying a singer and dancer at the Spanish Café, a classy

nightclub where Autry entertained his female lead, Bernice Allen (Judith Allen). When combined with other messages conveying a spirit of cooperation built up through the popular press and international radio broadcasting, *Boots and Saddles* persuaded Autry fans to feel positively about a growing alliance between the United States, Great Britain, and Mexico.³⁸

With *Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm* and *Boots and Saddles* circulating in the theaters, word spread about Autry considering another South American concert tour. If Grace Dugan's response was typical, the prospect of singing south of the border did not make Autry's fans very happy. A teenager from La Crosse, Wisconsin, Gracie wrote a letter to Gene Autry dated December 31, 1937, wherein, she pleaded with the singing cowboy not to go:

But here's my theme song and lament now-----are you REALLY going to South America, as Parsons tells us????????? Why? And where? And when? And for how long? Shhh-h-h, PUL-LEEE-EASE don't go.....when are you going? Oh, don't stay down there long.....you don't want another depression in the U.S.A., do you? I know my disposition will hit an all-time low, with the Autry influence far, far away. I do-o-o s-o-o wish you'd stay hyar in the land of stars and strikes---pun intended – but if you must go and do so....WOW'em, huh? And cash in on all the publicity --- farewell parties, bon voyages, et cetera, confetti, and such forth....

P.S. If you can get your tonsils around a South American microphone, I'll be shortwaving from now till then!³⁹

Rather than following through with the invitation to tour South America, Autry used the offer to leverage more money from Herbert Yates. He threatened to stop making movies and leave the country if Republic did not raise

his salary and address concerns about block booking practices. Autry complained about the studio used his films to force film exhibitors to rent other pictures. "It is known that my pictures are being used as a blackjack to force exhibitors into buying other Republic products," he explained. In announcing the prospect of a South American concert tour, Autry claimed to have an offer for \$25,000 in advance and \$5,000 a week, more than \$393,000 in 2001 dollars, and \$78,000 per week. "He may accept, if Republic and he don't agree to agree," Edwin Shallert reported in the *Los Angeles Times*.⁴⁰

Film industry insiders watched Autry's dispute with Republic closely. The U.S. Department of Justice launched an investigation into Hollywood's block booking practices. Justice continued to investigate restraint-of-trade allegations until 1940, when the Department reduced to five the number of films that distributors could package in a block booking. In 1946, a federal consent decree outlawed the practice altogether. Caving to the pressure, Yates agreed to raise Autry's salary from \$2,000 per picture (\$31,464) to \$5,000 in May 1938, \$78,661 in 2011 dollars. By December, the singing cowboy received another bump, earning \$10,000 per picture, \$157,322 in 2011 dollars.⁴¹

Siding with the federal government in opposition to the studio's block booking practices and considering a South American concert tour, Autry showed his independence from Republic. The timing of these events, following the release of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* and *Boots and Saddles*, showed evidence of synchronous developments involving Autry's emerging celebrity status and the

Roosevelt administration's soft power approach to influencing public opinion in line with its Good Neighbor policy. As Autry aligned himself with the policies of FDR, his motion pictures demonstrated the changing state of world affairs to fans. Autry's films emphasized the role of the American cultural industries in facilitating a global information revolution. The performer understood the value of public opinion and the role of opinion-shapers in managing global change.

The Good Neighbor films in the "Gene Autry" series provided an introduction to Mexican culture for many moviegoers in the Midwest, South, and Southwest. As Autry openly embraced Mexican traditions and music on screen, he showed respect by singing traditional folksongs in Spanish. He influenced audiences to think positively about Mexicans Americans; especially, in the Border States of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Similarly, the inclusion of Mexican cultural elements—locations, architecture, traditions, actors and musicians—made Autry movies more appealing to the large Mexican audiences that enjoyed De Fuentes' *comedia-ranchera* films. American values, put forth through Republic's musical-western formula, combined with the inclusion of ethnic Mexicans in Republic productions, made Autry's brand of Americanization palatable for Mexican American moviegoers; while simultaneously, meeting the expectations of increasingly larger and more mainstream national and international audiences.⁴²

Most filmmakers thought message films were unprofitable, but Autry's success with Republic Pictures changed that opinion. The MPPDA reversed its

opposition to controversial subjects and announced plans for Hollywood studios to cooperate with the federal government by producing several “shorts” and some feature films dealing with various aspects of Americanism. Another stimulus for the MPPDA decision reflected the Nazi closure of central Europe to American films. The loss of European markets made distribution critical throughout Great Britain and Latin America. Hollywood responded by producing more pro-British—anti-Nazi films and more Good Neighbor creations.⁴³

Newsreel companies cooperated by producing weekly 10-minute news films to accompany virtually every motion picture shown. Newsreels exposed the public to world political leaders and enabled moviegoers to become eyewitnesses to great events. Films of FDR’s Presidential addresses, particularly his fireside chats, were as popular among film audiences as they were with radio listeners. Newsreel companies cultivated goodwill from FDR with full and sympathetic coverage. One of FDR’s detractors thought the President’s head had been turned by such sycophancy. *Baltimore Sun* pundit H.L. Mencken charged: “In the popularity of Roosevelt there has always been something false and meretricious; it is the popularity of a radio crooner or movie actor.”⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Warner Brothers, Paramount Pictures and Loew’s (the parent of MGM) volunteered to assist the White House directly. Warner Brothers eagerly tested the boundaries of tolerance through daring and explicit criticism of Nazi Germany in its films. Execution of the studio’s German sales representative keyed the aggressive attitude at Warner Brothers. A good

example of the studio's approach, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), was based on a well-publicized espionage trial in New York. Starring Edward G. Robinson, one of the highest ranking and most aggressive anti-fascists in Hollywood, Warner Brothers rushed the production to completion after wrestling with the MPPDA to get script approval. Released in May 1939, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* used documentary film techniques to depict a sense of realism in its portrayal of the German-American Bund as a grave threat to U.S. national security. The film ended with the prosecutor at the spy trial delivering a stern speech about the dangers of isolationism.⁴⁵

Contemporary with *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, Republic Pictures produced and distributed four films in 1939 that connected the "Gene Autry" series with U.S. foreign policy. The first of these films premiered two weeks after German troops occupied Czechoslovakia. Released on March 29, 1939, *Mexicali Rose* strengthened the associations between Republic's musical-western formula and De Fuentes' *comedia-ranchera* genre. The movie title came from Autry's golden recording of the duet he performed with Armida in *Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm*. Republic incorporated another song, "Rancho Grande (Allá en el Rancho Grande)," to drive home the association between the "Gene Autry" series and De Fuentes' work. Republic acknowledged the growth of a cross-cultural audience by including this song in the film.

Mexicali Rose opened with Autry and his sidekick, Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette), racing their horses down a desert road skirted with Joshua trees and

framed in the distance by snow-capped mountains. This Old West introduction faded out to the interior of a modern broadcasting booth at a “border blaster” radio station located, presumably, in Mexicali, across the border from Calexico, California, about 250 miles from Los Angeles. A Mexican radio announcer, fronting a Mexican band, nervously looked at his watch before saying into the microphone, “Buenos Tardes Amigos, once again the Alta Vista Oil Company brings you Gene Autry and his caballeros, broadcasting from across the border in Old Mexico.”⁴⁶

Autry arrived in the nick of time to do the show; but afterwards, he discovered that Alta Vista Oil may be involved in some shady dealings in Mexico that threatened a group of orphans being cared for by the lovely Anita Laredo (Luana Walters) at an old mission overseen by her uncle, Padre Dominic (William Farnsworth), located on an original Spanish land grant handed down within the family since the early nineteenth century. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself, broadcasting for a company like this, helping them sell their worthless stock,” Miss Laredo growled, “You and your pretty songs—baiting people for those grafting oil promoters.”

The oilman Carruthers (William Royle) countered by offering Autry a new contract to keep performing on the company-owned station. Carruthers and Autry argued about the rights of an entertainer to question a sponsor’s product line. The oilman chided the singing cowboy to mind his own business. Autry

responded by proclaiming: “A lot of people bought stock in this outfit on my account and I am going to see that they get a square deal!”⁴⁷

Gene and Frog headed for the oil well to check up on things with Carruthers’ henchmen trailing along intending to bushwhack the cowboy heroes. Riding through the Mohave Desert, the boys crossed paths with a Mexican outlaw gang. The bushwhackers shot at Valdez (Noah Beery), the leader of the gang, expecting the outlaw to blame Gene and Frog. Valdez and his men tried to capture the singing cowboys; but they escaped and headed for the Ochenta Mission. Meeting the orphans cared for by the mission, Autry explained to Miss Laredo and Padre Dominic his commitment to investigate the actions of the U.S. oil company.⁴⁸

Valdez turned out to be a music fan. His favorite record, surprise, surprise, the hit Autry song, “Mexicali Rose,” played on a modern portable phonograph. When a wood gatherer accidentally broke the noble bandit’s record player, Gene calmed things down by singing the song live, in person. Eventually the entire encampment joined in a symphony of hemispheric unity, a symbolic display of American harmony and the power of music to promote collective action. The harmonizing softened Valdez’s disposition, while making music together signaled friendship between the noble Mexican bandit and the gallant American cowboy.⁴⁹

The bond created between Valdez and Autry signified the goodwill and cultural bonds tying Mexico together with the United States. A shared meal and

another song sealed the deal. Autry serenaded Valdez with a tune called, “Robin Hood,” a song about another, much-heralded, noble bandit from English lore. This song introduced an affinity for Great Britain into the budding association between Autry and Valdez, personifying the United States and Mexico. In this regard, *Mexicali Rose* synergized two principal facets of U.S. foreign policy—Anglo-American relations and the Good Neighbor policy.⁵⁰

An elaborate fiesta scene featured youthful dancers showcasing a traditional Mexican folk dance, “Chiapanecas,” with the accompaniment of a Mexican dance band. Autry sang the popular song, “You’re the Only Star in My Blue Heaven,” followed by Frog Millhouse singing a comedic, bilingual song, “My Orchestra’s Driving Me Crazy,” with verses in Spanish and English and the accompaniment of a youthful orphan ensemble. As the partygoers danced, Valdez and his gang strong armed the wealthy men in the crowd, a la Robin Hood, to raise money to support the poor orphans.⁵¹

When Autry and Valdez hatched a plan to foil the corrupt U.S. oilmen they signified their allegiance by riding together and singing a song from the saddle, “Rancho Grande” (Allá en el Rancho Grande).” Symbolizing hemispheric unity and harmony through music, the vaqueros and cowboys sang verses from the original Mexican song in Spanish. Then Autry sang new verses of the same song in English. The combination of these Mexican and American verses sung together emphasized for mainstream American audiences the common cattle-ranching heritage of vaqueros and cowboys along the U.S.-Mexico border. The

tight bond between the vaqueros and cowboys shown in this scene personified the friendly relations between the United States and Mexico; thereby, furthering the aims of FDR's Good Neighbor policy. The common heritage of vaqueros and cowboys working on the ranches and ranchos of the Border States symbolized the Western Hemisphere Idea as clearly and concisely as any comparable image. Autry and Valdez symbolized the American states of the Western Hemisphere and the bond made by the people of the Americas to support liberal democracy and individual freedom. Together these values represented the social ideals that all the American states agreed to protect. *Mexicali Rose* suggested that U.S. business interests, in particular, big oil companies like Standard Oil, represented the gravest threat to democracy and freedom in the Western Hemisphere.⁵²

The climactic scene featured a firefight between the oilmen, holed up in a cabin, surrounded by Autry and Valdez and their men, and a company of Mexican *federales*. Valdez was mortally wounded attempting to throw a teargas bomb into the shack. Autry showed off a big-league arm by picking up the bomb and throwing it himself. He literally smoked out the bad guys, before turning his attention to the aid and comfort of his good neighbor, Valdez. As the noble bandit lay dying in the cowboy-hero's arms, Valdez asked to be remembered like Robin Hood. In the closing scene, as the assembled Mexican citizenry watched Autry deliver on his promise of oil drilling profits, Padre Dominic expressed his eternal gratitude to Valdez. Autry, in turn, referred to his Mexican *compadre* as a true friend.⁵³

Mexicali Rose showed sympathy for the positions of the Latin American governments, anxious to curtail, or at least slow down, the assault of Yankee firms on their natural resources. The film suggested the appropriateness of Roosevelt's decision to side with Mexican President Cárdenas in support of his claims against Standard Oil. In addition, the picture demonstrated Latin American citizens receiving a larger share of the profits derived from U.S. corporations.⁵⁴

Two months later, Republic released a different type of Good Neighbor picture, *Blue Montana Skies*, on May 4, 1939. A now familiar border-smuggling story, this film changed locations from the U.S.-Mexico border to the U.S.-Canada border. The film opened with a close up of a sign reading, "Assiniboia Trading Company." The camera pulled back to reveal a wintry scene with sled dogs barking and men sorting silver fox pelts. The story involved a man named Hendricks, part-owner of the "HH Guest Ranch," a dude ranch operating along the Canadian border in northern Montana. Driving cattle across the border to sell in Canada, Hendricks used the HH chuck wagon to smuggle silver fox pelts into the U.S. Snow sleds and barking dogs, U.S. and Canadian customs agents, and Canadian Mounties signified the northern border for moviegoers.⁵⁵

Often overlooked as an aspect of the Good Neighbor policy, *Blue Montana Skies* reflected the U.S. desire to build stronger and friendlier relations with neighbors to the north. The film featured Autry driving a dog sled in pursuit of the crooked ranchers turned smugglers and murderers. The singing cowboy

hero gave aid to Canadian Mounties by causing an avalanche that pinned the bad guys in their car with the contraband. In the closing scene, Autry rode with Dorothy (June Storey) singing a reprise of “I Just Want You.” As they arrived atop a sublime Rocky Mountain vista, Gene proclaimed to Frog that he liked Montana fine and that he decided to stay on with Dorothy at the HH Guest Ranch for the foreseeable future. Such a nod toward domesticity conveyed a sense of peace and serenity in U.S.-Canadian relations, unlike the chaotic situation in *Mexicali Rose*.⁵⁶

In Old Monterey (1939), Republic’s third Good Neighbor message film of the season, focused on war preparedness and the likelihood of bombings along the border between the United States and Mexico. This was the first big-budget, “Super Western” in the “Gene Autry” series. Released in first-run theaters in major metropolitan areas on August 14—less than three weeks before the Nazi invasion of Poland and the start of World War II—critics marked this outing as Autry’s bid for major representation. The marketing campaign for *In Old Monterey* encompassed a personal appearance tour in and around New York City and an overseas tour of the British Isles and the Irish Free State. Autry spent \$18,000 for a 35-foot horse trailer to take his two saddle horses on the overseas tour. British hosts outfitted Champion with a \$300 gas mask, making Gene’s mount the most stylish and best-prepared horse in Hollywood. Borrowing language from federal propaganda, Jimmie Fidler commented upon the singing cowboy’s bon voyage in his Hollywood entertainment column. “Bet Gene Autry

singing 'Home on the Range' will be the best Good Will Ambassador we ever sent to England," Fidler wrote.⁵⁷

On the way to London, Autry's Republic Pictures entourage made a stopover in New York on July 21, 1939. Before sailing on the ocean liner *Manhattan*, the singing cowboy appeared on "Gene Autry Day!" at the New York World's Fair. Monday, July 22, fans got to meet their cowboy hero in person at a reception in the Administration Building. Afterwards, fan club members escorted their western singing sensation to the World's Fair Wild West Show and Rodeo for a special ceremony. Ruth Mix, the daughter of Tom Mix, crowned Gene Autry—"King of the Cowboys." That evening, Autry appeared as guest of honor at a dinner in the Ford Building in the Little Old New York section of the Amusement Area. The next day, he made a fast tour of eight Loew's theaters throughout New York City, including the Valencia Theater in Jamaica, the Pitkin in Brownsville, Boro Park Theater in Brooklyn, the Commodore on the East Side, and the Yonkers, Boulevard, Paradise, and Orpheum theaters.⁵⁸

Newspapers billed Autry as an "Ambassador of Good Will" when he landed in London in August 1939. Upon arrival, the cowboy hero was taken by surprise to learn of a ban on firearms. He sent out 100 "Gene Autry" cap pistols as an invitation to tea, but when his guests arrived, a Scotland Yard man confiscated the toy guns at the door. Handguns were reserved for soldiers in England. They served tea in a hall decorated to look like an old-fashioned

American saloon. It took an American cowboy to break down the English barriers. The locals seemed to love the western singer.⁵⁹

This six-week personal appearance tour of Britain and Ireland confirmed Autry's international standing. All the daily newspapers reported the cowboy hero's lunch with Champion at the luxurious Savoy Hotel in London. Newspapers also noted that Autry sold more than 172 million movie tickets in Britain alone. This extraordinary statistic gained credence from the tumultuous receptions the singing cowboy received from fans in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds, and Newcastle. In Glasgow, 50,000 fans turned out to greet Autry, "an all-time record for public demonstrations of popularity."⁶⁰

Even so, Autry's reception in Dublin eclipsed the Scottish outing. Police estimated that 500,000 to 750,000 people joined in the parade through the city streets. Adoring fans, attended his shows at Dublin's Theater Royal, and jammed the alley behind the theater after each performance. Fans chanted, "We want Gene!" until their cowboy hero appeared on the fire escape. Remembering how the fans packed the alley his last night at the theater, Autry said: "I never heard anything like it. They sang 'Come Back to Erin,' and weaved back and forth, and it was a very heart-touching scene."⁶¹

Themes tied to Mexican oil concessions and curbing the rise of foreign powers in Latin America took center stage in the film, *South of the Border*. Released by Republic on December 15, 1939, less than two weeks after the Soviets invaded Finland, and two days before the German battleship, *Graf Spee*,

scuttled off the coast of Montevideo, *South of the Border* represented another milestone in Autry's career. Written around the lyrics of the hit song, this film exemplified the ways the singing cowboy integrated motion pictures, radio broadcasting, and sound recording mediums with advertising tie-ups and personal appearance tours to create synergy. Autry's eponymous recording of "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)" provided another gold record, topping *The Billboard* popular music chart at No. 12 on November 25, 1939. Additional songs reflecting Mexican culture and Good Neighbor themes in the film included, "Come to the Fiesta," "Moon of Mañana," and a novelty song, "Fat Cabellero."⁶²

Autry teamed up with co-star Mary Lee to create a second gold record emerging from *South of the Border*. In July 1940, "Goodbye Little Darlin', Goodbye" reached the No. 20 spot on *The Billboard* popular music chart. In addition, Mary Lee provided the vocals for a song called "Merry-Go-Roundup" that reminded fans of the New Deal goals and objectives in other Autry pictures. In co-writing the screenplay, Betty Burbridge put Mary Lee front and center to mirror the thoughts and opinions of Autry's principal fan base. The young actress reinforced the influence of young women in the creation of a New West.⁶³

As with *In Old Monterey*, Republic opened *South of the Border* in first-run movie houses, demonstrating the broadening appeal the singing cowboy generated with mainstream, middle-class audiences. The film opened with Gene

Autry and Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette) riding with their cowboy crew, singing, "Come to the Fiesta," in an exotic Mohave Desert setting. With references to señoritas and dancing to the bamba beats of tangos, rumbas, and fandangos, the film footage with the song depicted "Old Mexico" as an active, attractive culture. Gene and Frog went to the fiesta to meet the U.S. Consul. Upon arrival, a gypsy fortune-teller accosted the singing cowboy and begged to tell his fortune. "I see you do secret work for you country," the gypsy explained, while gazing into her crystal ball. The fortune teller identified Autry as a federal agent and foreshadowed a big job in the near future. Audiences saw their singing cowboy-secret agent riding Champion through a Joshua Tree forest. Inside the crystal ball, fans saw Gene singing, "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)."⁶⁴

Outside the gypsy's tent, Gene and Frog ran into Patsy (Mary Lee) being chased by the Mexican police. The officers attempted to deport Patsy to an orphanage in the United States, after the death of her father. In the midst of this chaos, Gene spotted the señorita foretold by the gypsy. He borrowed a guitar and serenaded the lovely Delores (Lupita Tovar) with the song, "Moon over Mañana"; after which, Patsy decided to make Gene her new daddy. When the cowboy refused, Patsy stole the horse-drawn carriage with Delores and her Aunt seated inside and took off across the desert. Gene and Champion raced after them, catching up to the carriage and calming the horses until the police arrived. Gene shared an off-screen kiss with Delores, which made him love-struck.

Delores dropped her locket bearing the family crest to create an opportunity for Gene to come calling.⁶⁵

A continuing association of Old Mexico with romance and adventure carried over into the next scene, featuring Gene and Frog going to the hacienda of Don Diego Mendoza (Frank Relcher) to serenade Delores and return her locket. Climbing a rough-hewn ladder to the balcony outside her window, Gene sang a reprise of “Moon over Mañana” to get Delores’ attention. The arrival of a nightrider hastened Gene and Frog to leave. The rider delivered a note to Aunt Duena (Claire Du Brey) from her husband, Don Diego. “With this revolution threatening, no one is safe in Mexico,” the rider explained. Audiences learned that Dolores’s brother, Andreo Mendoza (Duncan Renaldo), was a leader of the revolutionaries. Gene and Frog learned that Don Diego owned a big cattle ranch in Palermo that the revolutionaries had threatened. Mendoza had sent his family to northern Mexico for safety. Expressing the viewpoint of U.S. isolationists, Frog responded to this news by urging neutrality, “Look Gene, we’ve got troubles too, let’s don’t get mixed up in this....”⁶⁶

Another telling scene opened with a bilingual sign on a door signifying a United States Consul office in Mexico. Autry, the singing cowboy—secret agent, stood inside the office surveying newspaper headlines proclaiming, “Pan-American Neutrality Menaced” and “Submarines Sighted off American Coast.” The Consul explained, “We’re taking immediate action and the Mexican government is offering its full cooperation. We know that foreign agents are

trying to start a revolution in Palermo to gain control of the American oil concessions....” As the diplomat showed the cowboy a map of the fictitious Palermo, an island country off the Mexican Coast, he described it as one of the most important oil-producing areas in Latin America. Viewing the map, Gene noted that Palermo’s harbor provided an ideal location for a submarine refueling base.⁶⁷

“We’re certain that foreign powers have the same idea and it’s up to us to put a stop to it,” the Consul responded. He handed Autry an envelope with instruction inside, saying, “Your boat leaves within the hour.” Gene expressed concern, because he wanted to say goodbye to Delores, but the Consul stopped him, saying, “You’re not telling anybody anything. This is government business.” Arriving in Palermo, the cowboy set out to learn the identity of foreign agents attempting to overthrow the existing government.⁶⁸

Gene and Frog and their cowboy crew met Don Diego Mendoza upon their arrival in Palermo via steamship. As they rode with Mendoza in his carriage, through a countryside littered with oil derricks, en route to the cattleman’s rancho, Mendoza put forth a viewpoint outlining the aftermath of President Cárdenas’ nationalization of the Mexican oil industry:

We have been friendly with your country. Our people were well-paid for their work and they were prosperous and happy; all at once, the change... They listen to propaganda, which teaches them unrest and rebellion. And now, the oil well lay idle and there is misery and want. My own nephew listened to these lies. Now he believes himself a patriot, a liberator of our country, riding with his band of Americano renegades. Can you blame me if I am bitter?⁶⁹

A few scenes later, Andreo Mendoza expressed the viewpoint of leftist rebels who agreed to work with foreign powers (i.e., Germans), because any other nation was better than working with the U.S. Suspecting Saunders (Alan Edwards), the foreign agent, of a potential double-cross, Andreo explained:

It is you who must worry *amigo mio*, you need the submarine base. Your country, she need the oil. You get these things when I take over the government. But the revolution, she costs plenty of money. My army cannot eat promises. Yesterday, you are my good friend. Today, you are just my friend. Tomorrow....⁷⁰

Mendoza punctuated this last statement by blowing smoke into the face of Saunders, illustrating the presumably tenuous position of foreign powers in Mexico and the cautiously optimistic outlook in the U.S. that the revolutionaries might be bought off.

When the vaqueros at Don Diego's rancho learned that the rebels planned to attack Mendoza's herd, they decided to pack up and leave to avoid a fight. Autry and his cowboy band convinced the vaqueros to stay by singing, "When the Cactus Blooms Again," a traditional western folksong. As the song unfolded, Autry got the cowboys and vaqueros to sing together in harmony,

another expression of unity through music, and a hallmark of the “Gene Autry” series. Working together, the vaqueros and cowboy drove the herd to the beach where they loaded the livestock into a cattle boat by swimming the herd out to sea and then hoisting the beeves with a crane, a tactic perfected in the Hawaiian cattle trade.⁷¹

Music also played a role in the singing cowboy’s discovery of high-frequency static interfering with a radio broadcast of Autry singing, “South of the Border (Down Mexico Way).” Static interfering with the song turned out to be a coded message sent from a clandestine radio station in the abandoned oil fields to the submarines of foreign powers perched offshore from the island. After many attempts, Autry cracked the ciphered code to reveal a secret message: “Notify submarines...attempt to obtain oil tonight...signal.”⁷²

Autry tracked the rebels to La Casa Cantina, where Andreo Mendoza conspired with the foreign agent, Saunders, in the cellar of the saloon. Mendoza and Saunders got the drop on Autry when the cowboy snuck up on the clandestine meeting. Saunders wanted to do away with Autry and Mendoza agreed, until he discovered the locket given to Gene by his sister. Questioning the cowboy hero about the locket, Andreo learned how Gene knew Delores. Autry used the opening to plead with the rebel leader:

Do you realize what a revolution would do to this country?
...It will give Saunders and the foreign powers a stranglehold on this entire coast. With their submarines operating in these waters unchallenged it means the end of Pan-American neutrality. Neither your country nor mine can allow this to happen. And they won't let it happen.⁷³

The film reached its climax when Gene and Frog commandeered two oil trucks headed to the beach to refuel the offshore submarine. Andreo Mendoza was killed during the firefight that erupted during the showdown. Newspaper headlines brought the action to its conclusion, by heralding, "Submarine Base Smashed! Austry Finishes Job and Leaves Palermo Today, Attempt to Establish Submarine Refueling Station Base is Failure." Passing through northern Mexico on the way back to the United States, Gene returned to the Mendoza safe house. He learned that Delores joined a convent to mourn the death of her brother and atone for the disgrace of his rebellion.⁷⁴

This signifier of a U.S.-Mexico alliance took some of the sting out of President Cárdenas decision to nationalize Mexican oil fields in 1938 and his decision to sell oil to the Axis powers. The message contained in *South of the Border* put the incoming Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho on alert that the U.S. would not tolerate German submarine bases in Mexico. Furthermore, the verses from "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)" included the refrain, "That's where I fell in love, where the stars at night come out to play," suggested that Americans discomfited by their culture's traditional capitalist credo might turn Mexico into a downscale version of the Left Bank in Paris, where the "Lost

Generation” found a home after World War I. More importantly, FDR showed his support for President Camacho by sending Vice President Henry Wallace to represent the United States at his inauguration, the first official vice-presidential trip to any Latin American nation. Wallace’s participation conveyed enormous symbolic meaning.⁷⁵

By elevating the production values for *South of the Border*, Republic packaged this “special” to play both first-run movie houses and the independent theaters. In its allegorical story form, *South of the Border* proved to be politically expedient in allowing for the introduction of controversial issues without explicit engagement. The deepening of Autry’s appeal to the independent sector and its audiences helped the studio consolidate its understanding of the musical-western genre. Exploiting the genre as an American art form with the casting and production values of a prestige western, Autry appealed across class, gender, generational, and political divisions.⁷⁶

Autry headed the list of moneymaking western stars for a third straight year in December 1939, followed by Bill “Hopalong Cassidy” Boyd, Roy Rogers, George O’Brien, Charles Starrett, The Three Mesquiteers, Tex Ritter, Buck Jones, John Wayne, and Bob Baker rounding out the top ten. Hopalong Cassidy topped the list among the theatrical circuits, while Autry placed first among the independent theater exhibitors. George O’Brien came in second in the circuits with Autry third. The combined voting gave Autry first place overall.⁷⁷

In February 1940, *South of the Border* became the first Autry film with a Hollywood premiere. All of the singing cowboy's previous pictures premiered in rural and small town theaters in the San Fernando Valley and the other hinterlands of Los Angeles. Grace Kingsley recounted that, "The somewhat neglected wild 'westerns' had their innings last night at the Cinema Theater when one of them went swank and had a real premiere, with floodlights, stars in person, ushers in 10-gallon hats and all the rest of it." Autry was the star of stars at the event, taking bows with Smiley Burnette, Lupita Tovar, June Storey, Mary Lee, Duncan Renaldo, and William Farnum. Visiting luminaries called to the stage included Noah Beery, Ray Hatton, and Betty Bradshaw. Roy Rogers, Dick Foran, and Tex Ritter also attended. Burnette proved the cutup of the gang when it came to the speeches.⁷⁸

The song, "Rancho Grande (Allá en el Rancho Grande)," provided the inspiration for the next film in the "Gene Autry" series to present Mexican culture and themes. Republic used the song to create an eponymous film title for *Rancho Grande*, released on March 22, 1940. Another "Special," receiving distribution through first-run movie theaters, *Rancho Grande* incorporated an almost perfect combination of modernity, gentrification, and market capitalism at work in the Western Hemisphere Idea. The film depicted three young Americans, Patsy (Mary Lee), Kay (June Storey) and Tom Dodge (Dick Hogan), as the inheritors of their grandfather's southern California rancho. *Rancho Grande* emphasized modernity in one scene where Kay and Tom Dodge flew their own

airplane to the California estate. In another scene, Grandfather Dodge communicated the terms of his will via a transcription record; his voice from the grave. Grandpa Dodge left Rancho Grande to his grandchildren with a mortgage held by the Citrus Valley Association. The indebtedness paid for the construction of a dam and irrigation system to open up the southern part of the estate to citrus orchards. In addition, the laborers at Rancho Grande inhabited a Mexican *colonia* that existed in association with the rancho for generations.⁷⁹

To help extend the run of the film, Autry performed the song “Rancho Grande” on his *Melody Ranch* radio program in May 1940, along with a radio version of the drama that tied in with movie theater promotions. June Storey, Autry’s co-star in *Rancho Grande*, appeared as Kay Dodge in the radio drama. The story involved the rescue of Jose, a Mexican laborer trapped under a section of irrigation pipe and threatened by an avalanche. Both the film and radio drama sought to promote Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor policy as Wrigley’s Doublemint gum pitch made clear:

Spread a Little Goodwill...Say to Your Neighbor, ‘Have a Stick of Doublemint.’ You know friends; we Americans like to think of ourselves as friendly folks and it’s a real friendly gesture to say to your neighbor, ‘Have a stick of Doublemint.’ Just try this easy inexpensive way to sort of spread a little goodwill....”⁸⁰

As *Rancho Grande* appeared in movie theaters, hope of containing the war to Europe faded fast. The Nazis invaded Denmark and Norway in April 1940 and, more spectacularly, Holland, Belgium and France in May. The defeat of

France in June 1940 changed the focus of the U.S. policy in Latin America. With Germany in control of Western Europe and little chance of Britain surviving, the prior goal of insuring hemispheric neutrality transformed into active organizing against a Nazi threat in the Western Hemisphere. Ominous reports of Nazi subversion in Latin America convinced Roosevelt that the Germans would attempt to overthrow existing Latin American governments. The President expressed concern about German control of Dutch and French possessions in the Caribbean. Moreover, FDR viewed German acquisition of the French fleet and West African naval bases as a prelude to an attack on Brazil and the rest of South America. He ordered the initiation of secret talks between the U.S. and Latin American military officials and planned a show of force by the U.S. Navy off the coasts of Brazil and Uruguay.⁸¹

These U.S. concerns regarding Pan-American neutrality influenced the titling of Autry's *Gacho Serenade*, released by Republic Pictures on May 10, 1940. Use of the term *gaucho* extended Bolton's theory of a shared common heritage from American cowboys and Mexican vaqueros to the South American pampas and Patagonian grasslands of Argentina, Uruguay, southern Chile, and the Rio Grande do Sul province of Brazil. The association with South American gauchos remained tenuous in the film, present mainly in the naming of an otherwise Mexican cantina, and in the eponymous title song; but, this film got Americans thinking in hemispheric terms. The film opened with a group of independent ranchers, vaqueros and cowboys, disputing the operations of the

Western Packing Company, a big firm taking advantage of rural westerners. One of the Mexican rancheros served as the spokesman for the group of cattlemen speaking Spanish and English interchangeably, the leader expressed unity and the will to fight the big packing company through the courts.⁸²

Republic promoted *Gacho Serenade* on Gene Autry's *Melody Ranch* through advertisements, and Autry singing, "Gacho Serenade," almost every week throughout June and July 1940. In competition with the "Road to..." pictures produced by Paramount, starring Bing Crosby and Bob Hope, *Gacho Serenade* promoted western tourism by featuring a cross-country U.S. road trip with Gene Autry and Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette) transporting Ronnie Willoughby (Clifford Sevren, Jr.), Joyce (June Storey) and Patsy (Mary Lee) across the country on the "Mother Road," U.S. Route 66. Midway through the film, a flat tire halted their journey, creating an opportunity for Autry to earn \$25 in a singing contest at the Cantina El Gaucho, presumably, somewhere in northern New Mexico. Carlos (Duncan Renaldo), the proprietor of the cantina, hosted the music contest. Autry scored big with a version of the title song, "Gacho Serenade," which endeared him to the restaurateur. Autry's competition in the contest included the Mexican specialty dancers, Mary and Fred Velasco. Jose Eslava's Orchestra (Jose Estava) performed as El Gaucho's house band.⁸³

A second appearance at the New York World's Fair corresponded with the release of *Gacho Serenade*. The official greeter of the exposition, "Elmer—The Typical American" (Leslie Ostrander), met the singing cowboy when he

arrived on horseback. Autry attended a luncheon of officials from Ridgeway, Long Island, Herbert Yates' stomping ground, at the Schaefer Center. Later in the afternoon, Gene made a speech and sang a few songs with a hillbilly band accompaniment. Then, he led a mounted parade through the Great White Way.⁸⁴

As a follow up his second appearance at the New York World's Fair, Autry headlined the first Southern California Musical Fiesta at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on June 1, 1940. Autry charged into the Coliseum in typical western array on his prancing sorrel, Champion. He rode straight for the mammoth hacienda stage, where he dismounted and then sang to his own guitar accompaniment the hit song that made him an international celebrity. "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)" provided the highlight of the music program. A cast of 6,000 participated in the spectacular event, sponsored by the *Los Angeles Times* for the benefit of the Parent-Teacher Association Milk Fund. Autry also performed with Shirley Temple as a headliner for a nationwide Red Cross broadcast from the "Avenue of Mercy" on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. In July, he appeared as the honored guest at the Minneapolis Aquatennial.⁸⁵

As the New Deal Cowboy made personal appearances throughout the summer of 1940, the Roosevelt administration dealt with fears of economic destabilization in Latin America and concerns about the possible existence of a "Fifth Column" in the hemisphere. Capable of exploiting economic troubles, Nazi propaganda in Latin America became more explicitly anti-U.S., after the fall of

France in June 1940. U.S. government officials became quite anxious about the growing Nazi presence. Along with shortwave propaganda and economic activity, many reports about Nazi threats focused on the extent to which the Germans controlled Latin American media culture and influence on public opinion against the United States. Throughout 1940, *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* radio program routinely featured Good Neighbor songs like "Gaucho Serenade," "It Happened in Monterey," "Trail to Mexico," "Rancho Grande," "Goodbye to Old Mexico," and "Mexicali Rose."⁸⁶

Responding to these developments, President Roosevelt created the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA), a government agency set up to assume the largest role in shaping government policy, action, and involvement in cultural and information activities in Latin America. Roosevelt appointed the 32-year-old Nelson Rockefeller, grandson of John D. Rockefeller—founder of the worldwide Standard Oil Empire—to head the CIAA and its subsequent activities. Traveling extensively throughout Latin America while working for Standard Oil, Rockefeller identified cultural misunderstandings as the root of major problems between the U.S. and Latin America. His appointment as CIAA in 1940 demonstrated a new policy of bipartisanship pursued by FDR as he sought to retain in the Democrats camp the moderate Republicans that supported him during his first two presidential bids. Despite his standing as a Republican, Nelson Rockefeller contributed \$25,000 to the Democratic Party.⁸⁷

The new Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs organized his office to address cultural concerns by creating major sections to deal with “Cultural Relations,” “Communications,” “Commercial Development,” “Trade,” and “Financing.” James Young, former chief of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, headed up the Communications section, with “Radio,” “Movies,” and “Press” divisions organized therein. Karle Bickel headed up the Press Division, John Jay Whitney managed the Motion Picture Division, and Don Francisco ran the Radio Division.⁸⁸

Like Roosevelt, Nelson Rockefeller thought that cultural exchange programs and grants to support various Latin American cultural figures might result in goodwill toward the United States. The degree to which these cultural investments strengthened hemispheric security had limits; yet, Rockefeller, whom the president eventually named Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, used cultural relations as a means to open the doors for dramatic expansion of economic relations between Latin America and the United States during the war and thereafter. Rockefeller incited the lasting enmity of Pan-American leftists who dismissed the CIAA as a light-weight economic imperialist. Likewise, he aroused the fears of others within Roosevelt’s administration who fretted about the CIAA creating an impression that better cultural relations were merely a means to the end of expanding U.S. economic interests. Be that as it may, culture, security, and economics became bound together inseparably in the rapidly evolving Good Neighbor policy in 1940.⁸⁹

In his approach to Latin America, Rockefeller promoted the notion that culture could serve as an invaluable public relations tool to encourage broad acceptance by Latin Americans of a North American economic presence. The CIAA packaged cultural, economic and security considerations together by encouraging Latin American tours by Hollywood stars and starlets. Simultaneously, CIAA funds supported art exhibitions and tours by symphony orchestras and jazz and swing bands. Rockefeller also financed the establishment of bi-national centers in Latin American cities where local citizens studied English and learned about American institutions. These centers routinely featured American musical and theatrical presentations. Unquestionably, these and other programs heightened mutual understanding between U.S. and Latin American cultural leaders and commoners.⁹⁰

President Roosevelt shared his perspectives with the American public in a Fireside Chat, broadcast in December 1940. "There are those who say that the Axis powers would never have any desire to attack the Western Hemisphere. That is the same dangerous form of wishful thinking which has destroyed the powers of resistance of so many conquered peoples." The vast resources of Latin America, Roosevelt assured his listeners, constituted "the most tempting loot in all of the round world."⁹¹

Autry graduated from being number one among Western stars to joining the select list of the top ten box-office earners in all of Hollywood as these events unfolded. In December 1940, Autry's inclusion on Hollywood's top-ten

list surprised many industry insiders. This was the first time since 1934, when Will Rogers made the list that a cowboy star had earned such distinction. Autry finished fourth in the polling, behind Mickey Rooney, Spencer Tracy, and Clark Gable; in front of Tyrone Power, James Cagney, Bing Crosby, Wallace Beery, Bette Davis, and Judy Garland. The annual poll conducted by the *Motion Picture Herald* represented the most comprehensive market research in the industry. Autry and Garland were newcomers to the list. Simultaneously, the singing cowboy also headed for the fourth consecutive year the list of the leading western film personalities. Other stars on the top-ten western star list included William Boyd, Roy Rogers, George O'Brien, Charles Starrett, Johnny Mack Brown, Tex Ritter, The Three Mesquiteers, Smiley Burnette, and Wild Bill Elliott.⁹²

In 1941, Autry received unprecedented national and international recognition from major metropolitan newspapers and fan magazines that previously ignored the entire "B" western film genre. *Motion Picture*, *Picture Play*, and *Screenland* struggled to explain Autry's appeal. The magazines recycled claims made in Republic Pictures ballyhoo that the singing cowboy averaged 12,000 pieces of fan mail per week, receiving a record of 50,103 letters in one month. These numbers eclipsed the mail received by other Hollywood stars. Fanzine writers emphasized Autry's "outsider" status. Gene lived in Hollywood; yet, he somehow remained separated from the social whirls and shenanigans of "Tinsel Town." Photo spreads took readers into the Autry household, where the homey emphasis reinforced the representation of the

popular celebrity as a domesticated cowboy—the home was both ranch house and idyllic suburban domicile. Gene’s eight-year marriage to Ina Mae, a young woman from a small Oklahoma town, exemplified the rising star’s virtuous down-home lifestyle, a further contrast to the love lives of Hollywood’s more celebrated citizens. These publications used words like *simplicity*, *sincerity* and *warmth* most commonly to explain Autry’s appeal, unlike the adjectives used to describe other Hollywood stars.⁹³

Republic continued to blend Good Neighbor elements in *The Singing Hill* (1941), “a regular humdinger of a western and probably Gene Autry’s best, with new story values, new cowboy stunts, extra fine cowboy music and lots of comedy.” Modernity, gentrification, and market capitalism remained center stage as the storyline shifted from the issues of the U.S.-Mexico border to the growing influence of Latin Jazz. In a birthday celebration scene, the female lead Josephine Adams (Virginia Dale) sang, “Tumbled Down Shack in Havana,” with back up from Alfredo’s Rumba Band (no credit). A similar scene in *Call of the Canyon* (1942), included female lead Ruth Terry singing, “When it’s Chilly down in Chile.” In April 1941, promoters bid \$16,000 a week for Autry to conduct a personal appearance tour of South America, about \$250,000 per week in 2011 dollars.⁹⁴

Concern for Mexican Americans living in the Border States returned in the plot of *Under Fiesta Stars*, opening August 25, 1941. Autry starred as a rodeo performer and part owner of a ranch he inherited along the U.S.-Mexico border.

As a ranch owner, Gene became responsible for several families of ethnic Mexican *rancheras* living nearby and working a mine located on his property. The Mexican ranchers lost their livestock during the Dust Bowl and Dad Irwin, the original owner of the mine, provided jobs to keep the Mexican families living on their independent ranches until their stock could be replenished and things turned around economically. Through many twists and turns, the singing cowboy hero and the Mexican *rancheras* supported each other as good neighbors. In the closing scene, they celebrated with a fiesta, featuring music and dancing and Gene Autry singing the eponymous movie title song, "Under Fiesta Stars."⁹⁵

Fiesta scenes remained central in *Down Mexico Way*, (1941). Autry played a rancher living near the town of Sage City, somewhere along the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona or California. Republic created this film as a reprise to take advantage of the continuing popularity of Gene's gold record, "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)." Released October 15, 1941, *Down Mexico Way* opened with credits rolling over scenic boulders and Joshua trees in the Mohave Desert, and a chorus singing the eponymous movie title song. Republic staged this film with significantly higher-production values, designed to support showings in first-run theaters, and taking advantage of the hugely popular song.⁹⁶

In addition, *Down Mexico Way* featured two other million-selling songs: "Beer Barrel Polka," a song popularized by Will Glahé, who scored No. 1 on *The*

Billboard popular music chart in June 1939; and “Maria Elena,” a million-seller for the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra in 1941. Budgeted at \$500,000, the film exemplified how the “Gene Autry” series incorporated increasingly elaborate musical excursions during the run up to World War II. A similarly styled grand fiesta scene also graced the screen in *Bells of Capistrano* (1942), wherein, Autry and a group of ethnic Mexican extras, once again, sang the eponymous title song⁹⁷

Republic ran afoul of Hayes office regulations in making of *Down Mexico Way*. All Autry pictures had heavies (bad guys) and in this film, which presented Gene and Smiley battling crooks in Mexico, the studio yielded to the MPPDA’s concerns about the villain being Mexican. Likewise, producer Harry Grey had difficulty in making the villain an American for fear of upsetting Pan-American amity by instilling suspicion of United States citizens in Latin America. Perhaps reflecting the mood in Hollywood, Grey made movie producers the bad guys in the film, abusing American and Mexican investors equally.⁹⁸

Harold Huber, portraying the character of Pancho Grande, provided Autry with a second sidekick, echoing Republic’s successful Three Mesquiteers formula. A reformed outlaw working as an immigrant laborer on Autry’s ranch along the U.S.-Mexico border, Pancho became a guide when Gene and Frog decided to make a trip to Mexico, after being taken in by a couple of phony movie producers. Autry and the townsfolk of Sage City got duped attempting to showcase their fair city in a motion picture, similar to *Dodge City* (1939) and

Virginia City (1940), which capitalized upon local history to create tourist attractions that appealed to the travel and recreation industries. Instead, Sage City residents got taken in a scam. Gene, Frog and Pancho followed the sharpies to San Ramon, Mexico, to retrieve \$35,000 swindled from their neighbors. They also foiled an attempt to con the honorable Don Carlos Alvarado (Julian Rivero), father of the lovely Maria Elena Alvarado (Fay McKenzie). As they crossed the border into Mexico, Autry could not help but sing his hit song, "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)." ⁹⁹

On the way to San Ramon, Gene and the boys boarded a train for the last leg of the journey. They ran into Maria Elena and the Herrera Sisters, a musical act hired to perform at the fiesta honoring Maria Elena's return home. Entertaining passengers in the club car, the trio sang, "La Cachita," followed by Autry singing the romantic, "The Cowboy and the Lady." These scenes were followed by a very elaborate fiesta extravaganza with Mexican bands and a dozen or more dancers. The film featured the Herrera Sisters again, singing "Guadalajara." These song and dance numbers provided a clear indication of the higher production values for this film. Nothing so elaborate was staged in earlier Autry pictures. In addition Republic routinely advertised Mexican-themed films on *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* radio program. Autry helped tie together his film and radio productions by entertaining listeners with songs like "Chiquita," "Juanita," "Maria Elena" and "Under Fiesta Stars." ¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSION

The type of public diplomacy represented through Gene Autry productions demonstrated the innovative redefinition of the role played by the U.S. government in formulating a policy of international cultural activity. As the president moved the federal government into the fields of art, entertainment, recreation, and information, Republic Pictures incorporated government information into its cultural products to help combat the Great Depression and prepare to prepare the U.S. and its allies for the prospects of global war. Autry films like *Boots and Saddles*, *Mexicali Rose*, and *Gaucha Serenade* stand out as attempts to bridge the gaps between the two major tenets of U.S. foreign policy—Anglo-American allegiance and Pan-Americanism. These films appealed to broad, mainstream audiences that did not understand the nuances of foreign affairs, but they trusted Autry as an “ambassador of goodwill.”

The focus of Autry’s Good Neighbor pictures on U.S. relations with Mexico illustrated the importance of border security issues for the Roosevelt administration and the ability of the singing cowboy to reach cross-cultural audiences. Autry promoted Americanism, war preparedness, and friendly relations with Mexico and Mexican Americans at a time when most of his audience favored isolationism. The need for Mexican cooperation with U.S. war preparedness efforts stimulated attempts through the “Gene Autry” series to familiarize rural, small town, and newly urban Americans with Mexican culture.

Similarly, the singing cowboy's inspiration for Fernando De Fuentes and his work, leading to the establishment of a unique style of Mexican filmmaking, confirmed Autry's influence south of the border.

In the historical figures of the cowboy, vaquero, and gaucho, Herbert Eugene Bolton's idea of a common heritage throughout the Americas found a simple and direct expression in the musical-western form. Vaqueros and cowboys, working, riding and singing together in harmony, dramatized this shared experience for tens of millions of music fans and moviegoers worldwide. Music formed the basis for demonstrating unity and harmony between the United States and other nations. The introduction of Mexican songs and traditional folk dances into Autry's films created a positive image of Mexican culture for fans to embrace.

Autry's British tour cemented the singing cowboy's international standing. The image of an American cowboy singing a song of Mexico to audiences in Ireland on the verge of global war with millions of British and American citizens listening on the BBC presented a powerful symbol of harmony and unity for people on three continents. Moreover, the decision by Republic Pictures to open Mexican-themed movies in first-run movie houses confirmed Autry's growing appeal among mainstream American moviegoers. Further evidence of that attraction came in the form of gold records for "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)" and "Goodbye Little Darlin', Goodbye." Autry's image as a singing cowboy—secret agent created a metaphor for understanding

the significance of soft power to influence public opinion and aid U.S. foreign policy. Similarly, near-perfect encapsulation of the Western Hemisphere Idea in the film *Rancho Grande* demonstrated how modernity, gentrification, and market capitalism served as goals for the Good Neighbor policy. Here again, echoing *Mexicali Rose*, the song, “Rancho Grande (Allá en el Rancho Grande),” promoted a symmetry of goals and objectives that influenced audiences on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

After the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Hollywood began adding war preparedness messaging to the New Deal and Good Neighbor films linked to the Roosevelt Presidency. Released as “Super Westerns” in first-run theaters, films like *In Old Monterey* and *South of the Border* marked a turning point in western film productions. As Autry’s music and motion pictures moved from the western fringe to the mainstream in American cultural industries, personal appearances provided the catalyst needed to synergize multiplatform entertainment. Live performances drove the sale of sound recordings, movie tickets, and licensed merchandise bearing Autry’s image and his signature of authenticity. As the next chapter makes clear, radio broadcasting accelerated these processes exponentially. Most significantly, The Wrigley Company of Chicago launched the nationally syndicated, *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch* radio program on the CBS Radio Network. A special preview for merchants selling Wrigley’s Doublemint gum on New Year’s Eve, December 31, 1939, *Melody*

Ranch positioned America's Favorite Cowboy to become "Youth's Model 1940," so named by *The New York Times*.

5

“Melody Ranch”

*'Round the flame on Melody Ranch
You belong
With a song in your heart
Come along
Be a part of the throng
—Gene Autry*

INTRODUCTION

Autry fans first heard the song “Melody Ranch” in a film with the same name, released by Republic Pictures on November 15, 1940. Helping to promote the movie, America’s Favorite Cowboy sang the “Melody Ranch” song repeatedly on *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch* radio program throughout December 1940 and January 1941. Meanwhile, the film version of *Melody Ranch* gave fans a firsthand look at Autry’s live radio broadcast, sponsored by The Wrigley Company of Chicago on the CBS Radio Network. The film opened with Gene and the boys sitting around a campfire singing the eponymous ballad. As the camera pulled back, the scene revealed the staging of the campfire set in a studio at the fictitious Radio Station KRL, a pseudonym for Autry’s own CBS affiliate, Radio

Station KNX in Hollywood. As Gene sang, moviegoers experienced his performance as if sitting in the back row in the KRL studio. Encountering this scene in panorama, fans felt as though they were a part of the studio audience.¹

Jimmy Durante replaced Smiley Burnette as Autry's sidekick in the film version of *Melody Ranch*, playing the role of Cornelius J. "Cornie" Courtney. Republic replaced Wrigley's Doublemint Gum, Autry's real radio program sponsor, with a cold remedy called "Nose Posse," which enabled Durante to do a comedic shtick about his big nose. When Autry and the extras launched into their weekly western drama, Station Manager Tommy Summerville (Jerome Cowan) showed concern, because Julie (Ann Miller), the drama's leading lady was a no-show. As the western drama proceeded, audiences saw the work of a radio sound effects man attempting to stretch things out to accommodate Julie's late arrival.

Autry made a connection to his performances at the World's Championship Rodeo in New York's Madison Square Garden by singing a catchy tune called "Rodeo Rose." This storyline developed further when Autry received a visit from "Pop Laramie" (George "Gabby" Hayes) and "Penny" (Mary Lee), friends from back home in the western town of Torpedo. Pop and Penny braved their way into the big city to ask Gene to serve as honorary sheriff during Torpedo's annual "Frontier Day" celebration, an event featuring a rodeo and horseracing, typical of the small town entertainment promoted by the United

States Travel Bureau (USTB) in 1940-41. Cornie suggested doing a radio show live from Torpedo to boost the sagging ratings of Autry's musical variety show.²

In the film version of *Melody Ranch*, fans got a glimpse of Autry's real life traveling caravan, assembled for the British tour in 1939. The film included scenes of Gene's live show outfit traveling across the spectacular scenery of U.S. Highway 395 from Red Rocks State Park through Lone Pine to Mammoth Lakes, California. Autry's traveling troupe included a tour bus, truck and horse trailer combination, and a radio equipment truck, necessary for remote radio broadcasting. The outfit set up in a saloon owned by the Wildhack boys to broadcast their Frontier Days show. Midway through the program, the Wildhacks preempted the show, beating up Autry and making him a laughingstock by singing "Go Back to the City Again," a parody of the *Melody Ranch* theme song, "Back in the Saddle Again." Afterward, Autry got sore and decided to stick around Torpedo to get even with the Wildhacks. He worked out with Pop Laramie, cowboying at Melody Ranch, to replace the softness of the city with some ranch-hardened manliness. Fan mail received by the singing cowboy in the film overflowed in support of his decision to fight the Wildhack boys.³

To tie in with President Roosevelt's unprecedented third term campaign for reelection in 1940, Republic's *Melody Ranch* featured Autry running for sheriff to clean up the town of Torpedo and clear out the corrupt Wildhacks. Cornie and Penny led the crowd in a rousing reprise of "Vote for Autry," last

heard by moviegoers in *Colorado Sunset* (1939), a theme dating back to *Guns and Guitars* (1936), released during Roosevelt's 1936 reelection campaign. In a plot similar to that of the earlier film, the Wildhacks in cahoots with the local sheriff tried to throw the election to favor their candidate. Cornie responded with a challenge for Mark Wildhack (Barton MacLane). "In your attitude, I see the beginnings of cheap totalitarianism," Cornie said. He criticizing the barkeeper for denying Autry's constituents their right to vote before the polls closed. When a firefight erupted between Wildhack and Autry factions, the local school teacher Veronica Whipple (Barbara Allen) ignored the whizzing bullets and overwhelming smell of gun smoke to crack wise. Whipple made a direct connection between Autry and FDR by saying, "My, the elections seem to get noisier every year. I haven't seen so much excitement since I voted for Roosevelt." Looking directly into the camera and speaking to movie-going audiences, she added sarcastically, "I mean Theodore, of course." This lighthearted but thinly-veiled direct appeal for Autry fans to vote for Franklin Roosevelt in 1940 demonstrated how direct government propaganda increasingly wormed its way into American media culture. Nevertheless, polls showed that Autry's message films continued to resonate with his growing fan base.⁴

The associations between Autry and FDR benefitted the cowboy and the President. In the annual poll of motion picture exhibitors conducted by the *Motion Picture Herald*, Autry joined a select list of movie stars, earning a spot on

the list of top-ten moneymakers for all of Hollywood in 1940. The singing cowboy ranked fourth—behind Mickey Rooney, Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable—ahead of Tyrone Power, James Cagney, Bing Crosby, Wallace Beery, Bette Davis and Judy Garland. Autry's position on Hollywood's "Top Ten" list surprised critics, while demonstrating the rise of the western genre in mainstream American cultural industries, during the run up to World War II. What's more, Autry ranked No. 1 for the fourth consecutive year on the *Motion Picture Herald's* list of biggest western moneymakers. Not since Will Rogers appeared on both top-ten lists in 1934 had any western star received similar national recognition.⁵

Promoting Americanism through the joint exploitation of live performances, motion pictures, sound recordings, radio broadcasts, and name-brand merchandise, Autry aided the Roosevelt administration through his mastery of mass media. It is no surprise that FDR welcomed support from a singing cowboy who could synergize such a large audience. Autry called himself a "New Deal Cowboy," because he agreed to mix information about public works in western states and issues important to westerners into his diverse cultural productions. By 1940, Autry helped shape public opinion in support of Roosevelt for more than one out of every four Americans. Every week, millions of fans turned out to see Republic pictures starring Gene Autry. They bought Gene Autry records from the American Record Corporation (ARC), along with sheet music and songbooks from the Sears catalogs. They learned to play and sing

Gene Autry songs at home on name-brand “Gene Autry” guitars. They chewed Wrigley’s Doublemint Gum, while listening to *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch*, broadcast live from Hollywood on the CBS radio network, and they went to see Gene Autry perform as a musical headliner on the World’s Championship Rodeo Circuit, including the annual WCR Finals at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

More than a simple song giving rise to synergy between radio broadcasting and the motion picture industry through eponymous titling, “Melody Ranch” came to symbolize the source of Autry’s uniqueness and the homeland for a new western identity associated with Americanism, war preparedness, and hemispheric cooperation. Giving emphasis to regional and national objectives, the idea of Melody Ranch established a point of origin for Autry’s brand of Americanism and its growing mainstream salability. In conjuring an image of Melody Ranch for his radio fans, Autry described his idea of a perfect democracy: “Just picture a congenial, easy going place to relax and shed your troubles for a while.” He told viewers, “Just let a few songs and stories that are part and parcel of the wonderful country of ours help you to forget your worries. And all we hope is that these little Sunday get-togethers at Melody Ranch may perhaps remind you that no people anywhere in the world have less to worry about than we do. Because we still have the freedom to get together when we want to as often as we may want to, and to say and do as we please.”⁶

The singing cowboy relocated his household to a real life Melody Ranch in November 1941, after a house fire destroyed the family's residence in North Hollywood. Autry named his 150-acre ranch located in the Santa Susana Mountains, above Granada Hills in the northern San Fernando Valley, to create a physical setting for the imaginary ranch known to radio and movie fans. The singing cowboy paid \$75,000 to purchase the rolling pasture land hemmed on three sides by steep hills and guarded at the open end by an electrically operated gate, about \$1.2 million in 2011 dollars. Trees lining the roadway were filled with singing birds, making apt the name of Melody Ranch, located 30 miles from Republic Pictures. "When I close that gate, I'm cut off from the world. This is a fine place to rest," Gene noted. But rest was one commodity that the cowboy star seemed unable to handle. He stayed on the road for seven months each year, making six pictures for Republic during the five months he was home, and performing his live radio show 52 weeks a year.⁷

YOUTH'S MODEL 1940

With the start of World War II, Hollywood began adding war preparedness messages into the assemblage of films with New Deal and Good Neighbor themes tied to the Roosevelt administration. Republic scriptwriters tried to mash up all of these national initiatives in the New West stories presented in the "Gene Autry" series. Films like *Boots and Saddles* (1937), *Western Jamboree* (1938), and *In Old Monterey* (1939) sounded the alarm. The

first Autry film to represent the allied forces of the United Kingdom, Mexico and the U.S., working together, *Boots and Saddles* dramatized a plan to save an old *Californio* rancho, now British-owned, from impending sale. Autry led a team of American cowboys and Mexican vaqueros in the effort to save the rancho. They rounded up and broke a herd of wild horses to sell under contract to the U.S. Army. The proceeds of the sale paid the bills of the British owners. The Brits responded by canceling the sale; thereby, saving the home place of a large Mexican *colonia* residing on the property.⁸

As the plot unfolded, Autry's sidekick, Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette), inadvertently enlisted in the U.S. Army. Watching Frog's ordeal provided young fans with some comedic food-for-thought. Millhouse dramatized both the torment of boot camp and the excitement of shooting rapid-fire machine guns. Automatic weapons appeared as symbols of modernism in the film, along with wireless telephone communications that enabled soldiers in the field to communicate with HQ. Additional symbolism came from Autry winning a horserace and preserving the ranch for his British and Mexican allies. The cowboy hero symbolized the willingness of the United States to support the United Kingdom and Mexico as the threats of global war increased.⁹

U.S. foreign policy objectives dramatized in the "Gene Autry" series added a new dimension with the release of *Western Jamboree* (1938). This quasi-dude ranch drama managed to incorporate New Deal, Good Neighbor, and war preparedness elements. *Western Jamboree* featured a portrayal of Don

Carlos (Edward Raquello) as a Mexican nobleman and musical *charro*, which showed an effort on Republic's part to reach new audiences in border towns, and help Autry fans empathize with ethnic Mexicans in the United States. A classic version of the Mexican folksong, "Ceilito Lindo," featured Autry singing in Spanish and the assembled patrons of the Silver Bow Saloon joining in harmony as the song reached its crescendo. This Spanish serenade probably struck an unusual chord among Autry's rural, small town and newly urban fans. Increased movie ticket sales and record sales demonstrated the singing cowboy's effectiveness as a messenger. America's No. 1 cowboy hero also made Hollywood's "Top Ten" list from 1940 to 1942.¹⁰

Another storyline in *Western Jamboree* involved a search for helium deposits on the Circle J Ranch. Autry worked as foreman for the Circle J, going up against Richard Kimball (Bentley Hewlett), a crooked American businessman. A newspaper in Kimball's hands revealed headlines announcing, "Foreign Powers Still Seek Helium—Recent U.S. Ruling Spurs Efforts to Secure Non-Flammable Gas for Lighter-than-Air Craft." For moviegoers, the spectacle of the notorious Hindenburg disaster remained fresh. Rumors suggested sabotage, while images of the stunning hydrogen explosion got people thinking about helium as a safer, alternative energy source.¹¹

Plot points promoted the value of western lands with oil and gas deposits and the challenges of dealing with absentee landowners. *Western Jamboree* encouraged moviegoers to think about the increased sales of American gas and

petroleum products as conflicts widened in Europe and Manchuria. The film signaled a transition from an emphasis on the promotion of New Leisure in the American West through travel and tourism and western dude ranch vacations. Audiences saw the Circle J transformed from a working cattle ranch into a dude ranch, and then, an industrial site. Residents and investors understood the value of western rangelands for natural gas and oil extraction. They pointed to the Hugoton gas fields in southwestern Kansas and the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, the largest reserves of helium in the United States. The progression from cattle ranching to dude ranching and natural gas extraction showcased the potential for industrial development to reemerge in the western states as war preparedness accelerated the nation's recovery from the Great Depression.¹²

By 1939, nearly half of the new productions in the "Gene Autry" series included Mexican themes and war preparedness messages. Another quarter of the Autry films incorporated New Deal themes. In total, 75 percent of Republic's output through the "Gene Autry" series showed support for the Roosevelt administration. The winter of 1939 also marked a turning point for Hollywood horse operas, a trend recognized by the *New York Times*. Seemingly overnight, consumers of culture reestablished the western genre as a popular American form. Western films were no longer, "the exclusive property of all the little Willies who pranced through preoccupied pedestrian traffic caroling 'Heigh-yo Silver, away!'" Reporter Frank S. Nugent found something curious happening in 1939. It involved Autry propelling the series western from the fringes into the

mainstream of American culture. Nugent wrote, “Frankly, we don’t quite know what to make of it all. We’ve formed the habit of taking our horse operas in a Class B stride.”¹³

Nugent promoted the American West as a region for tourist travel by calling attention to its photogenic qualities. He called out John Ford’s *Stagecoach* (1939) to envision the spectacular scenery awaiting photographers willing to travel through the Southwest. He described Ford’s Concord Coach carrying a miscellany of passengers past the lonely crags, sculptural sky-mesas, and cloud-shadowed ranges of Monument Valley in Arizona. Ford drew his camera back and then lingered in panoramic mode to let his audiences see the stagecoach cracking off the miles of sublime scenery. Nugent commented, “It’s something to see. We haven’t much hesitation in calling it one of the best horse operas ever filmed.”¹⁴

Riding on the success of *Stagecoach*, many critics predicted an announcement from Republic revealing grand plans for John Wayne. Under contract to Republic Pictures, Wayne would become a big box office asset in the postwar era; but in 1939, he could not get past Roy Rogers to challenge Autry for the “No. 1” spot. Autry claimed the title as the biggest box office draw in western films for six consecutive years (1937-1942). To tie-in with promotions for the government-sponsored “See America First” campaign, Republic set up a special stage at the Golden Gate International Exposition, for residents and tourists in the San Francisco Bay area to see Autry and other stars in person.¹⁵

Republic continued to broaden its market for Autry films with the release of *In Old Monterey* on August 14, 1939. This film reflected an increasing shift in the American public, away from rural and small town strongholds, into the industrial centers of the United States. As wartime production increased the ranks of newly urban workers, Republic increased its distribution of Autry films in urban areas nationwide. *In Old Monterey* helped smooth the transition for fans moving from rural to urban locales for jobs in wartime industries. The audiences for Autry pictures grew as newly urban workers popularized his films among metropolitan moviegoers.¹⁶

Republic Pictures released *In Old Monterey* as the Germans prepared to invade Poland, triggering the start of World War II. Republic branded the film a “special,” which meant a bigger budget, extra stars, more musical numbers, and other special effects. The film ran seventy-three minutes, longer than the normal “B” western, and it featured the Hoosier Hot Shots, a well-known Midwestern musical group, in addition to songs by Autry and Burnette. A plot involving the U.S. Army created an opportunity for Autry to appear onscreen in a soldier’s uniform. The cowboy hero’s delivery of a hard sell, patriotic speech confirmed American resistance to the aggression witnessed during the Spanish Civil War and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Autry’s performance became a benchmark that foreshadowed future acts of patriotism and the extraordinary efforts necessary for victory.¹⁷

The Good Neighbor associations apparent in the eponymous movie and song title, "In Old Monterey," suggested a story involving a senorita and unrequited love. In the form of a "super western," Republic introduced its star players in a series of screen cameos, featuring Gene Autry, Smiley Burnette, June Story, George "Gabby" Hayes, the Hoosier Hot Shots, the comedy team of Sarie *and* Sallie, The Ranch Boys and the juvenile actor, Billy Lee. Background images for these cameo shots suggested a typical musical-western adventure, until Billy Lee lit a string of firecrackers that began popping off.¹⁸

The exploding firecrackers segued into scenes of combat and floating newspapers with headlines announcing "War Threat Stirs Europe: World Capitols Agog Over War Situation." Superimposed over more footage of aerial bombing, additional headlines proclaimed, "Powers Increase Armament: Entire World in Arms Race." Scenes of mobile cannon arrays mounted on truck platforms firing rounds skyward served as the backdrop for a third big headline: "Congress Speeds Plans For Defense of U.S.A.: Huge Appropriation Made For Armament Program." These headlines reflected a reality quite obvious throughout the Southwest Border States, including Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, where the construction of flying fields and bombing ranges by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers facilitated the training of allied pilots from many foreign nations.¹⁹

The fictitious town of Colby and the ranchers of the fictitious Colby Basin District dramatized local reactions to notices of evacuation and the taking of

lands by the federal government. Foregoing the typical escapist adventure at the root of the “Gene Autry” series, *In Old Monterey* pushed the boundaries of realism in representing the circumstances faced by real westerners dealing with the U.S. Army. The film depicted ranchers resisting attempts by the Army Air Force to establish military bases. The westerners refused to budge, despite assurances from the U.S. Army to pay a fair price of rangelands and to help people relocate. Westerners refused to move, because they had strong ties to family homesteads and long-established property rights.²⁰

George Whittaker (George “Gabby” Hayes) espoused the isolationist sentiment typical of the westerners that resisted war preparedness efforts. As spokesman for the ranchers of Colby Basin, Whittaker responded to a government ultimatum by confronting an Army Captain (Edward Earle) and explaining that his people were born and raised on the western range: “I guess maybe you don’t understand soldier. We got our homes here. Most of us were born and raised right in this valley. We ain’t interested in selling and moving on. This is our land. We fit (fought) Indians, and thieves, and rustlers to get it. By cracky, we’ll take on the whole darned United States Army to keep it.”²¹

Scenes from Camp Kendall, a fictitious Army base, included the training of cavalry troops combined with pilot training and bombing ranges. When the captain reported the resistance of the townsfolk to Major Forbes (Robert Warrick), he suggested a deployment of troops to clear the resisters. Forbes refused to consider strong-arm tactics, stating emphatically, “These people are

citizens, they pay taxes, and after all, that's what keeps this man's army going." Instead, the major sent Sergeant Gene Autry undercover to convince the ranchers to sell their homes for the benefit of the U.S. war preparedness efforts.²²

In Old Monterey foreshadowed Autry's future as a non-commissioned officer working to recruit two million men and women for the U.S. Army Air Force. The film portrayed Autry as a working cattleman before he joined the Army. Autry's ability to ride and rope and his general ranch experience made him the perfect choice for this special undercover duty. The film connected Autry to the world of rodeo by showing him as the trainer for a group of soldiers learning to break horses for the U.S. Cavalry. As Autry demonstrated his rodeo technique, the Hoosier Hot Shots hit sour notes to spook his fiery mount. Moviegoers watched Autry handle a bucking bronco to the tune of a playful polka.²³

Afterward, Autry confronted his good buddies for their irresponsible behavior as Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette) roared upon the scene in a miniature one-man tank. Moviegoers learned that the boys' tour of duty was about over, unless they decided to reenlist. Autry nudged them by saying, "You can't quit now!" Then, he hatched a scheme to convince the boys to re-up by throwing a party in the mess hall and emphasizing a strong feeling of belonging felt by many soldiers. Singing "Born in the Saddle" and a sentimental tearjerker, "My Buddy," Autry convinced the boys to reenlist. Directed at young, movie-

going fans, these messages of duty, patriotism and camaraderie, came across loud and clear.²⁴

Before Autry signed his own reenlistment papers, he had to complete his secret mission; so, technically, he told the truth when passing as a rancher in the Colby Basin. Autry would re-up after completing his undercover assignment. At a town meeting, where folks gathered to discuss the Army ultimatum, a greedy mine owner named Stevenson (Jonathan Hale) stirred the people with talk of resisting the federal government. In response, the undercover cowboy reminded the Colby ranchers to think of their wives and families. “What’s going to happen to them if you shoot it out with the Army?” Autry asked. In an attempt to damaged Autry’s credibility, Stevenson revealed the cowboy’s secret association with the U.S. Army.²⁵

Accusations of double-dealing ruined Autry’s chance of a peaceable solution; so, he created a captive audience by locking down the theater and forcing the American people to watch actual newsreel films of *War in the Far East* and *War in Europe*. Showing scenes with terrible damage and loss of life suffered by the civilian populations, the addition of actual newsreels into the musical-western format intentionally blurred the line between real life and fantasy for moviegoers seeing *In Old Monterey*.

Americans were not safe or immune from physical danger in modern warfare, Autry explained: “Not a very pretty picture is it? What you saw there could happen right here in this country and will happen unless we have a fighting

force so superior that no one would dare attack us. By that I don't mean more men, more guns, and more equipment than anyone else; but better men, and better guns, and better equipment; and to make sure that they are better, we need places where our men can train and our equipment can be tested over and over until every flaw has been found and corrected. That's why the government wants to buy this land and is willing to pay more than a fair price for it. And I don't believe that any of you are such poor Americans that you won't be proud to do your part for such a cause."²⁶

Whittaker, the isolationist, jumped up to join Autry on stage and testified to a change of heart. Speaking to isolationists everywhere, he said: "Folks, I hate to admit it, but Gene here's convinced me that I've been all wrong, Trouble with us is that we have been thinking of our own measly selves so much that we forgot that there is 140 million other people in this country..." Then, Whittaker and Autry led the assembly in a rousing version of the nostalgic song, "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," a patriotic tune that occasionally saw use as an unofficial national anthem, in competition with "Hail, Columbia," and "The Star-Spangled Banner," until the latter's formal adoption as the national anthem in 1931.²⁷

Meanwhile, back at Whittaker's ranch, Stevenson's cronies rigged the house with explosives to fake an aerial bombing. Accidentally, they killed little Jimmy Whittaker (Billy Lee) in the blast intended to cast blame upon the U.S. Army Air Force. The killing of little Jimmy turned public opinion away from Autry's position. Whittaker threatened to kill the cowboy hero if he did not

leave town. Nevertheless, Autry returned to sing at Jimmy's funeral. He sang "Vacant Chair" as a duet with Jill Whittaker (June Storey), Jimmy's older sister.²⁸

Aerial photographs taken by the U.S. Army Air Force revealed a car belonging to Gillman (William Hall), Stevenson's partner in crime, hidden behind the barn at the time of the bombing. Further crime scene investigations, including plaster castings of Gillman's tire tread, concluded that the culprits who killed Jimmy were double-dealing business executives from the Atlas Borax Company. To exonerate the Army Air Force, Gene and Frog broke into the Atlas Borax offices and took confidential files that verified the treachery. Apparently, desperate times called for desperate measures and the suspension of the rule of law by government agents. Meanwhile, the townsfolk built a barricade to fend off an attack from the U.S. Army in an act of civil disobedience.²⁹

When Autry produced the evidence damning the Atlas Borax Company, the townsfolk, led by Whittaker, rushed to the Atlas Mine to confront Stevenson and Gillman. Frog demonstrated the use of the Army's one-man tank by quickly reaching Major Forbes and stopping the assault on Colby. Instead, the Army joined with the townspeople in the showdown with the crooked businessmen at the mine. Putting the pint-sized tank through its paces, Frog and Gene used this modern war machine to break through a barricade and attempt the capture of the crooks and rabble-rousers. Stevenson and Gillman used an airplane to make their escape, until Autry brought down the plane with a single shot from a Winchester rifle. As the film came to a close, Sergeant Gene Autry and the

Hoosier Hot Shots (in uniform) performed the title song, while helping the Whittaker family to relocate from Colby Basin and make room for the U.S. Army Air Force and the nation's war preparedness.³⁰

In Old Monterey helped inform the nation about the need for air bases and bombing ranges to training pilots and crewmembers for the U.S. Army Air Force. Autry echoed the Roosevelt administration's commitment to a superior air force and long-range bombers to protect the United States from the inevitability of foreign wars. In the process, both the star and studio represented the American West and westerners as supporting a national agenda. America's Favorite Cowboy represented the United States to the world. Republic ballyhoo promoted *In Old Monterey* as a coming attraction during Autry's hugely popular, personal appearance tour of the British Isles and Irish Free State. Upon his return to New York, John Kilpatrick, the operator of Madison Square Garden, booked the singing cowboy to appear in conjunction with the national finals of Everett Colborn's, World's Championship Rodeo (WCR). Drawing a sold-out crowd of over 17,000 fans in Madison Square Garden, Kirkpatrick added Autry as a headliner for the entire nineteen-day run of the 1940 WCR Finals.³¹

Autry's music and motion pictures moved from the western fringe into the mainstream of American cultural industries as the Second World War got underway. Autry's ability to sing softly and beat the bad guys attracted attention from the Wrigley Company of Chicago. Familiar with Sears' sponsorship of Autry on WLS and NBC's *National Barn Dance* program, Wrigley offered to sponsor the

sing cowboy as the star of a new nationally syndicated program for distribution over the CBS radio network. Wrigley launched *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* program during a special preview on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1939, exclusively for merchants selling Doublemint Gum. The *Melody Ranch* announcer identified the American cowboy as a romantic hero, comparable to the well-known knight in shining armor astride a powerful charger in Anglo-Saxon culture. The announcer praised the cowboys of the western plains and deserts for self-reliance, and for living a life closer to nature than most Americans. He identified sincerity and authenticity as the calling cards most highly valued by Autry fans. *Melody Ranch* positioned the cowboy hero in ways similar to the *New York Times*, which celebrated Autry in an article titled, "Youth's Model 1940."³²

Wrigley's announcer explained: "Our hero of Melody Ranch is Gene Autry, America's Favorite Singing Cowboy, who is a symbol of the clean thinking, honesty and integrity of the American people. Gene has achieved success through his fine work with Republic Pictures. Millions of picture-goers know him and love him. Much of his success is due to the fact that he personally lives the characters that he depicts. Many of us can still remember the many characters made famous by Horatio Alger. Gene Autry's own history is an Alger story, as you'll hear in a moment."³³

This *Melody Ranch* inaugural included a radio drama linking the emerging star to the much beloved Will Rogers. The drama retold an oft-repeated

foundational narrative about a meeting between Gene Autry and Will Rogers in a rural Oklahoma town, Autry worked as a telegrapher for the Frisco Line and Rogers dropped in to wire a message. Wrigley promoted Rogers as the source of Autry's inspiration, suggesting that his words of encouragement convinced young Gene to go to New York. The announcer explained that Autry made his way as a singer and succeeded in show business because he contributed something new to American culture. Wrigley asked merchants to celebrate Autry's unique contribution to American life and American song. Wrigley positioned *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* as a purely American entertainment that helped audiences forget about the outside world and escape into a modern-day western fantasy.³⁴

“You know everybody these days sort of has a hankerin’ to escape all this hustle and bustle, and bright lights and all the troubles they think they have on their shoulders, and sort of sink down around the campfire with the boys,” Autry surmised. The Wrigley announcer explained: “Millions go to their favorite theater to see Gene and thrill to his singing in Republic pictures. And now, Gene Autry comes to visit you: to sit around your firesides with you, swapping stories of the colorful West. Telling you his adventures and singing you the grand songs we all love so well, here is a new program. A program to carry you out of yourselves; out of this troubled world of ours; out into the great open plains of the west; a program that brings you color, America humor and American song by that successful interpreter of our nation’s most tuneful folksongs, Gene Autry;

so, join Gene and the boys at Melody Ranch next Sunday night and bring your family and friends along too.”³⁵

Gene Autry's Melody Ranch began regular broadcasts on January 7, 1940, and continued in primetime on CBS, every Sunday night at 6:30 p.m. The flurry of national and international publicity surrounding the singing cowboy in 1939 persuaded Wrigley to feature Autry in the national broadcast. Wrigley's Doublemint Gum continued as Autry's product sponsor for the next sixteen years (1940-1956), through a variety of iterations—*Gene Autry's Melody Ranch*, *Sergeant Gene Autry*, and *The Gene Autry Show*: on radio and television. Wrigley paid its cowboy hero \$1,500 per week for appearing on the program in 1940, more than \$24,000 per week in 2011 dollars. Over time, Autry's salary for weekly radio work rose to \$5,000, about \$70,000 per week in 2011 dollars.³⁶

Extension of the “Gene Autry” brand through a nationally syndicated radio show increased exponentially the level of synergy produced by the singing cowboy in other American culture industries. Heavy radio promotions helped Republic boost ticket sales and elevate Autry to the “Top-Ten” list of Hollywood box office earners. *Melody Ranch* also increased sales for Autry sound recordings; especially, the big hits, “South of the Border,” “Goodbye Little Darlin’, Goodbye,” “You Are My Sunshine,” and “Be Honest with Me.” Radio advertising for Autry's “in-person” appearances helped sell out venues for the World's Championship Rodeo and other Wild West shows. The singing cowboy expanded his one-man shows and Gene Autry Trio into a western musical

extravaganza to tie in with the pageantry and rodeo sports competition. His experience with huge crowds of 17,000 people at Madison Square Garden warranted a bigger presence to match the excitement and intensity of sold out stadium. This combination of Gene Autry productions created a synergy that elevated the “Gene Autry” brand into a true American franchise offering an amazing array of license merchandise.

From the beginning, Wrigley, CBS and Gene Autry, crafted a variety show that promoted Americanism, war preparedness, and hemispheric cooperation through music, drama, advertising, and information about the federal government, presented in public service announcements. Wrigley sponsored the primetime broadcast as part of its overall strategy to show support for U.S. troops and protect the reputation of company brands during an era of wartime rationing. Raw materials for chewing gum came from Malaya, Borneo, and South America. To maintain access to these markets, Wrigley wanted its chewing gum classified as an essential wartime commodity. Company President Phillip Wrigley accomplished this goal by taking the Spearmint[®], Doublemint[®] and Juicy Fruit[®] brands off the civilian market and dedicating the entire output of these products to the U.S. Armed Forces.³⁷

Usually, *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch* originated in the studios of CBS Radio Station KNX in Hollywood; however, Wrigley arranged for the program to broadcast live from Washington, D.C., on January 28, 1940. The First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt appeared as a special guest on the live broadcast, telling radio

listeners that she invited Gene to the nation's capital to celebrate Franklin's birthday and to help fundraise to support the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. An indication of the close association between Wrigley and the White House that benefited the singing cowboy, CBS staged the special broadcast as an all-American musical tribute, harmonizing the often conflicting themes of American unity and diversity through song and melody. In addition to the festivities in Washington, Americans extended the celebration at another 25,000 local balls, hosted across the country for the benefit of infantile paralysis victims. From that day forward, a mass of Gene Autry Friendship Club members showed continued support for the president by contributing annually to the March of Dimes. Soon, these same fans bought U.S. Defense Savings Bonds and Stamps promoted by Autry in regular radio pitches, patriotic recordings, jingoistic motion pictures, partisan personal appearance, and many licensed merchandise tie-ups.³⁸

The Presidential birthday broadcast demonstrated how music and radio drama could celebrate diversity as an aspect of American music, while simultaneously, promoting unity by harmonizing the different forms within a larger national context. The featured musical groups performed in noticeably different styles; yet, they all played American music. The program opened with Autry introducing the musical acts performing live from the CBS studios in Washington, D.C., followed by live simulcasts from St. Louis, Missouri; Fall River, Massachusetts; and Chicago, Illinois. To symbolize the American West, Autry

sang “Carry Me Back to the Lone Prairie”; his theme song, “Back in the Saddle Again”; and a closing number, “The End of the Trail.” The performance of a Negro spiritual, “Fly Up/Rise Up,” symbolized southern gospel and African American music. A hillbilly song, “Ozark Mountain Home,” performed from a CBS studio in St. Louis, represented music from the American heartland. Similarly, a hymn of thanks from Fall River performed in recognition of America’s Pilgrim Fathers, signified unity through prayer and oneness with God.³⁹

These songs celebrating regional diversity underscored the differences between local, regional, and national initiatives. Emphasizing Americanism as a national objective in combination with regionalism, *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch* also included a rendition of “Sweet Adeline,” performed by Washington Chapter No. 9 of The Society for the Preservation of Barbershop Quartette Singing in America. Nothing was more “downright American and universal in scope,” declared the Wrigley announcer. Showcasing the harmonizing effects of traditional American music, the announcer explained that American popular music was “played all over the world.” To emphasize the significance of American music, the big finale featured a popular American dance tune, “Oh, Johnny, Oh,” performed live from Chicago by the Orrin Tucker Orchestra, a featured act on *Hit Parade*, another nationally syndicated radio program. At the conclusion of this performance, Autry explained: “Your song brings us right up to date on the media trend of American dance music. Yes, you’ll find song and

melody wherever men and women gather together. It's a natural form of expression for all of us."⁴⁰

The First Lady thanked Mr. Autry for presenting such poignant examples of American songs and melodies. Mrs. Roosevelt pointed out, "So many of us don't realize that in this vast country of ours, each section has songs and traditions peculiar to itself; but at the same time, truly and thoroughly American." These expressions of harmony and unity through music earned Autry a speaking part at a luncheon of Hollywood celebrities at the White House. Newspapers reported that the singing cowboy made a very clever presentation, gifting the President and Mrs. Roosevelt a pair of matching cowboy hats.⁴¹

In sponsoring Autry's radio program, Wrigley invited listeners to a real American get-together at the imaginary Melody Ranch, where freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech provided the cornerstones of American culture and values. Echoing these sentiments through songs like "Dude Ranch Cowhands," "South of the Border," and "America, the Beautiful," Autry referred to his Melody Ranch get-togethers as "Real American" parties: "Feel the way we do: that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are more precious than all of the other riches in this bountiful country of ours. You know, we really are rich, because here in this country people sing because they feel that they have something to sing about. People laugh because they're happy and people work, and they work hard, because we have a lot of pride and faith in the nation we've built, and we're building day after day. So after all,

what have we got to worry about when we have things like that? Why, we Americans have less to worry about than any other people on the face of the globe. So if you happen to feel like singing along with us here at Melody Ranch, I don't care where you happen to be, just join right in. It'll help you relax..."⁴²

Personal appearance tours made Autry different than most other big movie stars in Hollywood. Autry logged almost 100,000 miles on personal appearance tours in 1940. Touring big cities and small hamlets alike, never once did this cowboy hero fail to win friends; not only for himself, but also for his movie studio, radio sponsor, record label, and the licensed merchandise producers and distributors earning income from Autry's name and image. The cowboy received letters from theater managers, school superintendents, civic officials, and just plain fans. They all told the same story—Autry came to their town and proved himself a "regular." Autry always added goodwill stops to his personal appearance jaunts. He visited schools, orphanages, and hospitals on every tour. He believed in setting a good example of clean living for his millions of kid-fans. He never smoked or drank on screen. Autry remained accessible to anyone who wanted to talk with him and he never refused any demand on his time, if he could possibly meet it. American media culture offered few stars with the same friend-making abilities as Autry.⁴³

Fans turned out in droves to see "Gene Autry, In Person" when the singing cowboy toured rural, small town, and neighborhood theaters in newly urban areas. Autry earned a significant portion of his income from a one-man

show and tours with The Gene Autry Trio. In 1940, he evolved these small shows into a western musical extravaganza worthy of his headliner status with the World's Championship Rodeo Finals at Madison Square Garden. Once he got started, Autry toured continuously on the rodeo and Wild West show circuits into the 1960s. His only time out came in 1943-45, while he served as a Technical Sergeant and pilot for the U.S. Army Air Force. Autry headlined the nineteen-day WCR Finals ten times, between 1939 and 1953.⁴⁴

Borrowing from the "Cavalcade of Texas" and other displays of pageantry, the singing cowboy and his musical sidekicks created a pageant of the Old West for their rodeo performances. Compared to the usual spine-tingling rodeo events, Autry offered a very flossy show. Cross-promotion in Republic pictures and live remote broadcasts of *Melody Ranch*, originating from different cities during the rodeo tours, enabled Autry to add this purely American form of spectator sport to his range of arts and entertainment emphasizing unity in American culture: "You know, a trip east sure opens a fellas eyes to this country's bigness and hustle and to the fact that all these many different cities, rivers, and farms, hills, towns, ranches and shops are actually under one roof—the Great American Sky. You can't beat the prairies and the mountains of the west, but there is something doggoned exciting too in the sight of the sunlight slanting down through city canyons and making all the windows flash and sparkle like a million diamonds...."⁴⁵

Headlining for the 1940 World's Championship Rodeo Finals represented one of the biggest breaks Autry received during his long career. John Reek Kilpatrick, president of the Madison Square Garden Corporation, signed Autry to perform during the annual nineteen-day October event. Evertt Johnson's Cowboy Band drove out to La Guardia Field in a bus to welcome the cowboy hero to New York. Autry's arrival by airplane drew the attention of New York media, because Gene brought Champion with him. The decision to plane his famous horse east for personal appearances at the rodeo cost Autry \$3,000, nearly \$50,000 in 2011 dollars. Even so, he must have netted 10 times that amount in fan approval.⁴⁶

To kick start his WCR engagement, America's Ace Cowboy led a parade from Madison Square Garden to the New York City Hall, where the mayor officially welcomed the rodeo participants to the city. America's foremost western film hero thrilled 2,000 patients and attendants at Bellevue Hospital, during the WCR's annual run, appearing at a benefit for incapacitated children. Autry appeared with a contingent of fifteen cowgirls, sixty-five cowboys, and a twenty-piece band. He sang several popular songs from his motion pictures, and he did an imitation of President Roosevelt. At Madison Square Garden, Autry did a free show for 17,000 underprivileged children who appreciated the WCR benefit. *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* originated from New York during the rodeo finals. Madison Square Garden promoted the singing cowboy's appearance at the WRC in joint advertisements with Republic Pictures, promoting the latest

picture in the “Gene Autry” series, *Ride Tenderfoot Ride* (1940). Boston Garden ran similar promotions then the WCR hit town, following the New York run.⁴⁷

Between performances at the WCR Finals, Autry took part in other special events while visiting New York City. He performed in two free concerts at the Music Hall of the New York World’s Fair. Hosted by the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), Johnny Green led the orchestra backing up the singing cowboy. These concerts showcased Autry’s celebrity status as an American composer and singer of western folksongs. Autry had many other successes in the years that followed; but none seemed as culturally significant as the respect he earned from ASCAP in 1940. Autry’s singing cowboy persona had evolved since 1931, when western music first offered a nascent theatrical masquerade for aspiring musicians hoping to carve out recording and radio careers. A decade later, Autry found himself at the center of the American cultural industries, fueled by a multimillion-dollar American media culture. In 1940, Autry ushered in an era of respectability and commercial viability for a burgeoning musical genre newly labeled as “country and western.”⁴⁸

Tom Mix died suddenly in a car accident, en route from Tucson to Phoenix, Arizona, during the World’s Championship Rodeo Finals. Upon learning of the event, Autry lamented: “Now that’s terrible news, Tom was the greatest cowboy that ever drew on boots. He was a credit to the American cowboy and was our acknowledged leader. He was also the greatest showman the West ever produced and he brought world attention to cowboys.”⁴⁹

To satisfy the throngs of Tom Mix's friends and fans that mourned his passing, Autry added a tribute to his Madison Square Garden rodeo performances. Another tribute called "A New Hand in Heaven" graced the *Melody Ranch* show. "[Tom Mix] contributed a great deal to the betterment of the American cowboy and cowboy sports," Autry proclaimed. The older western star provided a role model for young Gene as he learned the movie business. Mix earned \$17,000 per picture at the height of his career.⁵⁰

Autry copied Mix by adopting the custom of routinely dressing western. Mix knew better than most that cowboy regalia meant good business. Gene's favorite western outfit was an orangey-yellow number, complete with fancy boots and a 10-gallon hat. His most conservative look came in a delicate, powder-blue ensemble. Autry's dressy western style provided an ever-present spotlight when he walked down Broadway in New York. The singing cowboy made a statement wherever and whenever he appeared in public.⁵¹

A *New York Times* interview with George A. Mooney, published under the headline, "Youth's Model 1940," demonstrated that Autry understood his significance in American culture and media. The radio cowboy recognized that millions of American youngsters typically emulated his every action. Autry consciously obliged his fans by not mixing politics directly into his productions. Nonetheless, the singing cowboy felt differently about Americanism. Having

survived the Great Depression only to face the threats of global war, Autry's approach to showing kids the meaning of Americanism relied upon sincerity and authenticity in his persona. Autry played himself in the movies, on the radio, and sound recordings. His extensive touring gave fans the opportunity to see him perform live. In printed materials and licensed merchandise, he furthered the "Gene Autry" brand.⁵²

Autry's fan mail averaged more than 12,000 letters each week, topping that of all other Hollywood stars, and proving a deep understanding of his youthful audiences. Gene described the many letters received from parents asking him to say a good word so that junior would eat his spinach or take up some other worthy course. Gene Autry Fan Club members pledged to live a good life, following an example set by their cowboy hero. Police departments adopted the "Gene Autry" brand to impress safety campaigns upon school children.⁵³

"Youth's Model 1940" explained his approach to influencing young Americans: "If I can show our youth what it is like to be a real American, then I'm doing a good job. I want to show them that in this country everybody has a chance—just as I did. . . . In the programs we try to keep everything strictly American and down to earth. That's the sort of thing that will do more to knock any Communist, Nazi or other such ideas out of their heads than anything else. As I see it, the way is not to get up and say that the Communists and others are

wrong. Instead we should show the young people the decent, good things that are in this country; things that don't exist now in other countries of the world.”⁵⁴

With all due modesty, Autry declared, “Acting like a true American is very important, under the circumstances.... These young people watch me very carefully and there are certain things they expect me to do and not to do.”

Dressed in a cream-colored shirt, edged with brown piping, tight, brown breeches, and elaborately tooled boots, Autry explained that fans expected their cowboy hero to dress in a western style. Autry refused to express a preference for either motion pictures or radio, because he worked in both information mediums. Gene viewed these two forms of American media culture as complementary. Variety kept him from getting stale in either medium. For the work of spreading Americanism, Gene preferred radio: “In a single broadcast one can reach more people faster with the American doctrines.” Live performances made radio broadcasting more precise—no opportunity for “retakes,” as in film. A radio broadcast had to be right the first time.⁵⁵

A premiere parade featuring Gene Autry and Roy Rogers announced the arrival of country-western music and musical-western films on Hollywood Boulevard in 1940. The Teleview Theater in Hollywood premiered Autry's *Melody Ranch* and Rogers' *Robin Hood of the Pecos* ((1940) in a Friday night double feature. For the first time, fans saw Autry, Rogers, and Hopalong Cassidy films without having to drive to the San Fernando Valley or another rural locale. Hollywood columnist Hedda Hopper wrote, “You can't beat a good western for

entertainment—and an antidote for that super-sophisticated feeling that is beginning to cling to the town.”⁵⁶

Comparisons with Will Rogers as a western film star and Hollywood box office sensation continued in 1941. Autry garnered unprecedented national and international recognition along the eastern seaboard, among middle-income Americans, and audiences overseas. Extension of the “Gene Autry” brand and synergy among American media outlets established a “Gene Autry” franchise in a significantly modified form. Increasingly elaborate song and dance numbers, reminiscent of the western musical extravaganzas that Autry staged for the WCR took advantage of media synergy to further fuel expansion.

Rodeo references mixed with Mexican fiesta imagery as trademarked motifs in the “Gene Autry” franchise. Citizens of mainstream America came into contact with ethnic Mexicans and learned something about Mexican culture and cuisine from Gene Autry’s entertainments. No film dramatized the Mexican fiesta more elaborately than *Down Mexico Way* (1941), a second Republic “special” that took advantage of title associations with Autry’s hit song, “South of the Border (Down Mexico Way).”⁵⁷

Similarly, Republic took advantage of eponymous titling by choosing *Back in the Saddle* as the title of an Autry film released in March 1941. This film opened with actual newsreel film footage of Times Square in New York and the events of the World’s Championship Rodeo Finals at Madison Square Garden. A radio announcer broadcasting live from the Garden found Autry backstage

singing “Back in the Saddle Again,” the theme song from his *Melody Ranch* radio show. The incorporation of hit songs attracted a wide audience for this film. Fans also saw and heard Autry perform “In the Jailhouse Now” and “You Are My Sunshine.” He sang a duet with Patsy (Mary Lee) of “I’m an Old Cowhand” a contemporary western song with references to the Ford V-Eight, radio, and movie stars; written by Johnny Mercer for Bing Crosby to sing in *Rhythm on the Range* (1936).⁵⁸

In a departure from real life, Republic’s *Back in the Saddle* positioned Autry as an actual rodeo contestant, prize money winner, and the foreman of the Bar Cross Ranch, near the fictitious town of Solitude, Arizona. Gene and his top hand, Frog Millhouse (Smiley Burnette) were in New York to collect Tom Bennett (Edward Norris), the recently twenty-one-year-old inheritor of the Bar Cross Ranch. Bennett was reluctant to leave New York and it took a fistfight to convince him to make the long railroad journey home to Solitude.⁵⁹

Upon arrival in Arizona, the boys learned that Solitude was carried up in a copper boom, the biggest in twenty years. Increased wartime production brought about mining booms throughout much of the rural West in the 1940s; meanwhile, poisonous runoff from the mines polluted streams and rivers with copper sulfate, arsenic, and other nasty chemicals. With mining runoff killing cattle up and down the valley, Arizona cattlemen protested the contamination of the water supply. Insisting that miner owners and cattle ranchers had to find some way to accommodate one another, Autry laid out the situation in talking to

a mine owner named E.G. Blaine (Arthur Loft): “Blaine that stuff you’re dumping in the water is killing stock all over the range. It’s got to be stopped....The boys are getting sore Blaine, we don’t want to have any trouble. We both have to live and work in this valley. There should be some way for us to come to an agreement.... I figure there must be some way for you to use that water without dumping that waste into it. Dig some drainage pits.... That’d clear up the water and solve both our problems.”⁶⁰

Screenwriters Richard Murphy and Jesse Lasky, Jr. may have drawn upon newsworthy stories about the Miami Copper Company to develop the plot for *Back in the Saddle Again*. Miami Copper made headlines by implementing new leaching techniques designed to extend the life of old mines, allow increased tonnage, and the recovery of low-grade ores. The company employed these techniques to develop the Castle Dome copper ore body, near Bisbee, Arizona. The Castle Dome Copper Company, a subsidiary of Miami Copper, entered into an agreement with the U.S. government with financing from the Defense Plant Corporation (DPC), a subsidiary of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), tasked with the procurement of mineral products to fuel the wartime expansion of industrial productions in 1941. The government contract supplied \$9 million for stripping the overburden and to build a concentrating plant, which the DPC would own and lease to Castle Dome. Miami Copper supplied additional operating capital

needed after completion of the treatment plant. In return, Miami Copper received premium price plan payments for its wartime copper production, a sweetheart deal that paid to the company for ore in excess of production quotas from 1941-46.⁶¹

Autry's rising star in Republic's stable of "B" western film stars created the cash flow needed for Herbert Yates to compete within the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA). Building upon Autry's success, Yates increased Republic Pictures productions to fifty-six features and four serials in 1940. Yates expected to gross \$10,000,000 as a return for his production increases, more than \$160 million in 2011 dollars. His secret to successes involved running the studio like a business. Consequently, Republic made typical westerns on budgets of \$80,000 to \$125,000 per picture, \$1.3 to \$2 million in 2011 dollars. The final costs never missed the mark by more than five percent. Yates' formula produced salable westerns on an assembly line basis, similar to the approach used by P. T. Barnum.⁶²

Herbert Yates explained: "The public has always liked Westerns—you know, cowboys, horses and fine scenery—hillbilly comedies and serials. The proof of the pudding is that Gene Autry is one of the best-loved stars in pictures today. Sure, the story is pretty much the same. There's a hero and the girl and the heavy who's trying to gyp them out of a mortgage or land or cattle. But you change it around a little to give it new trimmings. You've got a formula the

public likes and it's as standardized as granulated sugar. If you like sugar in your coffee why use salt?"⁶³

Republic's formulaic approach relied upon good stories, according to Yates. Good stories and positive messages mattered to both Yates and Autry. Fans valued Gene's character, more than the settings in his films. Again, Yates clarified: "If you have a good yarn you can do it on a low budget and make a picture as entertaining as one costing six times as much. The public doesn't care if your characters are walking around in a set that cost \$50,000. The audience is interested in the characters, not the set. Some of those people out on the Coast seem to forget that show business started in a tent. Today they have everything overcapitalized. You don't have to spend \$3,000,000 to make a good picture or build a \$10,000,000 cathedral to show it in."⁶⁴

Even so, circumstances changed in 1941, as first evidenced by the increased production of airplanes in the San Fernando Valley. Airplanes built for national defense and for service overseas proved challenging for motion picture producers, especially Republic. Situated directly below the air route favored by the test pilots of manufacturing companies putting new planes through their paces, Republic faced constant interruptions from planes flying overhead as many as thirty times a day. Each halt in shooting averaged about three minutes. In response, Yates instructed scenarists to confine many scenes to interiors, so the filming could take place on a sound stage. To get away from the airplanes, stories filmed by Republic in the open air, including all of Autry's pictures, began

shooting on locations far away from the San Fernando Valley, in Lone Pine and other western towns, outside of metropolitan Los Angeles.⁶⁵

Adjusting to the challenges of wartime productions, Yates made \$1,000,000 worth of improvements to a Republic studio worth \$4,000,000 in 1941. He increased Republic's annual budget from \$10 million to \$15 million, an increase of 50 percent over the previous year. Yates announced this increase in productions at a western regional sales meeting held at the studio. He scheduled sixty-six pictures for 1941: thirty-two features; plus 30 westerns; and 4 serials. Six Republic features warranted budgets from \$750,000 and \$1,000,000 each. All this activity made it possible for Republic to become a full-fledged member of the MPPDA in 1941. It took Yates only six years to turn Republic Pictures into a major Hollywood studio. During the same six years, Autry emerged as Yates' biggest star attraction.⁶⁶

By 1941, Autry and Burnette had starred together in forty-six westerns, a team record in Hollywood. The musical-western duo introduced novel new elements to the traditional western film form. Their musical-western films introduced country-western music in a contemporary western setting, where Autry provided the music, through his singing cowboy character, and Burnette providing humor, through his role as a sidekick. Serious regard for their fans contributed greatly to the tremendous popularity enjoyed by the duo. Autry gladly sent photographs of himself and Champion, without charge, to anyone who asked. Fans considered Autry a personal friend. They really appreciated

the singing cowboy's friendly demeanor and they turned out by the millions to enjoy every picture in the "Gene Autry" series.⁶⁷

Republic's success notwithstanding, many Hollywood insiders detested westerns, because the films targeted lower-culture audiences. Still, westerns were huge moneymakers. More sophisticated motion pictures won Academy Awards, but film producers knew that the westerns paid the bills for their artistic triumphs. William S. Hart became the first cowboy-hero to rescue the western genre from its lower-culture status. Tom Mix followed Hart, along with Hoot Gibson, Art Acord, and J. Warren "Crash" Kerrigan. The tremendous grosses piled up by these colorful and virile cowboy stars covered studio losses on more elegant pictures during the silent film era. That cycle rolled on into the 1930s with such heroes as Buck Jones, George O'Brien, Jack Holt, Charles Starrett, Bill Elliott, Tex Ritter, Bill Boyd, Russell Hayden, Tim Holt and others. Autry and Burnette provided the most novel new elements by introducing music through the singing cowboy character, and humor, through the character of the sidekick in a contemporary western setting.⁶⁸

Taking advantage of Autry's rising star, Republic positioned Buck Jones as a rival for America's Favorite Cowboy. Autry's rise to stardom in the mid-1930s came at the expense of Buck Jones who went from making nine films in 1937 to four in 1938. For all intents and purposes, Autry forced Jones into early retirement in 1939. After Tom Mix died, Jones decided to stage a comeback. Buck said he retired in disgust at the state of the cow-screen. It wasn't

consistent with his code of honor to compete with crooners. Once the public embraced Autry's "melodious treacle," Jones retired to his ranch at Sonora, California. Then, he began to think about the youngsters. "They used to want to grow up to be cowboys," Jones noted. "Now they'll want to grow up to be like Gene Autry."⁶⁹

Jones expressed real concern about the seduction of the young generation growing up with decadent musical dramas and fancy singing cowboys. "Of course, if the public still wants them, there's nothing to be done. But I think they've been overdone now and will disappear," he explained. Jones accused Republic Pictures of promoting singing cowboys to save money on horses, riders, and ammunition. "Why, you take Gene Autry and lean him up against a tree with his guitar and let him sing three songs and you can fill up a whole reel without spendin' any money. That's why they've overdone the singing, and that's why it's on the way out," Jones exclaimed!⁷⁰

William Seal, an executive at Republic, added fuel to Jones' fire by listing the five greatest screen cowboys of all time. Seal named Bronco Billy Anderson, William S. Hart, Tom Mix, Gene Autry, and Charles "Buck" Jones as the favorites of western film fans. Irked at being ranked behind Autry, Jones could not deny the box-office success of the top four, but he made a class distinction between those who were real "hands," and those who were actors or crooners first, and cowboys second. Only Tom Mix rivaled Jones as a genuine cowhand. "Bronco Bill started in vaudeville, Bill Hart as an actor and Autry as a radio entertainer,"

Jones noted. He named Gary Cooper as the only other “real hand” working in westerns in 1941. Other real cowpokes on Jones’ list included Will Rogers, Hoot Gibson, and Yakima Kanutt.⁷¹

Jones worried about succession within a canon of western cowboy heroes. He expressed concern that the breed might die out. Jones suggested that Autry led America’s children astray. “A dangerous sign of our synthetic times that movie actors should be encouraged to play cowboy,” Jones said, criticizing Autry for dressing like a dude. Truth be told, Autry owned at least seventy-five cowboy suits, ranging from vivid colors to the palest yellow. In public, he always wore cowboy boots, except when playing golf.⁷²

The rivalry between Jones and Autry ended tragically in 1942. All Hollywood and the millions of youngsters and adults, who loved the typically American, red-blooded western hero, mourned the death of Jones. He died in a disastrous nightclub fire at the Coconut Grove in Boston. Nearly 500 people died in the ghastly blaze. Jones died of smoke inhalation, burned lungs, and third and second degree burns on his face, neck and mouth. The fire broke out at a special party honoring Jones, hosted by New England motion picture exhibitors. Most of the film executives and their wives also died in the fire.⁷³

Autry also rivaled Bing Crosby in 1941. Crosby ranked No. 1 on the music scene, but he placed behind Autry among the “Top Ten” list of box office earners in Hollywood. However, cultural industry insiders pegged Autry as a musical contender for the No. 1 spot. Autry’s work with Republic Pictures and his

Melody Ranch radio show fueled resurgence in the sound recording industry. Songs recorded in a Los Angeles session on March 12, 1940, marked the beginning of a musical makeover for the singing cowboy. Autry introduced a hot new orchestra with a tangy western flavor and the breezy feel of a solid jazz combo. The players included Carl Cotner, Spade Cooley, Paul Sells, Frankie Marvin, Oliver E. "Eddie" Tudor, and Walter Jecker. Later known as the "King of Western Swing," Spade Cooley made the greatest impact on Autry's sound. Cooley played fiddle with the Jimmy Wakely Trio at the Venice Pier Ballroom in Venice, California, while Wakely's band was also backing up Autry on the *Melody Ranch* radio program.⁷⁴

Autry's change in musical styling occurred simultaneously with the efforts of Republic Pictures to transition the singing cowboy out of musical-westerns and into more mainstream Hollywood genres. Aiming to compete with Bing Crosby, Autry's new sound highlighted his maturing vocals. As he abandoned his traditional cowboy sound for more modern popular arrangements, other western recording artist followed suit. Ten gold records between 1940 and 1942 evidenced Autry's status as a trendsetter in popular music. Many of his finest recordings dated from this period.⁷⁵

Autry's run of good fortune began with the gold record sales of "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)," "We're Headin' for the Wide Open Spaces," "Gaucho Serenade," and "Goodbye Little Darlin', Goodbye." His popularity as a recording artist grew intensively with five more gold records in 1941. "Be

Honest with Me” and “You Are My Sunshine” made *The Billboard* popular music chart, peaking at No. 23. The Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences nominated “Be Honest with Me” for an Oscar; but Autry lost out to Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein, the composers of “Last Time I Saw Paris.” His other gold records from 1941 included “Under Fiesta Stars,” “In the Jailhouse Now,” and “Ridin’ on a Rainbow.” Before volunteering for the U.S. Army Air Corps in July 1942, Autry scored two more gold records with “(I’ve Got Spurs) Jingle, Jingle, Jingle” and “Clementine” on the B-side. These songs peaked at No. 14 on *The Billboard* pop chart after Autry’s enlistment.⁷⁶

This tremendous musical output reinforced the popularity of the singing cowboy and the expansion of the “Gene Autry” franchise through synergy in sound recording, motion picture, radio broadcasting, and live-performance productions. As many of these songs became popular music standards in the postwar period, the range of cultural products associated with Autry’s musical output demonstrated the singing cowboy’s significance in the history of American media and cultural industries. To take advantage of this music industry renaissance, Autry extended his franchise into music publishing. He launched Western Music Publishing in 1941 and released the words and music for his many film production numbers in limited editions and folios. “When It’s Round Up Time in Texas,” became the first big seller for Western Music Publishing. Johnny Marvin, the veteran writer and singer of cowboy ballads, collaborated with Autry on several songs for Western Music.⁷⁷

Taking advantage of the “Gene Autry” franchise to improve its status with the Roosevelt administration, The Wrigley Company used *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch* to promote the sale of U.S. Defense Savings Bonds and Stamps. Beginning in June 1941, Autry punctuated his delivery of these public service announcements by repeatedly singing:

“Any Bonds Today?”

Any bonds today?
Bonds of freedom
That’s what I’m selling

Any bonds today?
Scrape up the most you can
Here comes the freedom man
Asking you to buy
A share of freedom today

Any stamps today?
We’ll be blessed
If we all invest in the U.S.A.
Here comes the freedom man
Can’t make tomorrows plan

Not unless you buy
A share of freedom today!⁷⁸

Autry also performed this song to help boost the sale of Defense Savings Bonds and Stamps at state rallies. He made a whirlwind visit to Oklahoma in September 1941, appearing as the headliner at Taft Stadium in Oklahoma City. At other rallies in Enid, Fort Sill, and Tulsa, Autry kicked off local bond sale campaigns. Nested within a great nationwide effort to sell U.S. Defense Savings

Bonds and Stamps, these Oklahoma rallies encouraged young fans to purchase defense savings stamps in denominations ranging from 10¢, 25¢, 50¢, \$1.00, and \$5.00. The singing cowboy expected the members of Gene Autry Friendship Clubs to save their dimes and quarters to buy the attractive stamp books, sold through retail stores. When they filled their stamp books, Autry persuaded his fans to turn them in for \$25.00 U.S. Defense Savings Bonds. The popular Series "E" bonds included \$25, \$50, \$100, \$500, and \$1,000 denominations, returning 2.9 percent interest.⁷⁹

The singing cowboy used a four-point approach to make his patriotic pitches. First, buying Defense Savings Bonds and Stamps helped preserve, protect and defend America's democratic way of life. Autry explained that the U.S. government needed the financial aid of American citizens. Only through the sharing of the task of securing defense could the nation successfully be on guard. Buying government securities represented a partnership with the people owning the best asset in the world. The purchasers of Bonds or Stamps bought a share in America. He made it clear that each purchase helped make it more certain that Americans could avoid the evils of an increased cost of living. Through the sale of bonds and stamps, the government sought to insure against inflation and consequent harm to the citizenship. Thrift and savings represented the best defense against inflation. Additionally, bond purchasers built a reserve for the postwar readjustment period. Personal savings, secured upfront through systematic investments, helped Americans protect against distress and build

security for the readjustments expected with the coming of peace. Autry described how President Roosevelt's approach to war preparedness reversed the techniques used by Wilson in the Liberty Loan drives during the First World War. The president intended no coercion of any kind and no quotas for cities and states to raise funds. This was strictly a voluntary effort aimed at all types of American citizens.⁸⁰

While touring in the Sooner State to sell war bonds, Autry decided to take a look at his growing herd of 1,500 head of prized rodeo stock on his 2,000-acre, Flying A Ranch, near Berwyn, Oklahoma. Autry intended to use the ranch to winter stock for his newest endeavor, "Gene Autry's Flying A Ranch Rodeo Stampede." In 1941, more people paid to see rodeo events than any other sport, excepting professional baseball and college football. Autry decided to stage his own Wild West show and rodeo as an extension of the success formula he developed in western music, sound recording, radio broadcasting, motion pictures, and live performances. He planned a knockout show for the World's Championship Rodeo Finals. Incorporating fluorescent costumes, flags, pennants, and emblems that changed color under black lights, Autry added new stunts and special effects to create a rodeo sensation. He needed at least 150 horses and 500 head of cattle and other livestock to launch the new rodeo. Finding good bucking horses and old-time Texas longhorn steers at a reasonable cost became the biggest problem. Autry considered the costs a good

investment, because he expected to clear \$2,000 per day during the WCRF in Manhattan.⁸¹

To differentiate his rodeo extravaganza from the many celebrity rodeos traveling on circuits across the country, Autry implemented a highly innovative black light show as a mainstay of the Flying A Ranch Rodeo. Manufactured by Keese Engineering of Hollywood, John T. Shannon designed Autry's "Black Light' Lighting Layout for Traveling Troupe" for use in large stadiums like Madison Square Garden. Shannon began working on this "Black-Light Layout" in September 1941. He forwarded blueprints and pencil sketches with full details of the system to Eddie Allen, Autry's rodeo manager. The arrangement conformed to the usual trouping idea of having individual boxes made for each lighting standard to avoid any special packing requirements. Packers merely coiled the wires and put them in the box with reflectors protected in nesting containers.⁸²

While Shannon designed and built this new black light system, Autry headlined for the third time at the sixteenth annual renewal of the World's Championship Rodeo Finals in Madison Square Garden. The rodeo opened in October 1941 with 200 contestants listed for several events on a nineteen-day program. The WCR decided eight rodeo championships with more than \$50,000 in prize money at stake, more than \$770,000 in 2011 dollars. A mounted parade routed between Madison Square Garden and City Hall opened the show with Autry as the Grand Marshal. A colorful panoply of 175 cowboys and cowgirls

also descended on Bellevue Hospital, to the manifest delight of 3,000 patients and staff members. The singing cowboy hero set the stage by evoking the great open spaces of the American West with the accompaniment of Jimmy Wakely's Melody Ranch Sextette. When the WCR moved to Boston, Autry traveled with the troupe to perform during another thirteen-day run. Afterward, he left the WCR tour to concentrate on launching his Flying A Ranch Rodeo.⁸³

By streamlining the rodeo and dressing it up with special lighting effects and luminous costumes, Autry added a sparkle of showmanship borrowed from the stage and screen. He envisioned a western extravaganza, the biggest entertainment spectacle on any amusement circuit in the nation. He announced the premiere of Gene Autry's Flying A Ranch Rodeo at the Houston Fat Stock Show in February 1942, with plans for eight-week tours in the spring and fall. He expected future tours to kick off in a new exhibition building in nearby Ardmore, Oklahoma, where the WPA was building a new indoor arena to seat 6,500 spectators.⁸⁴

To take advantage of Autry's renown, the citizens of Berwyn—227 inhabitants strong—voted unanimously to change the town's name to Gene Autry, Oklahoma. The Carter County Commissioners called a special session to officially approve the name change on November 16, 1941. The Wrigley Company helped stage the event during a live remote broadcast of *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch*. Alvin Bruce presented Autry with the pen used to sign the name change resolution during the national broadcast. J. P. Crowley, General Manager

of the Santa Fe Railroad, supervised the changing of the railroad signage. L. M. Cloney represented the Treasury Department in Washington, D.C., promoting the sale of U.S. Defense Savings Bonds and Stamps. Juanita Hudson presented the singing cowboy hero with a scroll bearing the name of every person in town. Berwyn honored their hero by becoming the first town in the nation to have 100 percent of the residents subscribing to the government's savings bond program. To commemorate the occasion, Autry sang "Don't Bite the Hand That's Feeding You," a patriotic song directed at first generation Americans, made popular during World War I. Press coverage of the event included a swank layout in *Life* magazine that showcased the re-naming ceremonies.⁸⁵

Shannon delivered the complete assembly of Autry's black-light stadium show to Eddie Allen in Hollywood on December 30, 1941. The new special effects cost the western showman a total of \$1,890, more than \$29,000 in 2011 dollars. The final blueprint and complete electrical layout showed a system for twenty black-light units with all the particulars for assembling and disassembling the system as part of a "traveling trouper show" designed for setup in indoor stadiums and arenas across the country. Shannon expressed real excitement for his design, explaining, "Incidentally, all of my boys have been most enthusiastic over the fact that this is the first complete job as large as this in the way of a trouper out-fit that they have worked on." Shannon's system exceeded the cowboy's expectations in every way; but one, eight bulbs burned out during the ten-day premiere in Houston.⁸⁶

Black light special effects and luminescent costumes most definitely added color to an already bright entertainment. Gene Autry's Flying A Ranch Rodeo retained the old thrill events, while adding some flavor of the New West: The show producer explained: "Rodeo is the second largest attraction in the entertainment field today. It is getting more popular. It is a true western sport. It is getting bigger and bigger. Every large city now has a large building or an arena in which the rodeo can be staged indoors and at night. This makes possible features never before possible in rodeo."⁸⁷

The Flying A Ranch Rodeo retained the events that fans expected to see; specifically, the five big events, including bronc-riding, bulldogging, calf roping, bull roping, and wild-cow-milking. Eddie Allen bought rodeo horses, saddle horses, famous bucking horses, rodeo livestock, longhorns, and Brahma steers from all over the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Autry offered large cash purses to assure the stiffest competition for these entry events. He required all of the contestants to ride in a grand entry parade to kick off each performance. Allen dressed the contestants in bright shirts, big hats, and leather chaps or frontier pants, including the trick riders, trick-ropers and other show personnel carried under contract. Autry hired Phelps-Turkell, a costume house in Los Angeles to make specially designed costumes. He placed an order with Ed Gilmore of Hollywood for 160 rodeo saddles, including two elaborately hand-tooled, silver-mounted beauties for personal use.⁸⁸

The Flying A Ranch Rodeo revived an old-time square dancing number with staging under regular floodlights and then switched to stroboscope black-light effects. With the arena blacked-out, the luminous costumes glowed in the dark as the dancers continued their routines. Autry built the climax of his own musical performance around another black-light spectacle; wherein, he serenaded a herd of longhorn cattle rounded up in the arena. Sitting astride Champion, his famous horse, Autry sang cowboy songs to the cattle during a number listed in the program as “The Vanishing Herd.” In the postwar period, the singing cowboy added a dramatic new hit to this nighthawk routine, featuring the highly acclaimed song, “Ghost Riders in the Sky.”⁸⁹

Gold record sales and elaborate rodeo extravaganzas helped Autry make Hollywood’s “Top Ten” list for a second consecutive year in 1941. He placed sixth among the ten biggest moneymaking stars. Mickey Rooney, Clark Gable, Abbott and Costello (as a team), Bob Hope, and Spencer Tracy ranked as bigger stars; but Gene Autry stood in front of Gary Cooper, Bette Davis, James Cagney, and Judy Garland. Autry also topped the list of western stars for a fifth consecutive year. William Boyd (Hopalong Cassidy), Roy Rogers, Charles Starrett, Smiley Burnette, Tim Holt, Johnny Mack Brown, the Three Mesquiteers (ensemble), Bill Elliott, and Tex Ritter followed in Autry’s wake. John Wayne did not rank among the top ten on either list in 1941.⁹⁰

Young moviegoers took part in another public opinion poll conducted by *Young America*, a national weekly magazine. The magazine’s annual survey of

American classrooms showed that average 13-year-olds chose Errol Flynn as the No. 1 movie star, followed by Mickey Rooney, Spencer Tracy, Gary Cooper, Deanna Durbin, Gene Autry and James Stewart. The youth poll showed that boys in their teens went to the movies 4.3 times per month. They paid an average of 13 cents for movie tickets and usually, they went with a pal. Star power, the name or names of movie stars in a film, remained the final factor for youth deciding which movies to see.⁹¹

Increasingly throughout 1941, Wrigley sponsored more war-related programming elements in the *Melody Ranch* broadcasts. In addition to pitches for buying U.S. Defense Savings Bonds and patriotic songs, Doublemint Gum pitches incorporated war references, radio dramas highlighted U.S. military heroes, informative talks focused on the mechanization of the U.S. Cavalry and the relationship of the Cavalry to the Army Air Force. Enlistment pitches profiled contemporary military heroes and special military events, including the program on December 7, 1941, which CBS preempted because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Routinely, Wrigley promoted Americanism, war preparedness and hemispheric cooperation through music, radio drama, and advertising on *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch*.⁹²

Wrigley extended its *Melody Ranch* broadcasts from thirty to forty-five minutes in 1942. Autry's western dramas incorporated more thrilling military topics. He told stories about historical military units, like George Armstrong Custer's 7th Cavalry. He conveyed stories about Congressional Medal of Honor

awardees, such as Lieutenant George Price Hayes, a hero of World War I; and Lieutenant Frank Luke, the namesake of Luke Field, near Phoenix, Arizona. The tag line in Wrigley's introduction of Autry shifted from "America's Favorite Cowboy" to "America's Ace Cowboy," defining their cowboy hero as someone who excelled as an entertainer; but also, associating Autry with the "Ace" combat pilots of the U.S. Army Air Force, those who brought down at least five enemy airplanes.⁹³

As the press announced Autry's participation in President Roosevelt's sixtieth birthday celebration, the cover of *The Movie and Radio Guide* for the week of January 25, 1942, featured a beautiful color picture of the singing cowboy astride his famous horse, Champion. Fans learned that Autry attended the president's birthday ball as a member of the "Victory Committee for Stage, Screen and Radio." He joined twenty-three other Hollywood film players, including Betty Grable, who traveled east for the event. Autry traveled by airplane to deliver his motion-picture industry tribute. While in the nation's capital, he also appeared at a luncheon hosted by the Texas and Oklahoma congressional delegations.⁹⁴

Soon after this trip to Washington, D.C., Gene Autry's Flying A Ranch Rodeo premiered at the Houston Fat Stock Show in the Sam Houston Coliseum. Republic advertised the Autry film, *Cowboy Serenade* (1942), during the live remote radio broadcasts from Radio Station KTRH in Houston. Autry continued his promotions of U.S. Defense Savings Bonds and Stamp sales. He told

adventuresome stories of the U.S. Cavalry and sang several songs, including “El Rancho Grande,” “Don’t Bite the Hand That’s Feeding You,” “Dude Ranch Cowhands,” and “God Must Have Loved America.”⁹⁵

During the *Melody Ranch* program on March 1, 1942, Autry began telling his listeners about a transition taking place with the U.S. Cavalry. He explained that the U.S. Army Air Force was taking over much of the work formerly done by cavalrymen and their mounts, giving the soldiers more time for fighting. He explained that the modern cavalry included thousands of motor vehicles—tanks, armored cars, scout cars, and motorcycles—in addition to plenty of horses. The modern U.S. Cavalry employed a “Portee System” during this transitional phase, using motorized vehicles to quickly transport horses and riders from the scene of one battle to the next. Autry continued his informative talks about the Portee System throughout the spring of 1942. The cowboy hero explained: “The U.S. Cavalry has always played a prominent part in American history. And every cavalryman looked back with pride on men like Custer and Steward and Sheridan and all of the others who left the glorious tradition upon which the Calvary is founded. And those same cavalrymen are as indispensable part of the model war tank and manpower army fighting for freedom this very minute.”⁹⁶

In April 1942, Autry launched his first Flying A Ranch Rodeo tour, using his *Melody Ranch* radio programs to promote his western extravaganza. Wrigley and CBS used the opportunity to add *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch* to the programming available via shortwave broadcasting to U.S. Army soldiers, sailors,

and marines serving worldwide. In May 1942, CBS began to distribute *Melody Ranch* over a new Latin American network of 76 stations in 20 countries. Republic Pictures took advantage of the new shortwave programming to promote its latest films in the “Gene Autry” series—*Heart of the Rio Grande* and *Home in Wyomin’*—in theaters everywhere. Wrigley joined the bandwagon by promoting Gene Autry’s Flying A Ranch Rodeo as an opportunity for Doublemint Gum chewers to see America’s Ace Cowboy in person. As Autry’s traveling troupe moved from an arena in Cleveland to Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Washington, New Haven, and Providence, Wrigley sponsored live remote broadcasts of *Melody Ranch* from the host cities en route.⁹⁷

Wrigley sponsored the airing of PSAs for scrap rubber drives that tied in with a corporation organized by Autry and others called Records for Our Fighting Men. Kay Kyser, Dr. Sigmund Spaeth, Fritz Reiner, and Kate Smith worked with Autry as directors of the company. Records for Our Fighting Men existed for a twofold purpose: salvaging old records for scrap and the use of proceeds of salvage sales to buy new records and phonographs for men in the U.S. Armed Forces. In New York, the American Legion and Auxiliary collected 37,500,000 old and broken phonograph records to be sold as scrap material to record factories. President Roosevelt’s Committee on War Relief Agencies approved the project. Roosevelt’s administration used the proceeds to buy and install jukeboxes in service posts in the United States and overseas.⁹⁸

As these programs launched, Autry began heavy promotion of a U.S. Army Air Force campaign to recruit two million volunteers for various types of duty. In addition to recruitment pitches, Wrigley revamped the *Melody Ranch* radio dramas, adding thrilling stories of modern aviation to the thrilling stories of the military exploits previously recorded. These stories of heroism featured manly men according to Autry: "Part of the reward came in the satisfaction of knowing that they were men's men and part of it came from the United States government. Lt. Yarlborough and Lt. O'Brien each received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroism.... And their action is only a sample of the incentive and loyalty, which is in the heart of every man who wears the uniform of Uncle Sam's Air Force.... I am sure Uncle Sam will have no trouble in getting his Air Force of two million, because every man between the ages of 18 and 26 knows that if he is accepted he's automatically classed as one of the best equipped men in the world and he has for his association other real men."⁹⁹

In July 1942, the *New York Times* published a letter written by Frances Morehouse that accused American radio of denying the state of total war that had engulfed the United States. Broadcasters in general took exception to this letter, describing it as a gross misstatement about their war work. CBS pointed out the ignorance of the Morehouse statement: "It would seem that Miss Morehouse is not a radio listener, or she would know how well aware radio is of total war, and how hard it works at the tasks of information, propaganda and morale. If she listened to sponsored programs, how could she have missed

Cheers from the Camps or the Gene Autry show, which is programmed by the Air Forces?”¹⁰⁰

Republic Pictures consciously catered to an amalgamating U.S. market. Republic’s patriotic escapist entertainment gained traction with a larger movie-going public as the United States became a combatant in the Second World War. The “Gene Autry” series reinforced the traditional American values of patriotism, conservatism, self-reliance, and justice. The studio expanded by following the shift in population from rural and small town regions to industrial centers. Wartime work increased the demand for Republic Pictures in urban areas. As the studio’s audience physically moved and grew larger, moviegoers remained the same in their entertainment habits.¹⁰¹

Republic Pictures increasingly sought to take advantage of Autry’s popularity as a star of radio and rodeo in its scenarios developed for film. Likewise, the incorporation of pro-government messaging became common currency in Republic’s “Gene Autry” series. *Home in Wyomin’*, released on April 29, 1942, opened with scenes of an attendant sitting behind the reception desk of a New York radio station listening to Autry sing, “Be Honest With Me.” The camera pulled back to reveal the cowboy-hero singing live in front of an audience in Studio D, when Benson (Fay McKenzie) and Hackett (Chick Chandler), journalists working for *Airwave Review* magazine, strode in with plans for an interview. Making jokes about the cowboy crooner, these reporters characterized the response of the mainstream media to the “Gene Autry”

phenomenon in 1942. Hackett asked, “Where’s the animal act? The singing milkman? Gene Autry?”¹⁰²

As the reporters enter Studio D, the camera zoomed in on the announcer introducing Autry’s next song, “Now, a special musical message from Gene Autry.... ‘Any Bonds Today.’” Without mentioning Wrigley by name, this scene depicted the chewing gum manufacturer’s support for President Roosevelt through sponsorship of *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch*. Inserting this scene logically into the context of *Home in Wyomin’* mirrored the real-life experiences of Autry performing on his radio program. Listeners routinely heard the singing cowboy promote efforts for Defense Savings Bond and Stamp sales and other means of support for federal government efforts to prepare the nation for war. In movie houses after Pearl Harbor, once the U.S. had entered the war, these messages carried added poignancy without panic. Everything remained under control in Autry’s world. His pitches promoting bonds and stamps sales were very matter-of-fact. They blended into the storylines of Republic’s contemporary New West dramas. After these initial radio station scenes, the remainder of *Home in Wyomin’* told the story of a fledgling rodeo troupe, intended to dramatize the real-life hardships experienced by those responsible for launching Gene Autry’s Flying A Ranch Rodeo.¹⁰³

Moviegoers got a full preview of the Gene Autry Rodeo in *Bells of Capistrano* (1942); but, it turned out to be a last hurrah. As soon as the film for this picture wrapped, Autry planed east to Chicago, where he enlisted in the U.S.

Army Air Force. The premise of the film involved Autry joining the World Wide Wild West and Rodeo outfit; thereby, adding a crooner attraction to spice up the more traditional entries. *Bells of Capistrano* dramatized an uneasy union between western music and western sports. Old timers and traditionalists did not care for the cowboy crooner; yet, they could not deny Autry's box office success. Large crowds and increased ticket sales won over the most ardent opposition.¹⁰⁴

Setting the climax of the film in San Juan Capistrano created an opportunity to combine a rodeo story with the music and dancing of a Mexican fiesta; thereby, associating Good Neighbor images more closely with war preparedness themes, represented in a Grand Entry parade sequence, featuring the regular troupers of Gene Autry's Flying A Ranch Rodeo, capped by Autry himself, singing, "Don't Bite the Hand that's Feeding You," the unfurling of a gigantic American flag, and a closing number, "Cavalcade of Men Who Made America." References to Madison Square Garden and the WCR Finals dramatized the national significance associated with America's biggest stage in New York City.¹⁰⁵

By 1942, major film companies simply could not ignore the popularity of musical-western films. High ratings for Autry in polls of popular stars demonstrated that the Republic series was not limited to western audiences. Even so, Hollywood never seemed to embrace Autry; nor, did it seem, to embrace Republic Pictures. Heavy-handed Americanism on the part of Yates and

Autry more than likely dampened support from many Hollywood types. As the U.S. entered into war, Republic's promotion of the "hundred percenter" suggested a thoroughgoing nationalism that sometimes came off as extreme or unjustified. Patriotism and the values of "The American Way" provided a major impetus in Republic's cultural products. Hence, the studio's message films, based on topical social issues, provided important gauges of popular social thought as the United States became a combatant in the Second World War.¹⁰⁶

Patriotism and the American way of life appeared central to Autry's identity after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. His decision to leave a lucrative show business career to join the U.S. Army Air Force verified his status as a "hundred percenter." Completely dedicated to the causes of nationalism under the leadership of Roosevelt's wartime administration, Autry explained his philosophy in an interview widely circulated through newspapers: "Everybody ought to think of winning the war ahead of anything else.... Every movie cowboy ought to devote time to the Army winning or to helping win until the war is won—the same as any other American citizen. The Army needs every young man it can get, and if I can set a good example for the young men I'll be mighty proud. Seventeen and eighteen [year olds] are needed, and some of those young boys are my fans. I say to them and to all you young men, every young man should give everything he can for the war effort. If we train young pilots and the war continues for a long stretch, those boys of seventeen or eighteen will be a protectorate over the whole country. I wanted to join the Air Corps rather than

the other branches of the services because I felt I could do more good for the war effort there than any other place—because I have been interested in flying for the past ten years.”¹⁰⁷

Arriving in Chicago for a weeklong run with the Flying A Ranch Rodeo at Soldiers Field, Autry continued his live remote broadcasting of *Melody Ranch*. The show on July 26, 1942, proved special, when Autry decided to enlist in the U.S. Army Air Force. With millions of people listening, across the country and around the world, Orvon Gene Autry took his oath of enlistment. Autry went through his induction ceremony on the air, with Lieutenant Colonel Edward Shaifer assigning him the rank of Technical Sergeant. Afterward, Autry said:

Folks, I am very happy that I've done this and I know that many more real Americans feel the same way that I do. Watching what Hitler and Hirohito and their teammates have been doing since they started running over defenseless countries stealing their food and making slaves of their people, all lovers of liberty have been aroused to do something about it. That's the real reason why I'm proud that I am now a member of Uncle Sam's fighting forces. Come on in fellas. If you're not in yet, now's the time. Your country needs you more than ever before....¹⁰⁸

All things considered, using Autry's enlistment as a publicity stunt for recruitment made sense as the U.S. Army Air Forces embarked on a quest to recruit two million young men between the ages of 18 and 26. Autry inspired thousands of boys listening to his broadcasts to join the U.S. Army. For millions of listeners, the singing cowboy symbolized American righteousness as a protector of the weak and oppressed. Autry's enlistment broadcast kicked off a

special campaign of five days called “V-Days” that involved thousands of volunteer war bond salesmen, going door-to-door to meet Illinois’ July war bond quota of \$85 million.¹⁰⁹

Autry’s efforts were designed to appeal to smaller purchasers buying Series “E” bonds. Higher July quotas, calling for a 51 percent increase over June sales, spurred the decision to hold the special bond drive. A streetcar painted red, white and blue, advertising war bonds, made its initial appearance in the Chicago Loop with drum majorettes from the Flying “A” Stampede as passengers. Autry worked the intersection of State Street and Van Buren, known as Treasury corner, serenading bond buyers with renditions of “Any Bonds Today?” and “Jingle, Jingle, Jingle,” his most recent gold record. He autographed war stamp boutonnieres to sell for \$1.¹¹⁰

After May 1, 1941, when the Roosevelt administration began using radio time and talent to sell U.S. Defense Savings Bonds and Stamps, CBS and Wrigley supported PSAs on *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch*, contributing to an estimated \$62,000,000 in radio time and talent, donated by national broadcasters and advertisers for a series of war loan drives. Autry proved especially adept at encouraging young boys and girls to save their nickels and dimes to buy stamps and then convert their stamps books to savings bonds over time. He encouraged Americans to put ten percent of their income into the popular Series “E” bonds, including \$25, \$50, \$100, \$500 and \$1,000 denominations.¹¹¹

Along with the Air Forces recruitment and war bond loan drive efforts, Autry also helped the American Legion and the United Service Organization (USO) raise a \$1.7 million war fund campaign. Collections for the USO were taken up nightly at Gene Autry's Flying "A" Stampede. In addition, America's singing pal joined other radio and stage stars of Chicago, appearing at USO-American Legion booths in the loop during the lunch hour to help members of the Legion auxiliary at counters where contributions were being received.¹¹²

The U.S. Army Air Forces allowed Wrigley to continue broadcasting *Melody Ranch* after Autry's induction, to recruit radio listeners interested in the aims, needs, and accomplishments of Army aviation. Autry kept telling stories of real-life efforts to win the war. He supplemented these inspirational segments with news and information about the officers and men in the Army Air Force, and efforts to preserve the American way of life. CBS broadcast his first program as *Sergeant Gene Autry* from an imaginary airfield, where the new recruit described a typical day in the life of an Army Air Force corpsman.¹¹³

The War Department made a point of disclaiming any endorsement of Wrigley's Doublemint Gum, while stating that Autry received no added pay for his radio work. Gene continued to pepper his show with public service announcements, Defense Savings Bond promotions, and recruitment pitches. He sang songs like "Silver Wings on the Moonlight" and "There's a Star-Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere." Wrigley's announcer explained the changes: "Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Although Gene Autry is no longer

appearing on Melody Ranch for Doublemint Gum, he will continue to bring his songs and thrilling stories of the exploits of the brave men of the Army Air Forces, because Doublemint Gum has assigned the time formerly used for the Melody Ranch program to the United States Army Air Forces. Gene Autry is no longer representing Doublemint Gum. He is now Sergeant Gene Autry and his appearance on the radio is under the supervision of the Army Air Forces. In the interest of supplying *information and entertainment* to the public and to acquaint young men of America with details of life around Army Air Forces flying fields, Sergeant Autry has been detailed to bring to you dramatizations of true stories from the official records this splendid organization. Sergeant Autry's participation in this radio program for the time being is a part of his regular duties in the Army Air Forces and he receives no compensation for so doing other than his sergeant's pay. Doublemint gum now turns broadcast over the United States Army Air Forces (italics added).¹¹⁴

I added the italics in this quote to emphasize an admission on the part of Wrigley's announcer, offering information and entertainment in several cultural products, including *Melody Ranch*, Republic pictures, patriotic songs, and personal appearances. Autry joined the U.S. Army Air Force because he understood the seriousness of the Second World War. He recognized World War II as an unfolding historical event. With enemies threatening the United States from both east and west, Gene explained the need to build modern high-speed, long-range bombers that could safely reach enemy nations:

The future of our lives and homes and the safety of our families depend on our building the superior air force and hitting the enemy faster and harder than he can hit us. We're building the machines and training the men to fly them. The faster we build them and the faster we train men the sooner we are going to make America safe....¹¹⁵

In September 1942, Autry settled in for an extended tour of duty at Luke Field, near Phoenix, Arizona. He continued broadcasting every Sunday evening from the recreation hall at Luke Field. Wrigley invited listeners to take part in the Army Air Forces Sunday night recreation period. Millions listened in each week to learn something about army aviation. Occasionally, Autry traveled to other bases, including Bakersfield, California, and Chicago, Illinois, where he made live remote broadcasts. He also broadcast a live remote show from the Burbank Recreation Building, a benefit for the employees of Lockheed and the Vega Aircraft Corporation.

Before enlisting in the U.S. Army Air Force, Autry signed a memorandum of agreement to merge his fledgling rodeo outfit with Everett Colburn's World's Championship Rodeo in exchange for a 20 percent ownership share in the larger sporting spectacle. Autry allowed the World's Championship Rodeo to use his name, both singularly and in combination with the WCR logo to promote rodeo events. He also agreed not to make any personal appearances with other rodeo outfits, unless the WCR gave its written consent. Autry considered other income derived from personal appearances as separate and of no interest for the WCR. Finally, Gene pensioned his beloved horse, Champion, until the war was over.

Champ got to spend his days sharing a pasture with Tony, Jr., Tom Mix's old horse. The cowboy kept Tony, Jr. in clover after Mix died in 1940.¹¹⁶

C O N C L U S I O N

The return of the western genre to the mainstream of American culture in 1939 surprised critics who "formed the habit of taking our horse operas in the Class B stride." Universal's release of *Stagecoach* by director John Ford captured the eye of many reviewers; nonetheless, films like *In Old Monterey*, *Rovin' Tumbleweeds*, and *South of the Border*, released by Republic Pictures in first-run theaters, catapulted Autry onto the Hollywood A-list. Riding high in 1940 as America's number one western film star *and* one of the motion picture industry's top-ten box office earners, Autry played a significant role in positioning the cowboy hero as a representation of American culture on the international stage. Despite strong reviews for *Stagecoach*, John Wayne remained an also-ran among western stars, during the run up to World War II. An isolationist before the war, Wayne's climb to the top did not come until the postwar period. He ranked No. 1 in Hollywood from 1949-52.

Asked to explain Autry's prominence as the leader in the movie cowboy corral, critics appeared flabbergasted. One distinguishing factor resided in the singing cowboy's support for President Roosevelt. Three-quarters of Republic's films starring Autry showed support for Roosevelt's New Deal, Good Neighbor, and war preparedness policies. Autry's ability to communicate information in

the public interest through multiplatform entertainments aided the President in shaping public opinion through motion pictures, radio broadcasts, sound recordings, live performances, and licensed merchandise. Gold record sales, western rodeo extravaganzas, and a nationally syndicated radio show positioned Autry as a rival to Bing Crosby in the American mainstream from 1940-42. Autry's reign ended when he stopped making movies, after enlistment in the U.S. Army Air Forces. During the war, Republic promoted Roy Rogers as The King of the Cowboys, in addition to rereleasing several fan favorites from the "Gene Autry" series.

Responding to the example set by residents of Gene Autry, Oklahoma, where 100 percent of the town purchased U.S. Defense Savings Bonds and Stamps, Autry qualified himself as a "hundred percenter," after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. One hundred percent committed to preserving, protecting, and defending the American Way of Life, patriotism became paramount in the life of the singing cowboy. Winning the war against the Axis powers took precedent before everything. Building a superior air force provided the means of achieving victory; so, Autry devoted himself to recruiting the two million young men and women that the Army Air Force estimated as necessary to win the war.

To strengthen its association with the Army Air Force, The Wrigley Company rebranded America's Favorite Cowboy as America's Ace Cowboy. American media culture transformed Autry from the New Deal Cowboy of 1936

into an Ambassador of Goodwill in 1939. Outreach to Great Britain and Latin America increased significantly as wars raged in Europe and Manchuria. The New Deal Cowboy codified a brand of American patriotism, rooted in a contemporary New West, forged under Roosevelt's Presidency, and adopted internationally as Gene Autry's Cowboy Code.

Music provided the glue that held Autry's multiplatform entertainments together. Synergy elevated the singing cowboy's persona to new heights as an international icon. As Autry reached beyond his traditional audiences to embrace the mainstream in American culture, he changed his musical styling to develop a stronger appeal. During a recording session in Los Angeles on March 12, 1940, Autry's Musical Director Carl Cotner introduced a new sound by mashing up of country-western and jazz styles to create a type of western swing music. Marking the day the music changed, fiddle player Spade Cooley, the King of Western Swing, made the difference in Autry's new sound. On best sellers like "Goodbye, Little Darlin', Goodbye," "Call of the Canyon," "Be Honest with Me," and "Broomstick Buckaroo," Cooley repositioned the singing cowboy hero to move beyond the western genre into the popular mainstream of American music. Competing for the top spot with Bing Crosby, Autry earned ten gold records and an Oscar nomination for "Be Honest With Me." Recognition from ASCAP positioned the singing cowboy at the center of American popular culture. In the postwar period, many of Autry's songs became popular music standards, thus, demonstrating his significance in the history of American media culture, a

combination of sound recording, motion pictures, broadcasting, mass printing, and live performances.

After five years in Hollywood, Autry returned to regular radio broadcasting with the launch of *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch*. Wrigley's announcer compared the American singing cowboy with the European knight in shining armor. *Melody Ranch* promoted self-reliance and a life lived close to nature as real American traits. Honesty, integrity, sincerity, clean thinking, and authenticity represented the range of admirable qualities put forth by "Youth's Model 1940." Celebrating the President's birthday with the First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt as a special guest, Autry promoted an all-American musical tribute on *Melody Ranch*, showing unity through harmony and diversity in melody over the airwaves. *Melody Ranch* simulated a real American get-together, propagating freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and freedom of speech as cornerstones of American culture. *Melody Ranch* embodied the source of Autry's uniqueness. The homeland for a new western identity, *Melody Ranch* symbolized Americanism, war preparedness, and hemispheric cooperation as aspects of The American Way.

Autry's main stage performances at the World's Championship Rodeo mashed up rodeo sports with his other cultural products in the western genre. Improved technology with microphones, amplifiers, and loudspeakers enabled promoters at Madison Square Garden to offer a live concert experience as part of a rodeo extravaganza for 17,000 fans assembled nightly to enjoy the

spectacle. After a year on tour doing stadium shows, Autry established his own outfit in 1941. Gene Autry's Flying "A" Ranch Rodeo provided an incredibly extravagant marvel for the World's Championship Rodeo circuit. Autry incorporated black light special effects into the Flying "A" premiere at the Houston Fat Stock Show, marking another historical precedent for future stadium events.

As the biggest star at Republic Pictures, Autry provided the cultural products used by Herbert Yates to build his studio into a major motion picture producer and distributor. Becoming a member of the MPPDA in 1941, Republic gained its footing by combining New Deal, Good Neighbor, and war preparedness themes during the run up to World War II. *Boots and Saddles*, *Western Jamboree* and *In Old Monterey* numbered among the earliest and most important films of the era. Republic released *In Old Monterey* as Autry's first "Super Western" in 1939. Produced and distributed in first-run theaters across the country, the film featured Autry in a soldier's uniform. The studio incorporated actual newsreel footage into the musical-western fantasy, and a hard-sell patriotic speech by Autry warning his fans about the dangers of isolationism and the need for training bases in the Southwest. Autry argued for the transformation of the western states from a fantasyland for travelers and tourists into a manufactured landscape designed to accommodate the growing defense industries.

This benchmark foreshadowed future acts of patriotism and extraordinary efforts to achieve victory for the United States and its Allies. Foregoing the typical escapist adventure at the root of the “Gene Autry” series, *In Old Monterey* pushed the boundaries of realism in representing the circumstances faced by real westerners dealing with the U.S. Army. The film reflected tie-ups with FDR’s unprecedented third term. The “Vote for Autry” song reminded fans of the 1936 re-election campaign. They remembered Gene’s performance of the same song in *Guns and Guitars*. As America’s Ace Cowboy saturated the mainstream of popular culture, he drew comparisons with another Oklahoman, Will Rogers, one of the best-known celebrities of the 1920s and 1930s.

Promoting record sales, movie ticket sales, and concert ticket sales with live radio performances, Autry created new forms of synergy within the western genre to reflect the changes taking place in the American cultural and media industries. Autry’s inclusion on the Hollywood A-list provided one reflection. His gold records sales delivered another. Sold out stadium shows at WCR events offered a third mirror. Music supplied the source of synergy between motion pictures, sound recording, radio broadcasting, and music publishing. Films like *Melody Ranch* and *Back in the Saddle* made available eponymous song and film titling tied up with the *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch* radio program.

Wrigley supported war preparedness by limiting its products for consumption by service men and women. In 1941, Wrigley infused *Melody*

Ranch with war-related programming in songs, historical dramas, and feature stories about heroic soldiers. The gum merchant supported U.S. Defense Savings Bond and Stamp sales by adding more promotions to the weekly program, increasing its time slot from 30 to 45 minutes in 1942. Singing “Any Bonds Today,” America’s Ace Cowboy sold Savings Bonds and Stamps at state rallies in Oklahoma and elsewhere, delivering patriotic pitches about The American Way, encouraging fans to invest in a share of America, control inflation, and build a cash reserve.

Melody Ranch remained a part of Autry’s identity for the rest of his life. He created a real life Melody Ranch in November 1941, linking together his radio show, motion pictures, and sound recordings with the same name. Located in the hills at the upper end of the San Fernando Valley, Melody Ranch encompassed 150-acres of rolling pasture hemmed on three sides by steep hills, about 30 miles from the studio. The trees lining the roadway filled with singing birds, making apt the name of the place. Gene and Ina Autry remained living at Melody Ranch until 1949, when they built a new home in the Hollywood Hills. After moving to Studio City, the Autry’s donated their San Fernando Valley home to the St. Vincent de Paul for use as a Ranch Camp, and moved Melody Ranch to the old Monogram Pictures movie ranch in Placerita Canyon, near Newhall, California. Autry planned to do something that many in Hollywood were seeking to do in 1952. He intended to give every visitor to Los Angeles an opportunity to see motion pictures and television films being made. He organized guided tours

of the Melody Ranch back lot, where vacationers learned about the various phases and techniques of moviemaking.

6

“(I’ve Got Spurs That) Jingle, Jangle, Jingle”

*Yippy yeah, there will be no wedding bells
For today, I’ve got spurs that jingle, jangle, jingle
As I go ridin’ merrily along
And they sing, ‘Oh, ain’t you glad you’re single’
And that song ain’t so very far from wrong*

—Gene Autry

CONCLUSION

Frank Loesser wrote the lyrics and Joseph Lilley composed the music for “(I’ve Got Spurs That) Jingle, Jangle, Jingle.” Autry recorded the song in Hollywood on June 11, 1942. The American Record Corporation (ARC) released the tune on multiple labels, including Okeh, Columbia (United States and Canada), Regal-Zonophone, (England, Australia, and Ireland), and Melody Ranch Records. A few days later, the singing cowboy performed the song live for the first time on *Gene Autry’s Melody Ranch*. Encore performances followed on the program in July and August 1942. In Chicago with “Gene Autry’s Flying ‘A’ Ranch Rodeo,” he serenaded fans on Treasury corner—State Street and Van Buren—in the downtown loop. Autry sang, “Jingle, Jangle, Jingle,” while autographing war

stamp boutonnieres to sell to the lunchtime crowd. Radio play and live performances promoted record sales.¹

The song went gold for the western troubadour the week of August 25, 1942, topping out at No. 14 on *The Billboard* popular music chart. Fans heard the singing cowboy perform “Jingle, Jangle, Jingle” live one last time on the *Sergeant Gene Autry* program, broadcast October 11 from Luke Field, an air training school near Phoenix, Arizona. Autry served for about a year at Luke Field, training for the Ferry Command or a job as a flight instructor for the U.S. Army Air Forces. After World War II, he included the song as a standard in his shows from 1945-51.²

Tex Ritter and Kay Kyser also recorded “Jingle, Jangle, Jingle” in 1942, along with Dick Thomas, who performed the song for Paramount Pictures in *The Forest Rangers* (1942), a film starring Fred MacMurray. Ritter did not score a hit with the song, but it became a standard in his repertoire, reappearing on many albums during a long career lasting until 1976. Kyser performed the song routinely with his orchestra until 1950. More recently, a younger generation of fans gained familiarity with “Jingle, Jangle, Jingle” from a trailer for *Fallout: New Vegas*, unveiled at E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo), an annual trade fair for the computer and video games industry, presented by Entertainment Software Association.³

In the months leading up to the release of *Fallout: New Vegas* on October 11, 2011, more than 650,000 fans listened to “Jingle, Jangle, Jingle” watching the

trailer posted to *YouTube* by the video game publisher, ZeniMax Media. No longer reflecting the optimism and hope of the New Deal, the settings for *Fallout: New Vegas* mirrored the treacherous wastes in the Great Southwest; a post-apocalyptic New West, “where you make a name for yourself on a thrilling new journey across the Mojave wasteland.” Another 43,000 fans watched the *YouTube* video of Dick Thomas performing the song in a video clip from *The Forest Rangers*. As a new generation comes to discover the arts, entertainment, and recreation created by Autry before World War II, the take-away messages mean something different. Yet, for Autry’s original fans, times were also very bleak during the Great Depression. It is all in how one chose to look at the situation. Today, in a world without singing cowboy heroes, that outlook seems hopeless.⁴

Autry never expanded his multiplatform entertainment into video gaming or the Internet. He stopped performing in 1987; about the time these new mediums became part of the U.S. information economy. Instead of growing into new electronic entertainment mediums, Autry turned his attention to producing motion pictures and video recordings for television, distributing cultural products as a radio and television broadcaster, and developing new content in the form of spectator sports.

Consolidating several companies, Autry became the largest promoter of American rodeo sports during the 1950s, and then, he developed the Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League into a Major League Baseball

franchise. Changing the team name to the California Angeles and moving the team to Anaheim, near Disneyland, Autry broadcast every game over his West Coast radio network, and he televised many games from his flagship station, KTLA-TV in Hollywood.

A year after Ina Autry passed in 1980; Gene married Jacqueline Ellam and together, they began divesting his radio and television broadcasting enterprises. With the help of her good friend and founding executive director, Joanne Hale, Jackie Autry got her husband into the museum business, opening the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum in 1988, and guiding its growth and development into the Autry National Center of the American West, after a merger with the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, and a cooperative agreement with the California Historical Society in 2003.

In a lifetime that encompassed most of the twentieth century, Autry offered his fans an incredible variety of cultural products, covering the western genre over much of the Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation spectrum. Music provided the means for Autry to nurture transmedia storytelling. Popularizing songs across multiple information mediums, he created synergy as an independent artist, writer and performer, who also worked with performing arts companies and spectator sports as a promoter, agent, and manager for artists, athletes, entertainers, and other public figures. In the 1940s, Autry learned how to inundate American media culture with information in the public interest. At that time, the U.S. information economy included enterprises engaged in the

production and distribution of information and cultural products, businesses providing the means to transmit or distribute cultural products, companies transmitting or distributing data and communications, firms involved with data processing, and information services organizations. Autry worked in the motion picture and sound recording industries, broadcasting industries, and publishing industries; simultaneously, he saturated these sizeable subsectors of the U.S information economy with his western-themed cultural products.⁵

When Autry enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces on July 26, 1942, the thirty-five-year-old was married with no children; but he had an extended family that remained close and dependent upon him. He entered the U.S. Army as a technical sergeant, a noncommissioned officer. Forsaking his six-shooter for an Army rifle, the cowboy patriot left Chicago to report for basic training at the Santa Ana Army Air Base on August 16, 1942. Sergeant Autry was a civilian flyer with more than 200 hours in the air; however, the Army Air Corps thought he could make a greater contribution working special details, raising money to support President Roosevelt's war effort.⁶

Autry continued performing on *Sergeant Gene Autry*, until August 1943, providing entertainment each week, targeting young men and women in service to their country from the mess hall at Luke Field. Doing his best to sell U.S. Defense Savings Bonds and Stamps, the singing cowboy imported Mary Lee, Judy Canova and Max Terhune from Hollywood to help entertain the troops in

November 1942. He continued working out of Luke Field until 1944, when the Army Air Forces reassigned him to Love Field, near Dallas, Texas.

Autry earned his service pilot wings at Love Field and the Air Corps promoted him to the position of flight officer with the 91st Ferrying Squadron. He worked repositioning airplanes from one field of battle to another in 1944-45, piloting many types of aircraft during the last year of the war. Autry flew over the famous "Burma Hump" on the eastern end of the Himalayan Mountains, moving military transport aircraft from India to China to resupply the Chinese war effort of Chiang Kai-shek, and the units of the U.S. Army Air Forces based in China.⁷

Autry stopped making movies after his enlistment in July 1942; but he continued producing records, performing on the radio, publishing music, and making personal appearances during the war. Even so, the singing cowboy managed to remain on the Hollywood top-ten list for a third consecutive year. The comedy team of Bud Abbott and Lew Costello topped Quigley's annual survey of the ten biggest moneymaking film personalities in 1942, moving up from the third position they held the previous year. Following Abbott and Costello on the top-ten list, Clark Gable placed second, then Gary Cooper, Mickey Rooney, Bob Hope, James Cagney, Gene Autry, Betty Grable, Greer Garson, and Spencer Tracy. Among the western movie stars, Autry remained the leader for a sixth consecutive year; followed by Roy Rogers, William Boyd, Smiley Burnette, Charles Starrett, Johnny Mack Brown, Bill Elliott, Tim Holt, Don "Red"

Barry, and the Three Mesquiteers. Hedda Hopper reported that Abbott and Costello films were wildly popular in occupied France during the war and that their films were being smuggled into Paris, along with Autry's pictures, and Julien Duvivier's film, *The Great Waltz*.⁸

Critics predicted that military absorption would affect Autry's position in 1943, despite his great vogue in the hinterland. Republic kept the image of America's Favorite Cowboy in front of fans by re-releasing some of the better-class "oldies" made by Autry before the war. After Autry enlisted, Roy Rogers claimed a wrenched back and chronic arthritis to stay out of the war. Republic positioned Rogers to replace Autry as the studio's number one western star. Nevertheless, The Original Singing Cowboy remained popular, taking delivery of fan mail averaging 50,000 letters per month.⁹

As the nation's economic situation improved, dislocated Southern and Midwestern migrants formed a significant part of the core workforce in the rapidly expanding armament industries, emanating from outward from Los Angeles. Themes in Republic films shifted from the plight of western migrants and rural social issues, more generally, to the tastes of newly moneyed and recently established urban hillbillies. The growing popularity of the western genre during the war years suggested that these audiences did not lose their taste for adventure and romance, even though, they no longer felt the same fears of dispossession, displacement and economic insecurity that they experienced during the depression years. Compared to films produced in the

“Gene Autry” series from 1935-42, westerns produced during the war addressed a different set of anxieties and desires.¹⁰

Earlier and more stridently than most entertainers, Autry supported U.S. foreign policy and did what he could to assist the American state. He favored radio broadcasting for the task of spreading Americanism because he could reach more people and reach them quicker than he could through motion pictures. Yet he knew that Hollywood had a deeper and more meaningful impact on the attitudes of people in other nations toward the United States, and toward one another. Autry embraced the fact that capitalism and patriotism went hand-in-hand with U.S. foreign policy. He understood that global economics motivated the convergence of cultures through mass media. Increased respect and tolerance for the national, cultural, and religious sensitivities of people around the world appeared as a consequence of mass media converging cultures. Autry represented the United States of America in this global media market. He joined FDR in an attempt to control mass media as an element of public diplomacy.

The difference from 1942-45 was that Sergeant Gene Autry carried out these activities as a serviceman, not as a private citizen. The singing cowboy helped diffuse radical tensions threatening capitalism in the United States by making it easier for people to feel good about themselves, their situations, and their neighbors, both north and south of the border. The key to success for both Autry and FDR lay in the mastery of mass mediums.

As a live performer, recording artist, radio broadcaster and movie star, Autry was a real American hero who did not require coercion to support the President, unlike most other western stars, who generally supported isolationism. Roosevelt did not have to threaten Wrigley and CBS with tighter regulations by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Republic Pictures was not the target of intimidating Justice Department lawsuits. In working to promote Americanism, hemispheric cooperation, and war preparedness, Autry's movies influenced audiences on a deeper emotional level, while his sound recordings, radio shows, and live performances elicited more impulsive responses. Autry favored radio for the task of spreading Americanism, stating: "In a single broadcast one can reach more people faster with the American doctrines."¹¹

Gene Autry's contributions to the cultural and intellectual history of the United States were both timely and significant. His cultural products connected the arts, entertainment, and recreation through multiple information mediums with the policies of the Roosevelt administration. Music endured as the one element common to all the forms of art, entertainment, and recreation featuring the "Gene Autry" brand. Music proved to be a transcendent form of art and entertainment that tied up sound recording, music publishing, live performance, radio broadcasting, motion pictures, and licensed merchandise into one name-brand enterprise. The coming together of country-western music and musical-western films created big box office attractions and a story without precedent in

the arts, entertainment, and advertising worlds. The growth of radio broadcasting as a new information medium stood out as the greatest influence upon the hybridization of country-western music and the incorporation of this new subgenre into musical-western films.

Autry chose to become a country-western musician and musical-western film star because the western genre appealed to his rural, small town, and newly urban fans, throughout the Midwest, South and Southwest. The singing cowboy represented a quintessential American folk hero, presenting rural American folk values and important working-class behavioral norms as increasingly palatable to a majority of Americans during the Great Depression.

Synergy created a "Gene Autry" brand capable of shaping public opinion, boosting morale, and sparking patriotism within the mainstream of American culture. Autry's cultural products exemplified support for President Roosevelt's New Deal by underscoring the American West as an attractive destination for travel and tourism. Autry's New Deal films mirrored the creation of a New West, where leisure, recreation, travel, and tourism represented the emerging markets of a post-industrial age. His sound recordings and films appealed to a new breed of worker-tourists taking advantage of annual two-week paid vacations granted by industrialists for the first time, and legislated by the federal government. The singing cowboy's support for President Roosevelt exemplified a new type of soft power-public diplomacy meant to influence the American public and make the

New Deal more appealing to voters; especially women, and the men influenced by women.

Reflecting the values of rural, small town and newly urban Americans, Autry's musical-westerns came across as *message* films about law and order, rugged individualism, Americanism and patriotism. Autry willfully propagandized his name and image to influence his enormous fan base in support of the New Deal. Ultimately, the singing cowboy's support for President Roosevelt appeared most directly in *Guns and Guitars* (1936), *Colorado Sunset* (1939), and *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* (1939). In these films, Republic promoted a "Vote for Autry" in escapist local balloting as the equivalent of a vote for FDR in actual presidential elections.¹²

Autry joined with those who believed in the promise of new technologies and the ability of humans to reshape the natural world. He understood the deep and structured role the American state played by in the delivery of information through the arts, entertainment, and recreation. Republic's "Gene Autry" series offered particular representations favorable to the New Deal, expressed through storylines supporting livestock and range management, water for irrigation and flood control, and rural electricity. A loathing of eastern-establishment types appeared routinely in most Autry films. Some films in the series took issue with western mining and oil company operations, groundwater contamination, shady stock offerings, short sales, foreclosures, forced migrations and homelessness.

The notion of Gene Autry as a symbol of the modern, postindustrial New West is consistent with the work of scholars who pegged the emergence of this environment to the New Deal. With Roosevelt at the helm, the economic downturn of the Great Depression occasioned something of a development boom throughout much of the Far West, especially in southern California and central Arizona. New Deal relief and construction programs pulled a flood of unemployed workers from Southern and Midwestern cities into the region. Helping to secure Roosevelt's national agenda for economic recovery, Autry and Republic Pictures contributed to the cultural dialogue about shared national identity that affirmed and legitimized the relationship of the American people to a modern consumer culture.¹³

Autry became a "star" by creating content of lower technical quality for the large audiences that consumed his sound recordings, radio broadcasts, sound motion pictures, and live theater performances. Admirers sought vicarious contact with the singing cowboy through radio and movie guides, fan magazines, comic books, and other mass-produced publications. Followers did not distinguish between Gene Autry the performer and the character he played in the movies. They blurred the line between Gene Autry the man and the public image of the singing cowboy.

As national advertisers developed an interest in sponsorship, Autry's sound recording and motion picture producers revised their middle-class material to fit with working-class values. National advertisers needed to reach

audiences with more purchasing power than lower-culture consumers. The shift became apparent when Wrigley's Chewing Gum agreed to sponsor the nationally syndicated, *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch*, on the CBS radio network. *Melody Ranch* launched on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1939, followed by a movie with the same title, released by Republic Pictures in November 1940.¹⁴

The soft power-public diplomacy represented through Gene Autry productions contributed to an innovative redefinition of the role played by the U.S. government in formulating a policy of public diplomacy through cultural activities in the 1940s. As the president moved the federal government into the arts, entertainment, recreation, and information economies, Herbert Yates incorporated government information into cultural products featuring Gene Autry produced by Republic Pictures and ARC Records. Helping to combat the Great Depression and promote the New Deal, films in Republic's "Gene Autry" series appealed to a majority of Americans who did not understand the nuances of government affairs; but, they trusted Gene Autry.

Building upon Autry's success in promoting New Deal themes, Republic began using the singing cowboy's series to draw attention to President Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policy, promoting friendly relations throughout the Western Hemisphere. The type of public diplomacy represented through Autry productions also helped redefine the role played by the U.S. government in formulating a policy of international cultural activity. *Boots and Saddles*, *Mexicali Rose*, and *Gauche Serenade* stand out as attempts to bridge the gaps between

the two major tenets of U.S. foreign policy—Anglo-American allegiance and Pan-Americanism. These films appealed to broad, mainstream audiences that did not understand the nuances of foreign affairs, but they trusted Gene Autry as an “ambassador of goodwill.”

The focus of Autry’s Good Neighbor pictures on U.S. relations with Mexico illustrated the importance of border security issues for the Roosevelt administration and the ability of the singing cowboy to reach cross-cultural audiences. Autry promoted Americanism, war preparedness, and friendly relations with Mexico and Mexican Americans at a time when most of his audience favored isolationism. The need for Mexican cooperation with U.S. war preparedness efforts stimulated attempts through the “Gene Autry” series to familiarize Americans with Mexican culture. Similarly, Autry inspired Fernando De Fuentes to establish a unique style of Mexican filmmaking known as *comedia-ranchera*, modeled after Republic’s musical-western form, showing Autry’s influence south of the border.

The British tour in 1939 cemented the singing cowboy’s international standing. The image of an American cowboy singing “South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)” to audiences in Ireland on the verge of global war, with millions of British and American citizens listening to the performance over the BBC radio network, presented a powerful symbol of harmony and unity for people on three continents. Moreover, the decision by Republic Pictures to open films like *South of the Border* (1939) and *Down Mexico Way* (1941) in first-run movie houses

confirmed Autry's growing appeal within the mainstream of American moviegoers. Further evidence of that attraction came in the form of gold records for "South of the Border (Down Mexico Way)" and "Goodbye Little Darlin', Goodbye."

Autry's image as a singing cowboy-secret agent created a metaphor for understanding the significance of soft power to influence public opinion and aid U.S. foreign policy. Similarly, near-perfect encapsulation of the Western Hemisphere Idea in the film *Rancho Grande* demonstrated how modernity, gentrification, and market capitalism served as goals for the Good Neighbor policy. Here again, echoing *Mexicali Rose*, the song, "Rancho Grande (Allá en el Rancho Grande)," promoted symmetry of goals and objectives that influenced audiences on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Responding to the example set by residents of Gene Autry, Oklahoma, Autry qualified himself as one hundred percent committed to preserving, protecting, and defending the American Way of Life, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. Winning the war against the Axis powers took precedent before everything. Building a superior air force provided the means of achieving victory; so, Autry devoted himself to recruiting the two million young men and women that the Army Air Force estimated as necessary to win the war.

To strengthen its association with the Army Air Force, The Wrigley Company rebranded their radio star from being a New Deal Cowboy and

Ambassador of Goodwill into America's Ace Cowboy. Autry codified a brand of American patriotism, rooted in a contemporary New West, forged under Roosevelt's Presidency, and adopted internationally as Gene Autry's Cowboy Code.

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After moving to Studio City, the Autry's donated their San Fernando Valley home to the St. Vincent de Paul for use as a Ranch Camp, and moved Melody Ranch to the old Monogram Pictures movie ranch in Placerita Canyon, near Newhall, California. Autry planned to do something that many in Hollywood were seeking to do in 1952. He intended to give every visitor to Los Angeles an opportunity to see motion pictures and television films being made. He organized guided tours of the Melody Ranch back lot, where vacationers learned about the various phases and techniques of moviemaking.

As the Commander-in-Chief's main concerns shifted from the New Deal to Good Neighbor and War Preparedness priorities, Autry's cultural products mirrored Roosevelt's move from isolationist to internationalist in music, sound recordings, motion pictures, live performances, radio broadcasts, and licensed merchandise. Examining Gene Autry's oeuvre within a context created by the Roosevelt administration policies, *New Deal Cowboy* revealed a process of public diplomacy at work in American media culture from 1932-42. To get at the substance of public diplomacy in Autry's legacy, *New Deal Cowboy* examined the information included in the singing cowboy's productions and how that information related to Presidential politics. Exploring the similarities and differences between Autry's cultural products revealed different ideological operations at work in sound recordings, motion pictures, radio broadcasting, and

print mediums. As President Roosevelt's priorities changed over time, Autry's cultural products reflected these changes from the New Deal to the Good Neighbor policy to war preparedness during the run up to World War II. The rural, small town and newly urban audiences that nurtured Autry's singing cowboy persona in the Midwest, South, and Southwest came to expect message films about The American Way. Audiences respond to the mixing of public information into Gene Autry productions by wholeheartedly endorsing the New Deal Cowboy.

Notes

1. "PRIVATE BUCKAROO"

¹ "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (July 28, 1942): 9; *Bells* (Image Entertainment 2003, c1942) of *Capistrano* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1942): video recording.

² "Cowboys Arrive in City; Rodeo to Open Thursday," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 21, 1942): 10.

³ "Special Five Day Bond Drive Will Open Tomorrow," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 26, 1942): 15; "Cowboy Autry Give the Spur to Bond Sales," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 25, 1942): 18; "\$1,407,642 Total is Announced in USO Fund Campaign," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 25, 1942): 13.

⁴ "Special Event—Oath of Enlistment and Induction Ceremony of Gene Autry into the U.S. Army Air Forces with rank of Technical Sergeant by Colonel Edward F. Shaifer [July 26, 1942]" *Melody Ranch* (July 26, 1942): 1761 of 7921; Gene Autry during the introduction to the showing of *Bells of Capistrano* (1942) on the Nashville Network's *Melody Ranch Theater*, 1987; Boyd Magers, *Gene Autry Westerns* (Madison, NC: Empire Publishing, Inc., 2007): 222; "Listener's Choice," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 26, 1942); "Announcer's Closing Plug," *Melody Ranch* (July 19, 1942): 1750 of 7921; "'Stampede' Rehearsal," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 22, 1942): 16; "Listener's Choice," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 26, 1942).

⁵ "Special Event—Oath of Enlistment and Induction Ceremony of Gene Autry into the U.S. Army Air Forces with rank of Technical Sergeant by Colonel Edward F. Shaifer [July 26, 1942]" *Melody Ranch* (July 26, 1942): 1761 of 7921; Gene Autry during the introduction to the showing of *Bells of Capistrano* (1942), Nashville Network's *Melody Ranch Theater*, 1987; Boyd Magers, *Gene Autry Westerns*, 222.

⁶ *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* (August 23, 1942: 630/9672).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Michael Berkowitz, "A 'New Deal' for Leisure: Making Mass Tourism during the Great Depression," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelly Baranowski and Ellen Furlough, 185-212; quotes on 186 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

⁹ Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974; Revised Edition, 1999): 115-120.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* (December 31, 1939); *Melody Ranch* (1940): DVD.

¹² "Announcer's Opening," *Gene Autry's Melody Ranch* (December 31, 1939): 407 of 9672.

¹³ Letter from Gene Autry to Franklin D. Roosevelt, dated September 10, 1943, letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Gene Autry, dated September 15, 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library; *The Gene Autry Show*, digital audio file, 15 min. January 28, 1940. Distributed by Gene Autry Entertainment, Studio City, California; Winifred Mallon, "Nation Observes President's Day," *New York Times* (January 31, 1940): 1.

¹⁴ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006): Location 545.

¹⁵ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004) 134-37.

¹⁶ Herman S. Hettinger, "The Future of Radio as an Advertising Medium," 285-87; Marquis, "Written on the Wheel: The Impact of Radio during the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19:3 (July 1984): 398.

¹⁷ Nye, *Soft Power*, 134-37.

¹⁸ Wilson P. Dizard, Jr., *Digital Diplomacy: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Information Age* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, with the cooperation of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C. 2001): 1, 21-22.

¹⁹ Fitzhugh Green, *American Propaganda Abroad* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988): 15-16.

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²² *Convergence* (Summer 2007).

²³ Gaynor Kavanaugh, *History Curatorship* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990): 54.

²⁴ Jon Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history*, Revised Third Edition (New York: Longman, 1984, 2002): 9-10; Kavanaugh, *History Curatorship*, 63.

²⁵ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 10-11; Kavanaugh, *History Curatorship*, 63-64.

2. "THAT SILVER HAired DADDY OF MINE"

¹ Gene Autry to "Dear Friend Homer," 7 June 1931, Gene Autry Collection, T87-36-2851-1, Autry National Center of the American West (hereafter cited as GAC). The letterhead on this document stated: "Gene Autry: The Sunny South's Blue Yodeler: Recording Artist: Victor, Velvetone, Champion, and Okeh"; General ledger of Gene Autry's accounts from 1930-33, GAC, 87-36-4613: ledger. Handwritten on WJJD stationary, this ledger included information about the royalties received by Gene Autry for his sound recordings; Don Cusic, *Gene Autry: His Life and Career* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007): 20-22.

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⁴ Gene Autry to "Dear Friend Homer," 7 June 1931, GAC, T87-36-2851-1; *WLS Family Album* (Chicago: The Prairie Farmer Publishing Company, 1934), GAC, 94.218.1; Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art: Social history of American Film* (New York: Focal Press, 1976):?; Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, pv-pvi.

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⁹⁰ "Maynard Returns for New Picture," *Los Angeles Times* (September 17, 1934): 13; Rothel, *The Singing Cowboys*, 23; Green, *Singing in the Saddle*, 107, 131; ; Independent Movie Database, *In Old Santa Fe*, <http://www.imdb.com/>, accessed on 28 September, 2011; Internet Movie Database, *Mystery Mountain* (Seattle, WA: IMDb, 2004), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0025544/fullcredits>, accessed 28 September 2011; Autry appeared in chapters 6-8 in the role of "Thomas" in the Levine-Maynard serial production, *Mystery Mountain*.

⁹¹ Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 102.

⁹² "Film Groups Consolidate," *Los Angeles Times* (October 15, 1935): A1; Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 2-3; Internet Movie Database, *John Wayne* (Seattle, WA: IMDb, 2004): <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000078/?fr=c2l0ZT1kZnxteD0yMHxzZz0xfGxtPTlwMHxwbj0wfHE9am9obiB3YXluZXhodG1sPTF8bm09b24 ;fc=1;ft=20;fm=1#actor1920>, accessed 28 September 2011; Green, *Singing in the Saddle*, 110-113.

⁹³ Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 2-3.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 3-4; Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn, *King of the Bs: Working within the Hollywood System: An Anthology of film History and Criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1975): 13-32.

⁹⁵ "Film Groups Consolidate," A1; Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 2-3; Internet Movie Database, *John Wayne* (Seattle, WA: IMDb, 2004): <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000078/?fr=c2l0ZT1kZnxteD0yMHxzZz0xfGxtPTlwMHxwbj0wfHE9am9obiB3YXluZXxodG1sPTF8bm09b24 ;fc=1;ft=20;fm=1#actor1920>, accessed 28 September 2011; Green, *Singing in the Saddle*, 110-113.

⁹⁶ Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 3-7.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 169; Stanfield, "Dixie Cowboys and Blue Yodels," 109.

⁹⁸ Stanfield, "Dixie Cowboys and Blue Yodels," 109-10.

⁹⁹ Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*. Video recording.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 102-103.

¹⁰³ Green, *Singing in the Saddle*, 131-32.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 72-75.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ "Gene Autry's Hit Pop and Country Songs by Year," chart assembled by author.

¹⁰⁷ *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*. Video recording. Stanfield, "Dixie Cowboys and Blue Yodels," 106-12.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 110.

¹⁰⁹ Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 214.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 157-58.

¹¹¹ Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 107.

¹¹² Edwin Schallert, "Republic Gets Membership in Hays Group," *Los Angeles Times* (September 25, 1941): A10; White, "The Good Guys Wore White Hats," 135-159.

3. "THE WEST AIN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE"

¹ *Public Cowboy No. 1* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004, c1937): video recording.

² Richard Lowitt, *The New Deal and the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993): originally published: Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984: originally published in series: *The West in the Twentieth Century*.

³ Ibid., 64-80; Gerald D. Nash, *The American West: Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985): 31.

⁴ Edwin Schallert, "Gene Autry Western Champ," *Los Angeles Times* (December 27, 1937): 11.

⁵ Philip K. Scheuer, "A Town Called Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (December 21, 1937): 10; "News of the Screen," *New York Times* (December 21, 1937): 28; Schallert, "Gene Autry Western Champ," 11.

⁶ The federal government recognized the Brooklyn Bridge in 1964, crediting its status as the longest suspension bridge in the world and the world's first steel-wire suspension bridge when it opened in 1883. Michael Duchemin, "Water, Power, and Tourism: Hoover Dam and the Making of the New West," *California History: The Journal of the California Historical Society* Vol. 86, No. 4 (2009): 60; David P. Billington and Donald C. Jackson, *Big Dams of the New Deal Era: A Confluence of Engineering and Politics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006): 11, 177,

217; *National Park Service Landmarks Program* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service), <http://www.nps.gov>. See also Ray White, "The Good Guys Wore White Hats: The B Western in American Culture," in Richard Aquila, editor, *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996): 145-46. Republic Pictures produced five films in the "Gene Autry" series with storylines involving the issues of water rights and the development of water and power resources in the New West. These films are *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2006, c1935): video recording; *Red River Valley* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2005, c1936): video recording; *Man From Music Mountain* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004, c.1938) video recording; *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2001, c1939): video recording; and *Sunset in Wyoming* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2006, c1941): video recording.

⁷ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004) 134-37. The identification of twenty-seven New Deal-themed films in Republic Pictures' "Gene Autry" series comes from my own screening and rating of all fifty-six prewar films.

⁸ *Melody Trail*, (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004, c1935): video recording; *Red River Valley*, video recording; *Guns and Guitars* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2005, c1936) video recording; *The Big Show* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2002, c1936): video recording; *Git Along Little Doggies* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2002, c1937): video recording.

⁹ *Springtime in the Rockies* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2003, c1937): video recording; *Gold Mine in the Sky* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2007, c1938): video recording; *Man From Music Mountain*, video recording; *Mountain Rhythm* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004, c1939): video recording; and *Colorado Sunset* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2006, c1939): video recording.

¹⁰ Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art: Social history of American Film* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976): 14; Robert M. Hurst, *Republic Pictures: Between Poverty Row and the Majors*, Updated Edition (Lanham: MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2007): pv-pvi.

¹¹ Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 5-6.

¹² "Film Groups Consolidate," *Los Angeles Times* (October 15, 1935): A1; Schallert, "Republic Gets Membership in Hays Group," *Los Angeles Times* (September 25, 1941): A10; Republic display ad, *Los Angeles Times* (December 20, 1938): B26; Peter Stanfield, "Dixie Cowboys and Blue Yodels: The Strange History of the Singing Cowboy" in Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson, editors, *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western* (New York: British Film Institute, 1998): 96.

¹³ Gene Autry's New Deal filmography includes the following motion pictures: *Guns and Guitars*, *The Big Show*, *Git Along Little Doggies*, *Public Cowboy No. 1*, *Man from Music Mountain*, *Mountain Rhythm*, *Colorado Sunset*, *Rovin' Tumbleweeds*, *Sunset in Wyoming*, and *Sierra Sue* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2002, c1941): video recording.

¹⁴ *Melody Trail*, video recording.

¹⁵ Lizzie Francke, *Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood* (New York: British Film Institute, 1994), 172 pp.; Peter Stanfield, "Dixie Cowboys and Blue Yodels," 111; Quote from Gene Autry and Mickey Herskowitz, *Back in the Saddle Again* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1978): 66.

¹⁶ Bud Schulberg, "The Writer in Hollywood," *Harper's Magazine*, October 1959: 135; John Schultheiss, "The Eastern' Writer in Hollywood," *Cinema Journal*, 11:1 (Autumn 1971): 22-25.

¹⁷ Films in Republic Pictures' "Gene Autry" series with rodeo themes and settings from 1934-1942 include: *Melody Trail*; *Red River Valley*; *Rhythm of the Saddle* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004, c1938): video recording; *Rovin' Tumbleweeds*; *Carolina Moon* (Studio

City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004, c1940): video recording; *Ride Tenderfoot Ride* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2003 c1940): video recording; *Back in the Saddle* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1941): video recording; and *Bells of Capistrano* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1942): video recording.

¹⁸ *Melody Trail*, video recording.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Giuliana Muscio, *Hollywood's New Deal* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996): 85-91.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Margaret Farrand Thorp, *America at the Movies* (New Haven, 1939): 188-91, 296-98; Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History* (New York, 1939): 531-32; O. W. Riegel, "Press, Radio, Films," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 4:1 (March 1940): 148; Arch A. Mercey, "Films by American Governments: The United States," *Films* 1 (Summer 1940): 5-11; Robert L. Synder, *Pate Lorentz and the Documentary Film* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968): 21-121; Richard Dyer MacCann, *The People's Films: A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Pictures* (New York: Hastings House, 1973): 43-55; David E. Meerse, "To Reassure a Nation: Hollywood Presents World War II," *Film and History* 6:4 (December 1976): 79-80; Richard W. Steele, "The Great Debate: Roosevelt, the Media, and the Coming of the War, 1940-1941," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (June 1984): 73-74; Muscio, *Hollywood's New Deal*, 84.

²⁷ Internet Movie Database, *Red River Valley* (Seattle, WA: IMDb, 2004): <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0028163/>, accessed 1 October, 2011.

²⁸ *The Plow That Broke The Plains* (Franklin, TN: Naxos, 2007, c1936): video recording.

²⁹ *Red River Valley*, video recording.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Peter Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002): 139-140.

³³ *Red River Valley*, video recording; *Comin' Round The Mountain* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004, c1936): video recording; *Oh, Susana!* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2005, c1936): video recording.

³⁴ *Red River Valley*, video recording.

³⁵ Autry and Herskowitz, *Back in the Saddle Again*, 53.

³⁶ *Guns and Guitars*, video recording.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Republic Gives Schedule," *New York Times* (June 5, 1936): 16; Schallert, "The Pageant of the Film World," *Los Angeles Times* (July 10, 1936): A11; Read Kendall, "Around and About in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (July 11, 1936): A7; "Never Bores Self," *Los Angeles Times* (July 17, 1936): 17; Ledger of Cash Receipts and Cash Disbursements from September 1, 1936 thru December 31, 1938, Gene Autry Collection, Autry National Center of the American West (hereafter GAC), T87-36-4623..

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⁵² Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 126-27.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵⁴ "Press Book: Gene Autry: The Screen's Singing Cowboy In Person" He's Ridin' Your Way!" GAC, T87-36-249.

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⁵⁸ Shallert, "Ridin' Buckaroos of Cinema Win New Triumphs at Box Office," *Los Angeles Times* (February 14, 1937): C1; Schallert, "The Pageant of the Film World," *Los Angeles Times* (April 20, 1937): 12; Buck Jones, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0427659/#Actor>.

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⁶⁸ Berkowitz, "A 'New Deal' for Leisure," 203-5.

⁶⁹ *Public Cowboy No. 1*, video recording; *Springtime in the Rockies*, video recording; *Gold Mine in the Sky*, video recording; *Man Fran Music Mountain*, video recording; *Mountain Rhythm*, video recording; *Colorado Sunset*, video recording; and *Rovin' Tumbleweeds*, video recording,

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¹⁰⁶ Stanfield, “Dixie Cowboys and Blue Yodels,” 111-13; Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 141-145, 154.

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¹²² Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974; Revised Edition, 1999): 115-19

4. "SOUTH OF THE BORDER (DOWN MEXICO WAY)"

¹ Gene Autry, conversation with Pat Buttram, televised on *Melody Ranch Theater* (Nashville: TNN, 1987), included with *South of the Border*, video recording.; Holly George Warren, *Public Cowboy No. 1: The Life and Times of Gene Autry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 182-83; *Glasgow Herald*, "Actor Mobbed in Glasgow," (August 21, 1939); *Daily Record* (Glasgow), "50,000 Welcome Cowboy Gene," (August 21, 1939); *Belfast News-Letter*, "Cowboy Star Mobbed," (August 15, 1939); *Evening Dispatch*, "Singing Cowboy Star Admires our Golf Links," (August 7, 1939); "Studios Call Stars Back from War-Menaced Europe," *Los Angeles Times* (August 26, 1939): A19.

² Gene Autry, conversation with Pat Buttram, televised on *Melody Ranch Theater* (Nashville: TNN, 1987), included with *South of the Border*, video recording; "Studios Call Stars Back from War-Menaced Europe," *Los Angeles Times* (August 26, 1939): A19; Churchill, "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times* (September 7, 1939): 35; Churchill, "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times* (September 8, 1939): 32; B. R. Crisler, "Alarms and Discursions," *New York Times* (September 24, 1939): 131; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (October 6, 1939): 28.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fred Fejes, *Imperialism, Mexico, and the Good Neighbor: New Deal Foreign Policy and United States Shortwave Broadcasting to Latin America, 1900-1939* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1986): 5-8.

⁵ Peter Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002): 7; Lynette Tan and Philip Loy mention Gene Autry's role as a supporter of U.S. foreign policy, but neither developed the idea. See Lynette Tan, "The New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and the Anti-modern Resolution," *Film History* 13:1 (2001): 89-101; and R. Philip Loy, "Soldiers in Stetsons: B-Westerns go to war," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (Winter 2003): 197-205.

⁶ Duncan Aikman, "The Machinery for Hemisphere Cooperation," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 6:4 (Winter 1942): 550-54; Joseph L. Morrison, "Josephus Daniels—Simpatico," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 5:2 (April 1963): 277; Donald C. Meyer, "Toscanini and the Good Neighbor Policy: The NBC Symphony Orchestra's 1940 South American Tour," *American Music* 18:3 (Autumn 2000): 247.

⁷ Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 77.

⁸ Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 32-33.

⁹ Frederick B. Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995): 211-12; Arthur P. Whitaker, "The Origin of the Western Hemisphere Idea," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 98:5 (October 15, 1954): 323-326; Arthur P. Whitaker, *The Western Hemisphere Idea: Its Rise and Decline* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1954); Donald E. Worcester, "Herbert Eugene Bolton: The Making of a Western Historian," in Richard W. Etulain, editor, *Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians* (Reno & Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1991, 2002): 207.

¹⁰ Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*, 211-12; Whitaker, "The Origin of the Western Hemisphere Idea," 323-26; Whitaker, *The Western Hemisphere Idea*; Worcester, "Herbert Eugene Bolton," 207.

¹¹ Philip K. Scheuer, "Foreign Fans Eager for Screen News," *Los Angeles Times* (August 15, 1937): C1; Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 25-27, 73; Aikman, "The Machinery for Hemisphere Cooperation," 550-54; Morrison, "Josephus Daniels—Simpatico," 277; Meyer, "Toscanini and the Good Neighbor Policy," 247. Familiarity with radio broadcasting and a lack of support from newspaper publishers and motion picture producers convinced FDR to use shortwave radio broadcasting as a principal means of creating friendlier relations between the U.S. and Latin America. Developments and innovations in shortwave radio technology piqued the president's interest in international broadcasting. High-powered transmitters and directional antennas made north-south communications feasible by 1936.

¹² Aikman, "The Machinery for Hemisphere Cooperation," 550-54; Morrison, "Josephus Daniels—Simpatico," 277; Meyer, "Toscanini and the Good Neighbor Policy," 247. The need for greater understanding and appreciation for the people of the Americas took on new meaning after Adolph Hitler, Germany's President and Chancellor, rejected the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations and busied the Third Reich with the expansion and rearming of the German military. Benito Mussolini, the Italian Prime Minister, followed suit by starting a war of aggression against Ethiopia. The Italian assault further exposed the League's inability to guarantee world peace. Antiwar sentiment permeated the U.S. as these events unfolded. Isolationists in Congress confirmed an American desire for nonaggression by passing the Neutrality Act of 1935. President Roosevelt responded by "Pan-Americanizing" the Monroe Doctrine. He got the other nations of the Western Hemisphere to agree that an attack on one country equaled an attack on all of the 21 nations in the Americas. Closer relations in the Western Hemisphere helped increase national security for the U.S. by enabling American companies to maintain control of raw material supplies and access to markets for manufactured goods in Latin America.

¹³ Scheuer, "Foreign Fans Eager for Screen News," C1; Scheuer, "Singing Cowboy Assigned"; Edwin Schallert, "Gleanings From Studio Citadel," *Los Angeles Times* (December 30, 1937): 11; Schallert, "Gene Autry Battles Studio," *Los Angeles Times* (January 27, 1938): 10; Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 25-27, 73.

¹⁴ Meyer, "Toscanini and the Good Neighbor Policy," 247; Landry, "Radio and Government," 557-65; John A. Pollard, "Words Are Cheaper Than Blood," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 9:3 (Autumn 1945): 286; Saul Carson, "Notes toward an Examination of the Radio Documentary," *Hollywood Quarterly* 4:1 (Autumn 1949): 69; Morrison, "Josephus Daniels—Simpatico," 284-89. NBC competed in South America with German and Italian radio broadcasters offering 16 hours of programming per day. Germany launched advertising and public relations campaigns designed to edge out British and U.S. business interests. German trade with Brazil grew substantially from 1933 to 1938. Brazilian exports climbed from 12% to 25%, while German imports rose from 8% to nearly 20%. Mexican trade with Germany jumped 12% in the first quarter of 1938, after the Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas nationalized the oil industry. German economic strength increased chatter concerning the prospects of a military invasion in Latin America. As U.S. citizens contemplated this possibility, President Roosevelt used the potential threat to unnerve isolationists in Congress and gain support for Great Britain in a war against Germany.

¹⁵ Meyer, "Toscanini and the Good Neighbor Policy," 247; Landry, "Radio and Government," 557-65; John A. Pollard, "Words Are Cheaper Than Blood," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 9:3 (Autumn 1945): 286; Saul Carson, "Notes toward an Examination of the Radio Documentary," *Hollywood Quarterly* 4:1 (Autumn 1949): 69; Morrison, "Josephus Daniels—Simpatico," 284-89.

¹⁶ Giuliana Muscio, *Hollywood's New Deal* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996): 66; Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*, 106.

¹⁷ Muscio, *Hollywood's New Deal*, 66; Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*, 106; James Schwoch, *The American Radio industry and Its Latin American Activities, 1900-1939* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990): 143. Latin American broadcasters like Emilio Azcarraga helped the Roosevelt administration and U.S. advertisers reach additional large audiences in Mexico. Cooperation with the U.S. government enabled Azcarraga to enter an international arena and make connections with NBC and radio capitalists in the U.S. Working closely with NBC, the Mexican broadcaster developed new markets by helping to finance regular program exchanges for his powerful stations. Azcarraga organized a talent agency to book the Mexican musicians to perform on his radio stations. He also formed a music publishing company to control the copyright of the playlists at his stations. Another company distributed records in Mexico City for the RCA and Victor labels.

¹⁸ Schwoch, *The American Radio industry and its Latin American Activities*, 144.

¹⁹ Muscio, *Hollywood's New Deal*, 67.

²⁰ The figures come from the author's survey of all 56 films in Republic's ""Gene Autry"" series from 1934-1942.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Robert M. Hurst, *Republic Pictures: Between Poverty Row and the Majors*, Updated Edition (Lanham: MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2007): 16, 75-76.

²³ *Oh, Susana!* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2005, 1937): video recording.

²⁴ Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 75.

²⁵ Ibid, 67-69.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*, 186-95.

²⁸ Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 70-71.

²⁹ *Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2005, c1937): video recording.

³⁰ "Theatre Activities," *Bedford Gazette* (May 23, 1930): 10; "Cinderella Story," *Charleston Gazette* (September 22, 1929): 7; "Armida is Gay, Young Discovery," *Los Angeles Times*, (October 21, 1928): B13; "Wave of Popularity Sweeping Mexican Stars to the Top Keeps Going On," *Los Angeles Times* (January 27, 1929): C11; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armida_Vendrell, accessed 3 October 2011.

³¹ *Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm*, video recording.

³² Ibid.

³³ Cinemateca—Condor Media, Inc., *Allá en el Rancho Grande (Over at the Big Ranch)* (Bustamante y De Fuentes, 1936, 2007): 100 mins.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Mexicali Rose* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2006, c1939): video recording; ; Michael Chanan, "Cinema in Latin America," from Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, editor, *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 1996): 431; Robert Sklar, *A World History of Films* (New York: Abrams, 1993): ? Ephraim Katz and Ronald Dean Nolan, *The Film Encyclopedia*, 6th edition (New York: Harper Collins, 2003): ? Emilio Garcia Riera, editor, *Fernando De Fuentes* (Mexico: Cineteca Nacional, 1984): ?

³⁶ *Boots and Saddles* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2002, c1937): video recording.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Letter. Grace Dugan to Gene Autry, 31 December 1937. Gene Autry Collection, Autry National Center of the American West (hereafter GAC), T87-36-6018.

⁴⁰ Schallert, "Gene Autry Battles Studio," *Los Angeles Times* (January 27, 1938): 10.

⁴¹ Schallert, "Gene Autry Battles Studio," 10; Schallert, "Autry May Be Replaced," *Los Angeles Times* (February 15, 1938): 10; Schallert, "Pageant of the Film World," *Los Angeles Times* (March 16, 1938): 10; Douglas B. Green, *Singing in the Saddle: the History of the Singing Cowboys* (Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 2002) 120-48.

⁴² Good Neighbor themed films in Republic's "Gene Autry" series included: *Comin' Round the Mountain* (1936); *Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm* (1936); *Boots and Saddles* (1937); *Mexicali Rose* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2001, c1939) video recording; *Blue Montana Skies* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, c1939) restored master—DVD screener; *In Old Monterey* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2001, c1939) video recording; *South of the Border* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2001, 1939) video recording; *Rancho Grande* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1940) video recording; *The Singing Hill* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2004, c1941) video recording; *Under Fiesta Skies* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2001, c1941) video recording; *Down Mexico Way* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2001, c1941) video recording; *Call of the Canyon* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1942) video recording; and *Bells of Capistrano* (1942).

⁴³ Richard W. Steele, "The Great Debate: Roosevelt, the Media, and the Coming of the War, 1940-1941," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (June 1984): 79-80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-73; Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*, 147; *Baltimore Sun*, (November 10, 1940): ?

⁴⁵ Steele, "The Great Debate," 74-75; Allen Rostron, "'No War, No Hate, No Propaganda': Promoting Films About European War and Fascism During the Period of American Isolationism," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 30:2 (Summer 2002): 88.

⁴⁶ *Mexicali Rose*, video recording.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 77.

⁵³ *Mexicali Rose*, video recording.

⁵⁴ Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*, 178.

⁵⁵ *Blue Montana Skies* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004, c1939): video recording.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (July 4, 1939): A8; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (September 18, 1939): A16; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (July 12 1939): 13.

⁵⁸ Churchill, "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times* (July 20, 1939): 24; "The Coming Week at the World's Fair: A Page of Information for the Sightseer," *New York Times* (July 22, 1939): 5; "Named 'King of the Cowboys,'" *New York Times* (July 23, 1939): 28; Churchill, "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times* (July 24, 1939): 15.

⁵⁹ "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (August 18, 1939): A11.

⁶⁰ Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 151-152; Rothel, 29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *In Old Monterey* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2005 c1939): video recording.

⁶³ Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 172.

⁶⁴ *South of the Border* (1939).

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- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ R. Philip Loy, "Soldiers in Stetsons: B-Westerns Go to War," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 30:4 (Winter 2003): 198; Pike, *FDR'S Good Neighbor Policy*, 185, 195.
- ⁷⁶ Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 150.
- ⁷⁷ Schallert, "Gene Autry Leads Western Money-Makers," *Los Angeles Times* (December 22, 1939): 13.
- ⁷⁸ Review 1—No title. *Los Angeles Times* (February 3, 1940): A7; "Premiere of Western Due," *Los Angeles Times* (February 5, 1940): 15; Grace Kingsley, "Autry Film in Premiere at Cinema," *Los Angeles Times* (February 6, 1940): A10.
- ⁷⁹ *Rancho Grande* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004, c1949): video recording.
- ⁸⁰ *Melody Ranch* (May 19, 1940; 552/9672)
- ⁸¹ Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 121.
- ⁸² *Gacho Serenade* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1940): video recording.
- ⁸³ *Gacho Serenade*, video recording; *Melody Ranch* (June 9, 1940: 159/7921; June 23, 1940: 205/9672; July 7, 1940: 206/9672; July 28, 1940: 280/9672).
- ⁸⁴ "Today's Program at the Fair," *New York Times* (May 14, 1949): 20; Sidney M. Shalett, "Lily Pons, Tibbett Thrill Fair Crowd," *New York Times* (May 14, 1940): 20.
- ⁸⁵ "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (July 5, 1940): A14; "Headliners to Broadcast," *Los Angeles Times* (June 20, 1940): 8; "Gene Autry to Aid Fiesta," *Los Angeles Times* (May 19, 1940): A1.
- ⁸⁶ Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 52-57; Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 122; *Melody Ranch* (May 19, 1940: 156/7921; June 9, 1940: 4093/9672; June 23, 1940: 205/9672; June 30, 1940: 5995/9672; October 27, 1940: 252/9672; November 10, 1940: 5992/9672; November 24, 1940: 7504/9672; December 8, 1940: 4239/9672; December 22, 1940: 6409/9672).
- ⁸⁷ Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor*, 131-35.
- ⁸⁸ Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*, 252.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid, 253.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Ibid, 231.
- ⁹² Schallert, "Autry Joins Select List," *Los Angeles Times* (December 27, 1940): 11; "Autry Joins First Ten," *New York Times* (December 27, 1940): 23.
- ⁹³ Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 150-151.
- ⁹⁴ Grace Kingsley, "Autry Westerns," *Los Angeles Times* (May 15, 1941): A10; Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (April 23, 1941): 24.
- ⁹⁵ *Under Fiesta Stars* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1941): video recording.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*, 112.

⁹⁸ Schallert, "Gleams From Stellar Galaxy," *Los Angeles Times* (April 5, 1941): A9; "More Hollywood Notes," *New York Times* (July 6, 1941): X4.

⁹⁹ *Down Mexico Way* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2005, c1941): video recording.

¹⁰⁰ *Melody Ranch* (various programs throughout 1941).

5. "MELODY RANCH"

¹ *Melody Ranch* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1940) video recording; *Melody Ranch* (December 1, 1940; December 29, 1940; January 5, 1941: 249/9672; January 19, 1941: 219/9672).

² *Melody Ranch*, video recording; *Melody Ranch* (January 5, 1941: 249/9672; January 19, 1941: 212/9672; January 26, 1941: 1795/9672).

³ *Melody Ranch*, video recording.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Edwin Schallert, "Autry Joins Select List," *Los Angeles Times* (December 27, 1940): 11; "Autry Joins First Ten," *New York Times* (December 27, 1940): 23.

⁶ *Melody Ranch* (February 4, 1940; 546/9672).

⁷ "Fire Ruins Home of Gene Autry," *Los Angeles Times* (November 9, 1941): 3; Lirtley Baskette, "Home, Home on the Ranch," *Los Angeles Times* (June 14, 1942): H14; Hedda Hopper, "Autry Can't Get Around to Resting," *Los Angeles Times* (July 31, 1949): D1; "Camp Run Like Real Ranch, but More Fun," *Los Angeles Times* (August 9, 1970): SF_B1.

⁸ *Boots and Saddles* (Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2002, c1937): video recording.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Western Jamboree* (Studio City, CA: 2002, c1938): video recording.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Dwight E. Ward and Arthur P. Pierce (1973) "Helium" in *United States Mineral Resources*, US Geological Survey, Professional Paper 820, p.285-290.

¹³ Frank S. Nugent, "A Horse of Another Color," *New York Times* (March 12, 1939): 154.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Republic to Make 50 Feature Films," *New York Times* (April 6, 1939): 34; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (April 18, 1940): A10; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (April 26, 1939): 13.

¹⁶ Robert M. Hurst, *Republic Pictures: Between Poverty Row and the Majors*, Updated Edition (Lanham: MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2007): 171.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *In Old Monterey* (Chatsworth,, CA: Image Entertainment, 2005, c1939): video recording.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Beginning in 1942, the U.S. Department of State used the song's melody as the interval signal for the Voice of America. Paul Holsinger, editor, *War and American Popular*

Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999, p. 67;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia_Gem_of_the_Ocean.

²⁸ *In Old Monterey*, video recording.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Douglas W. Churchill, "News of the Screen," *New York Times* (October 13, 1939): 30; Al Wolf, "Louis-Baer Bout Here Awaits Public Reaction," *Los Angeles Times* (August 28, 1949): A10; "Rodeo Show to Open at Garden Tomorrow," *New York Times* (October 8, 1940): 31; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (October 2, 1940): 15.

³² George A. Mooney, "Youth's Model 1940," *New York Times* (October 27, 1940): 140.

³³ "Announcer's Opening: Our Hero of Melody Ranch is Gene Autry—America's Favorite Singing Cowboy, Who Is a Symbol of the Clean Thinking, Honesty and Integrity of the American People," *Melody Ranch* (December 31, 1939; 1 of 7921 radio show segments).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ "Announcer's Opening," *Melody Ranch* (December 31, 1939; 407/9672 song tracks).

³⁶ Mooney, "Youth's Model 1940," 140; Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 151; Rothel, 29.

³⁷ *The Gene Autry Show*, digital audio file, 15 min. December 31, 1939. Distributed by Gene Autry Entertainment, Studio City, California; John Morton Blum, *V Was For Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976): 108-110; The Wrigley Company, "Wrigley's Gum Production Dedicated to U.S. Armed Forces," in *Heritage Timeline* (Accessed August 18, 2010): <http://www.wrigley.com/global/about-us/heritage-timeline.aspx>.

³⁸ Letter from Gene Autry to Franklin D. Roosevelt, dated September 10, 1943, letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Gene Autry, dated September 15, 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library; *The Gene Autry Show*, digital audio file, 15 min. January 28, 1940. Distributed by Gene Autry Entertainment, Studio City, California; Winifred Mallon, "Nation Observes President's Day," *New York Times* (January 31, 1940): 1.

³⁹ *The Gene Autry Show*, January 28, 1940.

⁴⁰ *Melody Ranch* (January 28, 1940; 679/9672); Delbert Clark, "President Goes to Birthday Play," *New York Times* (January 29, 1940): 10; "Fifty-Eighth Birthday," *New York Times* (February 4, 1940): 111; Winifred Mallon, "Nation Observes President's Day," *New York Times* (January 31, 1940): 1; Schallert, "While the Films Reel By," *Los Angeles Times* (April 7, 1940): C2.

⁴¹ *Melody Ranch* (January 28, 1940; 679/9672); Delbert Clark, "President Goes to Birthday Play," *New York Times* (January 29, 1940): 10; "Fifty-Eighth Birthday," *New York Times* (February 4, 1940): 111; Winifred Mallon, "Nation Observes President's Day," *New York Times* (January 31, 1940): 1; Schallert, "While the Films Reel By," *Los Angeles Times* (April 7, 1940): C2.

⁴² *Melody Ranch* (February 11, 1940; 547/9672).

⁴³ "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (August 11, 1940): 8.

⁴⁴ Roy Rogers appeared as Autry's surrogate during the off years.

⁴⁵ *Melody Ranch* (May 5, 1940; radio show segment 128/7921).

⁴⁶ Churchill, "News of the Screen," *New York Times* (October 13, 1939): 30; Al Wolf, "Louis-Baer Bout Here Awaits Public Reaction," *Los Angeles Times* (August 28, 1949): A10; "Rodeo Show to Open at Garden Tomorrow," *New York Times* (October 8, 1940): 31; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (October 2, 1940): 15.

⁴⁷ "Rodeo Entertains Bellevue Patients," *New York Times* (October 16, 1940): 20; "17,000 Child Guests, Whoop It Up of Rodeo; Bronco-Busting Is a Hit and Autry Is 'Swell,'" *New York Times* (October 22, 1940): 22; *Melody Ranch* (October 20, 1940: 253/9672; October 27, 1940: 252/9672; November 3, 1940: 214/9672).

⁴⁸ "News and Notes of the Advertising Field," *New York Times* (October 14, 1940): 32; "ASCAP to Give Concerts," *New York Times* (October 23, 1940): 26; Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 152-154.

⁴⁹ "Tom Mix, Rider, Dies Under Auto," *New York Times* (October 13, 1940): 1; "Friends Pay Actor Tribute," *Los Angeles Times* (October 13, 1940): 6; *Melody Ranch* (October 13, 1940: 7891/9672).

⁵⁰ "Tom Mix, Rider, Dies Under Auto," 1; "Friends Pay Actor Tribute," 6; *Melody Ranch* (October 13, 1940: 7891/9672).

⁵¹ "Tom Mix, Rider, Dies Under Auto," 1; "Friends Pay Actor Tribute," 6; *Melody Ranch* (October 13, 1940: 7891/9672).

⁵² Mooney, "Youth's Model 1940," 140.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (January 22, 1941): 12.

⁵⁷ *Down Mexico Way* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2005, c1941): video recording.

⁵⁸ *Back in the Saddle* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1941): video recording.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Film Info" for *Back in the Saddle* (1941) Gene Autry Entertainment: <http://www.geneautry.com/geneautry/motionpictures/filmography/backinthesaddle.html>; Lorraine B. Burgin, *Time Required in Developing Selected Arizona Copper Mines* (Washington, D.C. United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Mines, 1976): 18, 37, 78-79.

⁶² Theodore Strauss, "Littlest Doggies Git Along," *New York Times* (August 4, 1940): 105.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "Armadas of Defense Planes Prove Headache for Films," *Los Angeles Times* (January 26, 1941) A6.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (June 7, 1941): A9; "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (January 26, 1941): C3; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (May 4, 1941): C2; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (May 15, 1941): A11; "Putting Guffaws Into the Western," *New York Times* (October 12, 1941): X4.

⁶⁸ "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (May 4, 1941): C2; "Putting Guffaws Into the Western," *New York Times* (October 12, 1941): X4.

⁶⁹ "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (June 12, 1941): A10; Thomas Brady, "The Unmusical Mr. Jones," *New York Times* (July 20, 1941): X4.

⁷⁰ Thomas Brady, "The Unmusical Mr. Jones," *New York Times* (July 20, 1941): X4.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (January 28, 1941): 10; Thomas Brady, "The Unmusical Mr. Jones," *New York Times* (July 20, 1941): X4.

⁷³ Schallert, "Fans Mourn Buck Jones in Dramatic Fire Death," *Los Angeles Times* (December 1, 1942): 8.

⁷⁴ "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (October 7, 1941): 13; Douglas B. Green, *Singing in the Saddle: the History of the Singing Cowboys* (Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 2002): 156-57; Holly George Warren, *Public Cowboy No. 1*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 191-92, 361; John Gilmore, *LA Despair: A Landscape of Crime & Bad Times* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 2005): 313.

⁷⁵ "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (October 7, 1941): 13; Green, *Singing in the Saddle*, 156=57; George Warren, *Public Cowboy No. 1*, 361.

⁷⁶ Hedda Hopper, "Rackin to Remake Classic Western," *Los Angeles Times* (February 4, 1965): C10; Green, *Singing in the Saddle*, 120-48.

⁷⁷ Harry MacPherson, "Tin Pan Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (March 24, 1940): 19; Ron Ryan, "Hillbilly Music," *Los Angeles Times* (March 3, 1940): H9; "Republic Studio Announces \$15,000,000 Film Budget," *Los Angeles Times* (February 26, 1941): A3; Schallert, "Republic Gets Membership in Hays Group," *Los Angeles Times* (September 25, 1941): A10; Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 10-11.

⁷⁸ Melody Ranch (June 29, 1941: 9100/9672; July 6, 1941: 9097/9672; July 20, 1941: 9095/9672; July 27, 1941: 9098/9672; August 24, 1941: 1008/9672; September 14, 1941: 1010/9672; November 16, 1941: 3291/9672; June 14, 1942: 1011/9672).

⁷⁹ Melody Ranch (June 29, 1941: 9100/9672; July 6, 1941: 9097/9672; July 20, 1941: 9095/9672; July 27, 1941: 9098/9672; August 24, 1941: 1008/9672; September 14, 1941: 1010/9672; November 16, 1941: 3291/9672; June 14, 1942: 1011/9672); "Oklahoma Defense Savings Bond Rally featuring Gene Autry, September 6-7, 1941. Newspaper clipping: "Autry's Songs to Give Boost For Bonds at State Rallies." Gene Autry Collection, Autry National Center of the American West (hereafter, GAC), T87-36-4629.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (February 1, 1941): 9; Treanor, "The Home Front," *Los Angeles Times* (July 30, 1941): A1; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (August 4, 1941): 8; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (August 12, 1941): A10; "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (September 12, 1941): 19.

⁸² Letter. Dated October 3, 1941. From John T. Shannon to Mr. Eddie Allen, Warwick Hotel, NYC, GAC, T87-36-2922-18; Letter dated December 29, 1941. From John T. Shannon to Mr. Eddie Allen, Mgr., Gene Autry Co. GAC, T87-36-2922-4; Blueprint. "The Shannon Line" of Black Light manufactured by Keese Engineering Co., Hollywood, especially for Gene Autry. Designed by John T. Shannon, chief engineer, GAC, T87-36-2922-2.

⁸³ "Rodeo Will Open Tonight," *New York Times* (October 8, 1941): 25; "Bellevue Patients Get Taste of West," *New York Times* (October 15, 1941): 19.

⁸⁴ Newspaper clipping. "Autry Rodeo Will Have Beauty, Sparkle: Western Film Star Will Take Part in Sunday Ceremonies," *Oklahoma City Times* (November 14, 1941): 15, GAC, T87-36-502.

⁸⁵ "Town Named for Gene Autry," *New York Times* (November 6, 1941): 12; "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (November 12, 1941): A10; *Melody Ranch* (November 16, 1941); Rothel, 29.

⁸⁶ Quote from Letter dated December 29, 1941. From John T. Shannon to Mr. Eddie Allen, Mgr., Gene Autry Co., GAC, T87-36-2922-4; Correspondence. Letter from John T. Shannon to Gene Autry, dated February 18, 1942; Response from Gene Autry to John T. Shannon dated February 20, 1942. GAC, T87-36-2922-7.

⁸⁷ Newspaper clipping. "Autry Rodeo Will Have Beauty, Sparkle: Western Film Star Will Take Part in Sunday Ceremonies," *Oklahoma City Times* (November 14, 1941): 15, GAC, T87-36-502.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Schallert, "Rooney Tops 10-Best List; Gable in Second," *Los Angeles Times* (December 26, 1941): A10; "Those Box Office Champions," *New York Times* (December 28, 1941): X4.

⁹¹ Philip K. Scheuer, "Poll Reveals Flynn Favorite of Juveniles," *Los Angeles Times* (September 16, 1941): A10.

⁹² *The Gene Autry Show*, digital audio files, 1939-1945.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ *Melody Ranch* (December 21, 1941: 4087/9672; January 11, 1942: 245/9672 ; January 25, 1942: 9153/9672); "Film Trio Leaves of Roosevelt Fete," *Los Angeles Times* (January 29, 1942): A1; "Film Stars Will Participate in President's Birthday Ball," *Los Angeles Times* (January 26, 1942): 8; "Gene Autry Feted," *Los Angeles Times* (May 6, 1942): 11; *Melody Ranch* (February 1, 1942: 8379/9672).

⁹⁵ *Melody Ranch* (February 2, 1942: February 8, 1942; February 15, 1942; February 22, 1942).

⁹⁶ *Melody Ranch* (March 15, 1942: 8413/9672).

⁹⁷ *Melody Ranch* (March 29, 1942; April 12, 1942; April 19, 1942; April 26, 1942; May 3, 1942; May 10, 1942; May 17, 1942; May 24, 1942); "Jimmie Fidler in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (December 15, 1941): A14; "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (April 10, 1942): A10.

⁹⁸ "One thing and Another," *New York Times* (November 30, 1941): X12; "New Drive Aids Troops," *New York Times* (June 3, 1942): 25; "Legion In Records Drive," *New York Times* (July 16, 1942): 21; *Melody Ranch* (April 19, 1942; May 17, 1942; June 14, 1942; June 21, 1942).

⁹⁹ *Melody Ranch* (June 28, 1942: 8502/9672).

¹⁰⁰ "Radio War Effort Defended," *New York Times* (July 28, 1942): 16.

¹⁰¹ Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 61.

¹⁰² *Home in Wyomin'* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2007, c1942): video recording.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ *Bells of Capistrano* (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003, c1942): video recording.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Schallert, "Drama," *Los Angeles Times* (January 9, 1942): 25; "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (April 27, 1942): 8; Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 203-05.

¹⁰⁷ Hurst, *Republic Pictures*, 168-69.

¹⁰⁸ *Melody Ranch* (July 26, 1942: 174/9672).

¹⁰⁹ "Special Five Day Bond Drive Will Open Tomorrow," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 26, 1942): 15.

¹¹⁰ "Cowboy Autry Gives the Spur to Bond Sales," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 25, 1942): 18.

¹¹¹ *Melody Ranch* (June 29, 1941: 9100/9672; July 6, 1941: 9097/9672; July 20, 1941: 9095/9672; July 27, 1941: 9098/9672; August 24, 1941: 1008/9672; September 14, 1941: 1010/9672; November 16, 1941: 3291/9672; June 14, 1942: 1011/9672); "Oklahoma Defense Savings Bond Rally featuring Gene Autry, September 6-7, 1941. Newspaper clipping: "Autry's Songs to Give Boost For Bonds at State Rallies." GAC, T87-36-4629.

¹¹² "\$1,407,642 Total Is Announced in USO Fund Campaign," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 25, 1942: 13; "Stars of Stage, Radio Help Drum Up Cash For USO," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July **Date?**, 1942): **Page?**

¹¹³ *Melody Ranch* (August 2, 1942: 190/9672).

¹¹⁴ *Melody Ranch* (August 23, 1942: 630/9672)

¹¹⁵ *Melody Ranch* (August 23, 1942: 630/9672)

¹¹⁶ Letter from Gene Autry to Everett Colborn, dated July 12, 1942. GAC, T87-36-2921; "Gene Autry Goes Into Army Aug. 1," *Los Angeles Times* (July 9, 1942): A1; "Gene Autry Takes Army Oath," *New York Times* (July 28, 1942): 13; "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (July 28, 1942): 9.

6. “JINGLE, JANGLE, JINGLE”

¹ Holly George Warren, *Public Cowboy No. 1: The Life and Times of Gene Autry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 365; “Cowboy Autry Give the Spur to Bond Sales,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 25, 1942): 18.

² “Gene Autry Leaves Horse Behind When He Joins Army,” *Los Angeles Times* (October 12, 1942): A2; “Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times* (November 16, 1942): 22; Douglas B. Green, *Singing in the Saddle: the History of the Singing Cowboys* (Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 2002): 168.

³ “Kay Kyser,” *iTunes* (Cupertino, CA: Apple, Inc.): (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/artist/kay-kyser/id540575>, accessed 7 October 2011; Tex Ritter, “(I Got Spurs That) Jingle, Jangle, Jingle,” *allmusic.com* (Ann Arbor, MI: All Media Guide, 2011): <http://www.allmusic.com/song/i-got-spurs-that-jingle-jangle-jingle-t1042640>, accessed 7 October 2011; “Fallout Soundtrack—Jingle, Jangle, Jingle,” *YouTube* (San Bruno, CA: YouTube, LLC, 2011): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DD_NCM_RJs, accessed 7 October 2011.

⁴ “Fallout Soundtrack—Jingle, Jangle, Jingle,” accessed 7 October 2011; “Jingle Jangle Jingle Dick Thomas 1942,” *YouTube* (San Bruno, CA: YouTube, LLC, 2011): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CUXLuVjO-w>.

⁵ Since the 1980s, telecommunications companies, Web search portals, software publishers, including those publishing exclusively over the Internet, and companies broadcasting exclusively over the Internet have transformed and expanded the information economy. *North American Industry Classification System* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011): <http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/>, accessed 9 October 2011.

⁶ “Gene Autry Joins Army Air Forces,” *Los Angeles Times* (August 17, 1942): 16.

⁷ “Gene Autry Leaves Horse Behind When He Joins Army,” *Los Angeles Times* (October 12, 1942): A2; “Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times* (November 16, 1942): 22.

⁸ George Warren, *Public Cowboy No. 1*, 365; “Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times* (July 24, 1942): 17; “Abbott and Costello Top at Box Office,” *New York Times* (December 26, 1942): 12.

⁹ Edwin Schallert, “While the Films Reel By,” *Los Angeles Times* (June 20, 1943): C3; Lucy Greenbaum, “‘A Sinatra in a Sombrero,’” *New York Times* (November 4, 1945): SM21; Thomas M. Pryor, “By Way of Report,” *New York Times* (November 28, 1943): X3.

¹⁰ Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 154.

¹¹ Quote from George A. Mooney, “Youth’s Model 1940,” *New York Times* (October 27, 1940): 140. Robert W. Phillips, *Singing Cowboy Stars* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1994); Samuel M. Sherman, *Legendary Singing Cowboys* (New York: Friedman/Fairfax Publishers, 1995); Peter Stanfield, “Dixie Cowboys and Blue Yodels: The Strange History of the Singing Cowboy” in Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson, editors, *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western* (London: British Film Institute, 1998): 96-118; Tan, “The New Deal Cowboy”; Loy, *Westerns and American Culture, 1930-1955* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2001); Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Loy, “Soldiers in Stetsons.”

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deal’s: Reflections on Roosevelt’s America, Mussolini’s Italy, and Hitler’s Germany, 1933-1939* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); David P. Billington and Donald C. Jackson, *Big Dams of the New Deal Era: A Confluence of Engineering and Politics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006). The big western dams included the Boulder Canyon Project on the Colorado River in Nevada; the Columbia River Control Plan—

Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams in Washington; Fort Peck Dam on the Missouri River in Montana; and California's Central Valley Project: Shasta Dam on the Sacramento River and Friant Dam on San Joaquin River.

¹⁴ Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974; Revised Edition, 1999): 115-19.

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- Bells of Capistrano* 1942. Reprint. Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003. Videorecording.
- Blue Montana Skies*. 1939. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004. Videorecording.
- Boots and Saddles* 1937. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2002. Videorecording.
- Carolina Moon* 1940. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2004. Videorecording.
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In Old Santa Fe. 1934. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2002. Videorecording.

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Red River Valley 1936. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2005. Videorecording.

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Rovin' Tumbleweeds 1939. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2001. Videorecording.

Sierra Sue 1941. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2002. Videorecording.

South of the Border 1939. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2001. Videorecording.

Springtime in the Rockies 1937. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2003. Videorecording.

Sunset in Wyoming. 1941. Reprint. Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2006. Videorecording.

The Big Show 1936. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2002. Videorecording.

The Phantom Empire. 1934. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment, 2007. Videorecording.

The Plow That Broke The Plains. 1936. Reprint. Franklin, TN: Naxos, 2007. Videorecording.

Tumbling Tumbleweeds 1935. Reprint. Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2006. Videorecording.

Under Fiesta Stars 1941. Reprint. Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2003. Videorecording.

Western Jamboree 1938. Reprint. Studio City, CA: 2002. Videorecording.

Wide Wide World: The Western. 1955. Reprint. Studio City, CA: Gene Autry Entertainment. Videorecording.

Curriculum Vitae

Michael Dean Duchemin
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E: duchemin@pacbell.net

Geographic and Area Specializations

With broad training in the arts, humanities and social sciences, I have worked since 1984 as a historian, educator, curator, exhibition developer, and manager in museums and historical organizations. Connecting the cultural and intellectual history of the United States with the history of the American West, my oeuvre includes studies of central Arizona in the twentieth century; exhibitions about race, ethnicity and religion; presentations of the western genre in every conceivable form; a national parks initiative; and new scholarship examining the history of American cultural industries and American media culture from the Great Depression to the Second World War.

Scholarship

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Doctor of Philosophy, 2011
U.S. History, American West, Public History
Dean's List 2003-2007
Dissertation: *New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy*

Arizona State University, Tempe

Master of Arts in History, 1992
U.S. History, American West, Public History
Scholarships, 1984-1986
Thesis: *Introducing the Urban Form: The Arizona Improvement Company in Phoenix, 1887-1890*

University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point

Bachelor of Science, 1982
American Studies, U.S. History, English, Broad Field Social Science

University of Jyväskylä, Suomi-Finland

Certificate, 1977
Seminar: Finnish Language and Culture

Museum Management and Historical Administration

- **Interim Executive Director.** Friends of the Chinese American Museum (FCAM). El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. Los Angeles, California: December 2010-present. Supervisor Contact: Alfred H. Soo-Hoo.
 - Directed and managed the Chinese American Museum for FCAM with six fulltime employees, five contract employees and \$500,000 annual budget under operating agreement with El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, a department of the City of Los Angeles.
 - Working to negotiate a new 50-year Memorandum of Agreement with the City of Los Angeles to bolster FCAM's rights to operate CAM for the City of Los Angeles.
 - Increased museum budget from \$500,000 to \$1,500,000 to accommodate Phase II, 5,000 square foot expansion of CAM into the historic Garnier Building, the original "Chinese City Hall" in Los Angeles from 1890-1953.
 - Earned income of \$129,000, 32% above budgeted expectations, for FCAM's 2011 Historymakers Awards Benefit.
 - Secured grant of \$28,500 from the James Irvine Foundation for FCAM to conduct national search for new Executive Director.

- **Senior Curator.** Autry National Center. Museum of the American West. Los Angeles, California: August 2004 to November 2008. Supervisor Contact: John Gray.
 - Provided intellectual oversight for the museum's interpretive and scholarly programs, exhibitions, and collections.
 - Created strategic partnerships with other museums and academic institutions to expand the discourse on the American West.
 - Identified acquisitions priorities and developed strong relationships with donors and collectors.
 - Served as a spokesperson for the Autry, communicating authoritatively on a variety of subjects related to the American West and the museum's collections and exhibitions.
 - Collaborated with museum staff to enhance the interpretive materials for the collections, special exhibitions, and public programs targeting many different audiences.

- **Managing Curator.** Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: December 1999 to August 2004. Supervisor Contact: John Gray.
 - Directly responsible for six curators, one media producer, one executive assistant, multiple Getty interns, and UNLV-Autry fellows producing 10 exhibitions for two large galleries, totaling nearly 10,000 square feet; producing an average of 4 "cameo" or "collections spotlight" exhibitions

per year; and routine changes in seven permanent galleries, about 40,000 square feet of exhibition space.

- Created and managed the development process for a 5-year revolving exhibition calendar to coordinate all of Autry exhibitions, including the annual *Masters of the American West Fine Arts Exhibitions and Sale*.
 - Responsible for the assembly and management of a team of 10 exhibition project managers, drawn from the curatorial, collections, education, and library staffs, leading teams of 10-40 staff members to handle simultaneous production of multiple exhibition projects.
 - Developed and managed annual budgets, including Curatorial Department budgets and multiple exhibition project budgets.
 - Principal staff contributor and manager for the development of exhibition proposals, contracts, conceptual plans, preliminary and final exhibition plans, implementation procedures, and opening and closing events for all exhibitions.
 - Provided oversight and daily management of exhibition project management databases.
 - Responsible for the planning and management of the Autry's collecting agendas, collections surveys, collections development, and de-accessioning processes.
 - Chair of Museum Interpretation Committee and member of the Executive, Accessions, Acquisitions, Exhibitions, and Publications committees.
 - Principal staff contributor for Board of Directors and Board of Trustees meetings and communications.
 - Reviewer of manuscripts and editor of exhibition texts and gallery guides for Publications Department; principal staff contributor for museum publications agenda.
 - Principal staff contributor for long-range planning processes, including capital campaign efforts, AAM Accreditation, and the setting of institutional and departmental goals.
- **Curator of History.** Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum. Los Angeles, California: May 1993 to December 1999. Supervisor Contact: James Nottage.
- Directly responsible for the creation and production of seven large exhibitions averaging 5,000 square feet and five "cameo" or "collections spotlight" exhibitions, averaging less than 1,000 square feet.
 - Responsible for routine change outs in seven permanent galleries, totaling about 40,000 square feet.
 - Responsible for the creation and productions of interdepartmental exhibition teams involved with the processes of exhibition development.
 - Responsible for the planning and management of the Autry's collecting agendas, collections surveys, collections development, and de-accessioning processes.

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- Participated in planning with Autry Museum executive staff.
 - Assisted and represented Chief Curator in public relations capacity.
 - Helped plan and carry out notable media events for selected exhibition openings.
- **Museum Department Director.** Arizona Historical Society - Central Arizona Division. Tempe, Arizona: November 1989 to May 1993. Supervisor Contact: Michael B. Husband.
- Director responsibility for a staff of six, including a curator, collections manager, conservator, exhibitor, facilities manager, and executive assistant.
 - Principal staff contributor to Building Construction Review Committee, working with the AHS Board to open new 82,000 square-foot museum, including preview parties of North American AT-6A and Roosevelt Dam exhibitions.
 - Created plans for collections storage, conservation, and exhibition of artifacts and archival materials.
 - Wrote contracts and managed outside exhibition services.
 - Managed contracts and contributed scholarship to the “Design Development Report for the Arizona Historical Society Museum,” prepared by American History Workshop, January 1991.
 - Served as acting director in absence of division director.
 - Involved in all hiring decisions for AHS-CAD staff.
- **Education and Program Manager,** Arizona Historical Society - Central Arizona Division. Phoenix, Arizona: March 1987 to November 1989. Supervisor Contact: Andrew E. Masich.
- Created and managed networks of educational outreach programs for AHS-CAD, including audiovisual programs, living history interpreters, artifact trunks, pre- and post-visit instructional materials, interpreter and audience evaluations, and a complete system for tracking all programming.
 - Created and managed a team of seven living history interpreters contracted to provide services for statewide public programming.
 - Created budgets, wrote specifications and managed work of contractors writing and producing living history presentations.
 - Created and managed reproduction and prop collections for educational outreach programs.
 - Managed Time Capsule Survey—collecting in the Community program.
- **Agricultural History Project Director.** Arizona Historical Society - Central Arizona Division. Phoenix, Arizona: November 1989 to May 1993. Supervisor Contact: Andrew E. Masich.
- Co-created and directed Arizona Agricultural History Project with a principal focus on the twentieth century.

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- Research focused on Roosevelt Dam and water resource development, together with the cattle, cotton, and citrus industries.
 - Provided annual public programs for a network of state and county fair associations throughout Arizona..
- **Volunteer Coordinator.** Arizona Historical Society - Central Arizona Division, Phoenix, Arizona: March 1987 to November 1989. Supervisor Contact: Andrew E. Masich.
- Recruited, trained, and managed a volunteer staff of 150.
 - Created and managed division-wide volunteer training programs, with specific responsibility for the development of docent-guided museum tours.
- **Manager and Curator.** J. B. Bayless "Old Country Store" Museum. Owned by the Bayless Investment & Trading Company. Operated by A. J. Bayless Markets, Inc. Phoenix, Arizona: May 1985 to March 1987. Supervisor Contact: Linda Bayless.
- Engineered transition of trusteeship from A.J. Bayless Markets, Inc., to Bayless Investment & Trading Co.
 - Supervised and directed staff of two, reported first to Marketing Department of Bayless Markets, later to President of Bayless Investment.
 - Managed controllable expenses, budgets, and purchasing.
 - Full responsibility for building and maintenance.
 - Planned and implemented museum's first collections management programs, including creation of storage environment, registration system, and conservation program.

Public Engagement: Collaborations and Multidisciplinary Projects

The nature of museum exhibitions and programs assume a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach, involving museum staff, docents, outside service contractors, donors, lenders, patrons, and sponsors, to name but a few of the major groups involved. Likewise the essence of most modern exhibitions assumes the involvement of multiple disciplines to handle a variety of cultural products in forms such as artwork, artifacts, archival materials, photographs, scientific and archeological specimens, architectural elements, audiovisual productions, graphics, and other design materials. Most of my scholarship has appeared through museum exhibitions and programs geared toward the broad publics that support public history. Below is a list of selected exhibition and programs that included significant contributions on my part. Typically, my participation included some combination of scholarship, curation, design, management, fundraising, marketing, and programming.

Community Partnerships

➤ Asian American Communities

- **Remembering Angel Island.** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. A department of the City of Los Angeles, California: August 2010-December 2011
- **Dreams Deferred: Artists Respond to Immigration Reform.** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. December 2010-December 2011
- **Breaking Ground: Chinese American Architects in Los Angeles, 1945-1980.**, Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. January-June 2012
- **Origins: The Birth and Rise of Chinese American Communities in Los Angeles.** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. A permanent exhibition opening in 2012.
- **(de)Constructing Chinatown.** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. Opening July 2012-January 2013
- **Culture and Community.** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. Conceptual planning. Spring 2009.
- **Chinese American Museum of Los Angeles.** Board member. Friends of the Chinese American Museum. 2001-2004. Chair of Exhibitions Committee, 2001-2008, including inaugural opening in 2003.
- **On Gold Mountain: A Chinese American Experience.** Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: July 2000 – January 2001. Smithsonian Institution, Arts & Industry Building, Washington, D.C.: May-September 2001.
- **Strength and Diversity: Japanese American Women, 1890-1990.** Organized by The Oakland Museum. Toured by SITES. Extensive supplementation organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage in collaboration with the Japanese American National Museum. Los Angeles, California: March-May 1994.

➤ Mexican American Communities

- **L.A. Starts Here!** Organized by La Plaza de Cultura y Artes. Los Angeles, California: April 2010 to present.
- **Art of the Charrería: A Mexican Tradition.** Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California, in cooperation with the Franz Meyer Museum, Mexico City, Mexico: May 5-September 29, 2002.

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- ***Culture y Cultura: How the U.S.-Mexican War shaped the West.*** Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: Summer 1998.
 - ***The Mask of Zorro: Mexican Americans and Popular Media.*** Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: June-September 1995.
 - ***Crafting Devotions: Traditions in Contemporary New Mexico Santos.*** Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: December 1994-February 1995.
 - ***Las Fiestas Patrias* and *Cinco de Mayo.*** Annual exhibitions and events planned and implemented for the Arizona Historical Society—Central Arizona Division. Phoenix, Arizona, from 1987-1989.
 - ***“El Vaquero 1880,” “Marshall Henry Garfias,”* and *Spainsh Conquistador.*** Living history interpreters trained, scheduled, supervised, and evaluated for statewide Arizona Historical Society programming. Phoenix, Arizona, 1987-1989.
 - ***Mexican Food Institute.*** Served as project director for Mexican American businessmen planning and organizing a Mexican Food Institute. Phoenix, Arizona: 1986-1987.
 - ***Aqui Magazine.*** Contributor in Phoenix, Arizona, 1986-1987.

➤ **American Indian Communities**

- ***Death Valley: an American Mirage.*** Exhibition concept and preliminary plan for the Autry National Center of the American West. Los Angeles, California: 2003-2004.
- ***Native Voices at the Autry.*** Board Member. Autry National Center of the American West. Los Angeles, California: 2003-2005.
- ***Mountain Family Spirit: The Arts and Culture of the Ute Indians.*** Organized by The Taylor Museum, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Presented by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: October 30, 2001 – February 27, 2002.
- ***HuupuK^wanum · Tupaat, Out of the Mist: Treasures of the Nuu-chah-nulth Chiefs.*** Organized by the Royal British Columbia Museum. Victoria, BC, Presented by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: February-June 2001.
- ***Inventing Custer: Legends of the Little Bighorn.*** Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: May-September, 1996.
- ***Beyond the Prison Gate: The Fort Marion Experience and its Artistic Legacy,*** Organized by the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City. Presented by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: December 1993-February 1994.

➤ **African American Communities**

- ***Black History: Seeking El Dorado***. Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: February-April 2001.
- ***Negro Leagues Baseball***. Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: February-May 1996.
- ***Juneteenth: Celebrating the African-American West***. Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: Summer 1994.

➤ **Jewish American Communities**

- ***Jewish Life in the American West: Generation to Generation***. Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, June 21, 2002-January 25, 2003.

American Media, Cultural Productions and the Western Genre

- ***Gene Autry and the Twentieth-Century West: The Centennial Exhibition, 1907-2007***. Organized by the Autry National Center of the American West. Los Angeles, California: June 2007 to January 2008.
- ***Death Valley: an American Mirage***. Exhibition concept and preliminary plan for the Autry National Center of the American West. Los Angeles, California: 2003-2004.
- ***Ocean View: The Depiction of Southern California Coastal Lifestyle***. Organized by the California Museum of Photography. Riverside, California. Presented by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: November 23, 2002-July 27, 2003.
- ***How the West Was Worn***. Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: October 20, 2001 – January 21, 2002. Additional venues: Bob Bullock Texas State Museum, Austin, Texas. National Cowboy Museum and Western Heritage Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Mesa Southwest Museum, Mesa, Arizona.
- ***California Deserts: Today and Yesterday***. Organized by the Palm Springs Desert Museum. Palm Springs, California. Presented by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: May 29-September 26, 1999.
- ***Inventing Custer: Legends of the Little Bighorn***. Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: May-September, 1996.
- ***Walt Disney's Wild West***. Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: May-September 1995.
- ***The Mask of Zorro: Mexican Americans and Popular Media***. Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: June-September 1995.

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- ***Cowboy Serenade: Roots of Western Music.*** Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: June-October 1993.
 - ***The Wild West: Photographs by David Levinthal.*** Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: Summer 1993.

Government Agencies

- **El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, a department of the City of Los Angeles**
 - ***Remembering Angel Island.*** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, a department of the City of Los Angeles, California: August 2010-December 2011
 - ***Dreams Deferred: Artists Respond to Immigration Reform.*** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. December 2010-December 2011
 - ***Breaking Ground: Chinese American Architects in Los Angeles, 1945-1980.*** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. January-June 2012
 - ***Origins: The Birth and Rise of Chinese American Communities in Los Angeles.*** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. A permanent exhibition opening May 2012
 - ***(de)Constructing Chinatown.*** Organized by the Chinese American Museum. El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. Opening June 2012-January 2013.

- **Los Angeles County, California**
 - ***L.A. Starts Here!*** Organized by La Plaza de Cultura y Artes for the County of Los Angeles. April 2011-September 2012.
 - ***Under the Sun.*** Organized by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Conceptual plan. Spring 2009.

- **Maricopa County, Arizona**
 - **Papago-Salado Heritage and Tourism District**
 - Board of Directors, 1992
 - AHS-CAD representative, 1992
 - ***Arizona's Pioneer Grocers.*** Exhibition planned and developed for A. J. Bayless Markets, Inc. Phoenix, Arizona: 1985-1987.
 - ***The Supermarket Concept: Linking Arizona to the Nation through Food,*** Exhibition planned and developed for A J. Bayless Markets, Inc. Phoenix, Arizona: 1985-1986.

➤ State of Arizona

- ***Traces on the Land.*** Multi-screen orientation film. Produced by the American History Workshop for the Arizona Historical Society, Central Arizona Division. Tempe, Arizona: 1992.
- ***Foundations of Arizona Communities.*** Organized by the American History Workshop, Brooklyn, New York, for the Arizona Historical Society-Central Arizona Division. Tempe, Arizona: 1991-1993.
- ***Arizona Agricultural Communities.*** Organized by the American History Workshop, Brooklyn, New York, for the Arizona Historical Society-Central Arizona Division. Tempe, Arizona: 1991-1993.
- ***Communities during Wartime.*** Organized by the American History Workshop, Brooklyn, New York, for the Arizona Historical Society-Central Arizona Division. Tempe, Arizona: 1991-1993.
- ***Communities of Vision & Persistence.*** Organized by the American History Workshop, Brooklyn, New York, for the Arizona Historical Society-Central Arizona Division. Tempe, Arizona: 1991-1993.
- ***Historic Preservation Fair.*** Co-created and managed this annual event for Arizona Historical Society-Central Arizona Division. Phoenix, Arizona: 1988-1992.
- ***Historic Preservation Tours.*** Principal staff contributor for AHS-CAD. Co-sponsored home tours with seven historic districts in Phoenix, Arizona: 1988-1992.
- ***“Meeting the Challenge: Past and Future.”*** Ethnic-oriented lecture series produced for AHS-Cad, Phoenix, Arizona: 1988-1989.
- ***Museum on Wheels: Arizona’s 75th Anniversary Exhibition.*** Traveling exhibition organized by the Arizona Historical Society, Central Arizona Division. Phoenix, Arizona, 1987.

➤ National Park Service

- ***Western Wonderlands: Touring America’s National Parks.*** Organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Los Angeles, California: Summer 1997.
- ***Death Valley: an American Mirage.*** Exhibition concept and preliminary plan for the Autry National Center of the American West. Los Angeles, California, 2003-2004.
- ***Drawn to Yellowstone: Artists in America’s First National Park.*** Organized by the Autry National Center of the American West. Los Angeles, California: September 2004 through January 2005.
- ***Yosemite: Art of an American Icon.*** Organized by the Autry National Center of the American West. Los Angeles, California: Part I: September 2006 through January 2007. Part II, November 2006 through April 2007.
- ***The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.*** Concept. Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Cody, Wyoming: Winter 2008.

➤ Bureau of Reclamation

- **Roosevelt Dam.** Organized by the American History Workshop, Brooklyn, New York, for the Arizona Historical Society-Central Arizona Division. Tempe, Arizona: 1991-1993.
- **Reclaimed.** Video history of the Bureau of Reclamation in Central Arizona. Produced by the Arizona Historical Society-Central Arizona Division. Tempe, Arizona, 1992.

Selected Publications

- “Water, Power, and Tourism: Hoover Dam and the Making of the New West,” *California History: The Journal of the California Historical Society*, Special Issue: Convergence, 86:4 (2009): 60-78.
- “Destinations of Choice: National Parks, Auto Tourism, and *Westways Magazine*” in Matt Roth, editor, *Scenic View Ahead: The Westways Cover Art Program, 1928-1981* (Los Angeles: Automobile Club of Southern California, 2009):74-91.
- “Mr. Autry Goes to Washington: The Cowboy and the New Deal,” *Convergence* (Summer 2007): 14-23.
- “Introduction” in Tish O’Connor, editor, *Spectacular National Parks* (Los Angeles: Perpetua Press, 1998).
- Review of David Dary and Steven L Grafe, *A Western Legacy: The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005) for *The Public Historian* 28:4 (Fall 2006): 104-05.
- Review of Keith L. Bryant, Jr., *Culture in the American Southwest: the earth, the sky, the people*, by (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001) for *Western Historical Quarterly* 34:1 (Spring 2003): 86.

Selected Presentations

- “New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy,” dissertation defense, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2011.
- “The New Deal Cowboy,” American Culture Association/Popular Culture Association Conference, St. Louis, Missouri, 2010.
- “Hoover Dam and the Making of the New West,” Arizona-Nevada History Conference, Laughlin, Nevada, 2010.
- “Learning in the Field: the Convergence of Public History and Academic History in Better Graduate Training,” American Historical Association—Pacific Coast Branch, 2008.
- “Gene Autry’s Cowboy Code,” at American Culture Association/Popular Culture Association Conference, 2008.
- “Gene Autry and the Twentieth-Century West,” American Historical Association—Pacific Coast Branch, 2007
- “South of the Border: Gene Autry and U.S. Foreign Policy” at Western Historical Association, 2006.
- “Interpreting Movie Westerns,” at American Culture Association/ Popular Culture Association Conference, 2006.
- “Myth and History of the American West,” Western History Association, 2005.

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- “Gene Autry and Western Heritage Preservation,” at American Culture Association/Popular Culture Association Conference, 2005.
 - “Making History Relevant: Presenting *On Gold Mountain: A Chinese American Experience* at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage,” American Historical Association—Pacific Coast Branch Conference, 2001.
 - “Walt Disney’s Wild West,” Western History Association, 1997
 - “A New Spirit of Community at the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum,” Western History Association, 1995.

Professional Organizations

- American Association for State and Local History, member since 2007
- American Association of Museums, member since 2007
- Arizona Historical Society, member since 1987
- Autry National Center, member since 1993
- California Council for the Promotion of History, member since 1995
- Central Arizona Museum Association, member from 1985-1994
 - President from 1989-1991
 - Director of Marketing Committee from 1990-1992
- Coordination Committee for History in Arizona, member 1985-2000
- Historical Society of Southern California, member since 1999
- Museum Association of Arizona, member since 1987
 - Executive Director, 1990-1992
 - Regional representative 1990-1992
- National Council on Public History, member since 1985
- Nevada Historical Society, member since 2009
- Phi Alpha Theta, Iota Gamma Chapter
 - President, 1985-1986
- Popular Culture Association, member since 2005
- Western History Association, member since 1991

Grant Writing

- James Irvine Foundation, \$28,500 grant to conduct a national search for a new Executive Director for the Friends of the Chinese American Museum, May 2011.
- Responsible for \$100,000 grant from the Rio Tinto Company to support *Death Valley: An American Mirage*, 2004
- Principal staff contributor in Development Department fund raising efforts, providing research materials and information for grant writing purposes, and meetings with current and potential donors and lenders for the Autry Museum of Western Heritage from 1999 to 2004.
- Worked with Autry Museum Development Department to implement successful fund-raising proposals based on written treatments for selected exhibitions for the Autry Museum of Western Heritage from 1993 to 1999.
- Assisted AHS Foundation by drafting grant applications, including \$56,000 North American AT-6A grant to Rockwell international; and \$47,000 for processing the Bayless Museum Collection as Museum Department Head from 1987-1993.

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- Negotiated donation of Bayless Museum Collections, December 1991; 15,000 artifacts valued at more than \$500,000).
 - Secured North American AT-6A, Rose Bowl motel sign, Roosevelt Dam parapet, and 1908 International Harvester Apache Trail touring car as “signature” objects for main galleries.
 - Initiated major donations of artifacts and archival materials related to 20th century Arizona history, including the Foundations of Arizona communities, water resource management, agriculture, World War II, air-conditioning, Mexican American community, Japanese American community, Mormon community, and media personalities.
 - Wrote successful grant applications to public sector groups, including Arizona Public Service, for annual funding of AHS-CAD Historic Preservation Fair as Museum Department Head.
 - Co-author of IMS-GOS Conservation Grant, 1989.
 - Solicited and received \$50,000 annual funding from Governor’s Fund for Agriculture and Livestock History from 1987-1989.
 - Raised funds annually for Historic Preservation Fair, from 1988-1992.
 - Helped plan and implement Historic League “Theater Night” fund raiser, 1989.
 - Helped plan and implement Historical League “Symposium on Arizona Art & Architecture,” 1989.
 - Helped plan and implement Bicentennial Commission Ratification Celebration, 1989.
 - Principal staff contributor in AHS Foundation “Don’t let History Pass You By”; “Institutional Allies”; and “Each One, Reach One” campaigns, 1987-1989.
 - Awarded funding from Miller Brewing Company for Mexican Food Institute, 1986.

Teaching

Course Development

- **UNLV History Department: HIS754: Public History—History Museums**
 - This course will introduce graduate students to museum theory and practice, preparing them to apply the historian’s content knowledge and skills in the dynamic environment of today’s history museums.
 - Students will gain an understanding of how museums are organized and how they function, along with an appreciation of the role historians play in museums.
 - The primary objective of this course is to ready students to translate the historian’s craft of research, analysis, and communication of content, typically accomplished in the academy through the written word or spoken lecture, into practice in a museum setting.
- **LAUSD: “Culture and Community”**
 - A mini-course for teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District based upon the *Spirit of Community Gallery* at the Autry National Center, October-November 2010

Museum Education

- **UNLV-Autry Fellowship Supervision**
 - Trained and supervised fellows provided by the UNLV Public History Program for work at the Autry National Center from 2006-2008.

➤ **Internship Supervision**

- Trained and supervised annual multicultural interns through program sponsored by the J. Paul Getty Foundation from 1997-2008.
- Trained and supervised internship programs for students from the Public History Program at Arizona State University from 1987-1993.

➤ **Docent Training**

- Museum Docent Training program at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, providing in-gallery training, peer reviews, program reviews, and presentations for internal and external audiences from 1999 to 2004.
- Trained and managed volunteer staff of 150 for the Arizona Historical Society—Central Arizona Division, Phoenix, Arizona. Created and managed division-wide volunteer training programs, with specific responsibility for docent-guided museum tours, 1987-1988.
- Researched, planned, organized, scheduled, and guided tours for 34,000 annual visitors at the J. B. Bayless “Old Country Store” Museum, 1985-1986.

➤ **Museum Classroom Project**

- ***Fingerprints and Footsteps: Uncovering Family Stories*** (Museum Classroom Project), organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles, California: June 11-October 17, 1999.
- ***Museum Classroom Exhibition, organized by the*** Autry Museum of Western Heritage, May 8 through August 2, 1998.
- ***Connecting Our Lives***, organized by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, exhibited June 14, 1996 to January 5, 1997.
- ***A Gallery of Our Own***, organized by AMWH, exhibited June 9 to September 4, 1995.

➤ **Living History Interpreter Training**

- Trained and managed living history interpreter corps of eight for the Arizona Historical Society, 1987-1989.