

In the end, however, the major question concerning these volumes cannot be answered here. That question is, "Will the published reflections of many minds and personalities that made up the American character motivate modern students to view history as a discipline that offers viable insight and perspective into his or her world?"

Northern Arizona University

Philip Reed Rulon

Lawrence W. Levine. *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. Pp. xii, 306. Cloth, \$25.00.

To this reviewer, Lawrence W. Levine's latest study represents cultural, intellectual, and social history at its best. In the introduction Levine recounts his growing awareness of the fact that the present hierarchical distinction between "highbrow" or "elite" culture and "lowbrow" or "popular" culture is of relatively recent origin, dating only from the turn of the last century. For instance, during most of the nineteenth century Shakespeare was "part and parcel" of a "rich shared public culture." In theaters the Bard was presented, suitably altered to suit local dramatic and moral tastes, to a socially heterogeneous audience who freely expressed their views, verbally and in more physical ways. Various versions of Shakespeare were presented in large cities, small towns, river boats, and barrooms. Then a strange thing happened. Shakespeare was "purified"—"sacralized" is Levine's preferred term—and elevated above the masses. The "legitimized" Bard became part of "high culture" and a "cultural deity" rather than a cultural experience. He became, and remains, "theatrical spinach" to be taken because he is good for one's cultural development.

The same thing happened to opera, symphonic music, and the arts. It is difficult now to imagine the ubiquity of opera in the nineteenth century, but in those days street boys whistled operatic airs and soldiers marched to "La Traviata Quickstep." Travelling singers and instrumentalists like Jenny Lind and Ole Bull casually mixed American folk pieces with the most respected European compositions. Orchestras included the Katy-did Polka and a Beethoven symphony on the same program. Then, like drama, music became sacralized and elevated above the masses. "Serious" music, usually by European composers, required a carefully controlled setting, similar to a temple or church, and an appropriately reverent audience. At the same time museums moved from the "general and eclectic to the exclusive and specific." All this cultural elevation and segregation was accompanied by "sacred language and religious analogies." According to the new dispensation nothing fine could be popular and nothing popular could be fine. It was not so much that rigid barriers were erected between the two cultures: "The meaning of culture itself was being defined The primary debate was less over who should enter the precincts of the art museum, the symphony hall, the opera house as what they should experience once they did enter, what the essential purpose of these temples of culture was in the first place." The purpose of sacralized art and music was, first, to purify and elevate culture itself, and, second, to improve the taste, cultivate virtue, and promote the spiritual growth of the masses, while in the process making them worthy citizens of the American republic. Levine shows how "arbiters of culture" like Henry Adams, Henry James, and Frederick Law Olmsted sought to promote social order in rapidly changing times, and to "civilize" the masses. He also notes a less than admirable desire for cultural exclusivity and more impersonal cultural trends.

This book could well serve as a textbook in nineteenth-century American cultural, social, and intellectual history. It fits in well with studies in American gentility (e.g. *Stow Persons*) and American republicanism (e.g. *Gordon Wood*). It reflects the rediscovery of popular culture, and provides insights into the current controversy over the "canon" of a liberal education. There is no doubt that Levine's sympathies lie with those who wish to modify the accent on a narrow range of elite "classics" by Western white males. Levine is not as much concerned with "high" standards as he is with shared cultural experiences. Although his book does little to resolve the problem of cultural standards in a mass society, it does provide a new perspective by showing that the elitist pedigree dates only from the turn of the last century.

Winston-Salem State University

Howard A. Barnes