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GENERATIONAL THEORY AS A LENS FOR APPROACHING MUSICAL THEATRE HISTORY, 1943-2023, OR A STRANGE LOOP

Ben J. Lundy

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COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

GENERATIONAL THEORY AS A LENS FOR APPROACHING MUSICAL THEATRE

HISTORY, 1943-2023, OR A STRANGE LOOP

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE COLLEGE OF ARTS

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN THEATRE EDUCATION

BY

BEN J. LUNDY

COLUMBUS, GA

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GENERATIONAL THEORY AS A LENS FOR APPROACHING MUSICAL THEATRE
HISTORY, 1943-2023, OR A STRANGE LOOP

By

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ABSTRACT

In 1991, William Strauss and Neil Howe published generational theory in *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584-2069*. Though critiqued, Strauss and Howe's generational theory suggests that American history occurs in cycles characterized by four distinct generational turnings or moods that occur approximately every eighty years, roughly the span of a human life. Though the theory has been applied to American history, usually through a political and economic lens, this thesis will focus on the most recent Millennial Cycle and apply the theory to the development of Broadway musical theatre history. Innovative musicals such as *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Hair* (1968), *Rent* (1996), and *Hamilton* (2015) and their place in musical theatre history support Strauss and Howe's generational theory. The theory narrates a sociocultural perspective on the evolution of the Broadway musical, a distinctively American art form. The theory could forecast future trends and serve as a helpful framework for teaching musical theatre history.

INDEX WORDS: Generations, Generational Theory, Musical Theatre, Broadway, Boomers, 13ers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Y, Gen Z, Homeland Generation, *Oklahoma!*, *Hair*, *Rent*, *Hamilton*

DEDICATION

In Loving Memory of

Terri Fox

1932-2023

Grandma, you are an inspiration. I will always tell people that you are the reason I am in the theatre. I am sorry we could not read this paper together, but I know you are thoroughly enjoying it. You have always been my biggest fan, and I will forever be yours. I love you forever and always.

“Deep in December, our hearts should remember

And follow, follow, follow”- “Try to Remember” from The Fantasticks

Tim Lundy

1955-2023

Uncle Tim, you were an avid supporter of the arts and brought Broadway magic to me and my dad. Thank you for guiding my first trip to New York City and for taking me to my first Broadway show—that trip has clearly made an indelible mark. You brought so much beauty to the world. Your love for the arts, travel, celebration, good food, and great company lives on.

“There's only us, there's only this

Forget regret, or life is yours to miss

No other road, no other way

No day but today.”- “Finale B” from Rent

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“No artist is pleased. There is only a queer, divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others.”

Martha Graham to Agnes DeMille

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Introduction: “Until Now Gives Way to Then”

In *Fun Home*, Allison Bechdel struggles to understand her relationship with her father and his assumed suicide. In the opening number she sings, “I want to know what is true, dig deep into who and what and why and when, until now gives way to then” (“It All Comes Back (Opening)”). Echoing this sentiment, Jack Viertel, in his magnum opus, perhaps an unintended musical theatre history text, *The Secret Life of the American Musical*, says, “It’s only in hindsight that the patterns emerge” (xvii). With more cynicism, John Kenrick begins his seminal musical theatre history text, *Musical Theatre: A History*, saying that, according to Napoleon Bonaparte, history is “a set of lies generally agreed upon,” and according to philosopher Jorge Santayana, “a pack of lies about events that never happened told by people who weren’t there” (9). Kenrick furthers his argument, “Many sacred truths in this field were invented by press agents. It is second nature for theatre people to reshape reality” (9).

As Bechdel reflects on her life and simultaneously the life of her father, she has inspiring epiphanies, ultimately concluding, “Every so often, there was a rare moment of perfect balance where I soared above him” (“Flying Away (Finale)”). Bechdel’s dilemma and reconciliation with her father can resonate with many audience members: who hasn’t struggled with their parents? This shared experience alone serves as an impetus and fundamental cornerstone for William Strauss and Neil Howe’s generational theory.

In 1991, William Howe and Neil Strauss published their generational theory in *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584-2069*. In examining American history, they found “a startling pattern emerges: a recurring cycle of four distinct types of peer personalities, arriving in the same repeating sequence” (Strauss and Howe 33). The theory is two-fold: in addition to the four generational types, they found recurring themes for historical events or

generational turnings (33). Inspired by generational biographies such as Gail Sheechy's *Passages*, Cheryl Merser's *Grown Ups*, Daniel Levinson's *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Erik Erikson's "Eight Ages of Man" and *Childhood and Society*, Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return*, Ellen Lagemann's *A Generation of Women*, and K. Warner Schaie's generational intelligence studies, Strauss and Howe determined four stages of life (youth, rising adulthood, midlife, and elderhood). They synthesized this information in a comparative chart in Figure 1 highlighting what they call the generational diagonal: how generational cohorts matriculate into various stages during different periods (*The Fourth Turning* 81).

Recent Generations and Their Archetypes					
ERA	1908–1929	1929–1946	1946–1964	1964–1984	1984–?
		(Crisis)		(Awakening)	
KEY EVENTS	Four Freedoms World War I Prohibition Scopes Trial	Crash of 1929 New Deal Pearl Harbor D-Day	McCarthyism Levittown Affluent Society Little Rock	Kent State Woodstock Watergate Tax Revolt	Perestroika National Debt Culture Wars Simpson Trial
ENTERING ELDERHOOD (AGE 63–83)	Progressive (Artist) empathic	Missionary (Prophet) wise	Lost (Nomad) tough	G.I. (Hero) powerful	Silent (Artist) empathic
ENTERING MIDLIFE (AGES 42–62)	Missionary (Prophet) moralistic	Lost (Nomad) pragmatic	G.I. (Hero) hubristic	Silent (Artist) indecisive	Boom (Prophet) moralistic
ENTERING YOUNG ADULTHOOD (AGES 21–41)	Lost (Nomad) alienated	G.I. (Hero) heroic	Silent (Artist) sensitive	Boom (Prophet) narcissistic	Thirteenth (Nomad) alienated
ENTERING CHILDHOOD (AGES 0–20)	G.I. (Hero) protected	Silent (Artist) suffocated	Boom (Prophet) indulged	Thirteenth (Nomad) abandoned	Millennial (Hero) protected

Fig. 1. William Strauss and Neil Howe. *The Fourth Turning*. Broadway Books, 1998, pp. 81.

Strauss and Howe find that in youth generational cohorts are dependents; in rising adulthood: active members; in adulthood: leaders; and in elderhood: stewards (61). Each generation has its unique peer personality, usually based upon their childhood and upbringing, that illuminates how they will proceed into each phase of life. They also found that each cycle or "saeculum" spirals around two social moments: secular crises and spiritual awakenings (71). In synthesizing this information, they determined that 1991 was characterized by busy GIs in

elderhood, the indecisive Silent generation in midlife, the narcissistic Boomers in rising adulthood, and criticized 13ers (Gen X) in youth. As of 1991, they cite the most recent crisis as the Great Depression and World War II and the most recent spiritual awakening as the Boom Awakening or Consciousness Revolution (71). Using their generational diagonal, they concluded that generations alternate between dominant and recessive generations (73). According to the theory, in 2023, the dominant generations would be the Boomers and Millennials, and the recessive generations are the Silent and 13er generations.

In figuring eighteen generations of American history and proposing a four-part cycle where each cycle lasts roughly eighty years (approximately one life span), Strauss and Howe determined that there is a dominant, idealist generation (Boomers), who are raised in an outer-driven, “high” era, followed by a recessive, reactive generation (13ers), born during a spiritual awakening (76). After the spiritual awakening, a dominant, civic generation (GIs & Millennials) is raised during an inner-driven era referred to as the “unraveling” (76). Then, a recessive, adaptive generation (Silent and Gen Z) comes of age during a crisis (76). Strauss and Howe are not the first to suggest generational sequences in interpreting American history, and their work stands on the shoulders of previous historians and social scientists such as Arthur Schlesinger, Daniel Elazar, Samuel Huntington, and Morton Keller (85). However, in proposing these eighteen generations and the five four-part saeculums, they have illustrated important coincidences that characterize their theory: “Exactly eighty-five years passed between the first Confederate shot on Fort Sumter and Pearl Harbor Day. Back up the story, and note that eighty-five years also passed between Fort Sumter and the Declaration of Independence” (88).

Perhaps, most intriguingly, they preface their book by addressing each generational cohort and hypothesize how each generational cohort may react to their theory. They say to the

adult Boomers, “Possessing unyielding opinions about all issues, you judge your own peers no less harshly than you judge your elders and juniors” (11). They add a sentiment many would agree has come to pass, “You may feel some disappointment in the Dan Quayles and Donald Trumps who have been among your first agemates to climb life's pyramid, along with some danger in the prospect of Boomer Presidents and Boomer-led Congresses farther down the road” (11). Even more surprisingly, they include this prediction in the preface:

“No one, for example, can foretell the specific emergency that will confront America during what we call the ‘Crisis of 2020’—nor, of course, the exact year in which this crisis will find its epicenter. What we do claim our cycle can predict is that, during the late 2010s and early 2020s, American generations will pass deep into a "Crisis Era" constellation and mood— and that, as a consequence, the nation's public life will undergo a swift and possibly revolutionary transformation.” (15)

Based on their theory published in 1991, they “project a crisis lasting from 2020 to 2029” (382). In 1997, Strauss and Howe further explicated their theory in *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, suggesting the catalyst for the crisis may start circa-2005 and could potentially involve fiscal crisis, global terrorism, impasses over the federal budget, communicable viruses, and conflict in former Soviet republics that could prompt “gold and oil prices” to “soar” (345). They further hypothesize, “It's highly unlikely that any one of these scenarios will actually happen. What is likely, however, is that the catalyst will unfold according to a basic Crisis dynamic that underlies all of these scenarios: An initial spark will trigger a chain reaction of unyielding responses and further emergencies” (345). Keep in mind, they used their theory to prophesy this in 1991 and 1998, and recently, we have seen many of their predictions come true. Hopefully, your interest in the theory is now piqued.

In 2017, I remember when my undergraduate musical theatre professor, Valerie Accetta, introduced the theory as a possible lens and framework for musical theatre history. She thought it might help us as musical theatre performance students see the big picture as we scoured through John Kenrick's well-detailed yet chaotic (albeit opinionated) first edition of *Musical Theatre: A History*. Even in 2017, with no pandemic in sight, the generational theory seemed appealing to me. I thought about it, read some Wikipedia articles, discussed it with friends, and suggested its framework to aspiring musical theatre artists. I also thought about the theory as we debated in class what the date parameters are for the Golden Age era, contemporary musical theatre, and whatever we call the period we are currently in. This was further exacerbated by a painful audition in which I was severely scolded by an artistic director for presenting a contemporary musical theatre song at an audition for *Newsies* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. The artistic director wanted Golden Age selections even though that was not specified. But what should be considered Golden Age material? At that time, it seemed many musical theatre practitioners had a different theory as to when the Golden Age died. Surprisingly, despite a traumatic audition, I got the job but was plagued by the problem of what shows constitute each era of musical theatre. What even are the eras of musical theatre?

Through the Covid-19 pandemic and Broadway shutdown in 2020, followed by the January 6th insurrection in 2021, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, my interest in generational theory was rekindled. Despite a world in crisis, in the summer of 2022, I began graduate school at Columbus State University, and I elected to take musical theatre history again. This time we would be reading the second edition of John Kenrick's *Musical Theatre: A History*, which, though still loquacious and very much jumbled, remains a seminal (albeit exhaustive) text for this area of study. In this musical theatre history graduate course, we had to present a lecture

on various topics. I was assigned “Groundbreaking Broadway Choreographers.” My first question was, “What is a groundbreaking Broadway choreographer?” To my knowledge, there were so many of them. How do I identify them all and their contribution to musical theatre in under an hour? I decided generational theory and Tony award wins would be the standard in selecting my choreographers. I wanted to select choreographers from each generational cohort and choreographers whose work represented the generational turnings outlined by Strauss and Howe. I also made a chart to help students make connections between choreographers and the musical era they led. In drafting this chart in Figure 2, I started to see how many groundbreaking choreographers once served as dancers for a previous choreographer, and in turn, they would reject, revise, or revolutionize the choreographic storytelling of their predecessor. My professor and fellow students appreciated this rough graphic organizer. Unfortunately, Google Docs could not contain all lines of connection these Broadway choreographers had to one another.

Musical Theatre by American Generation: Choreographer Family Tree

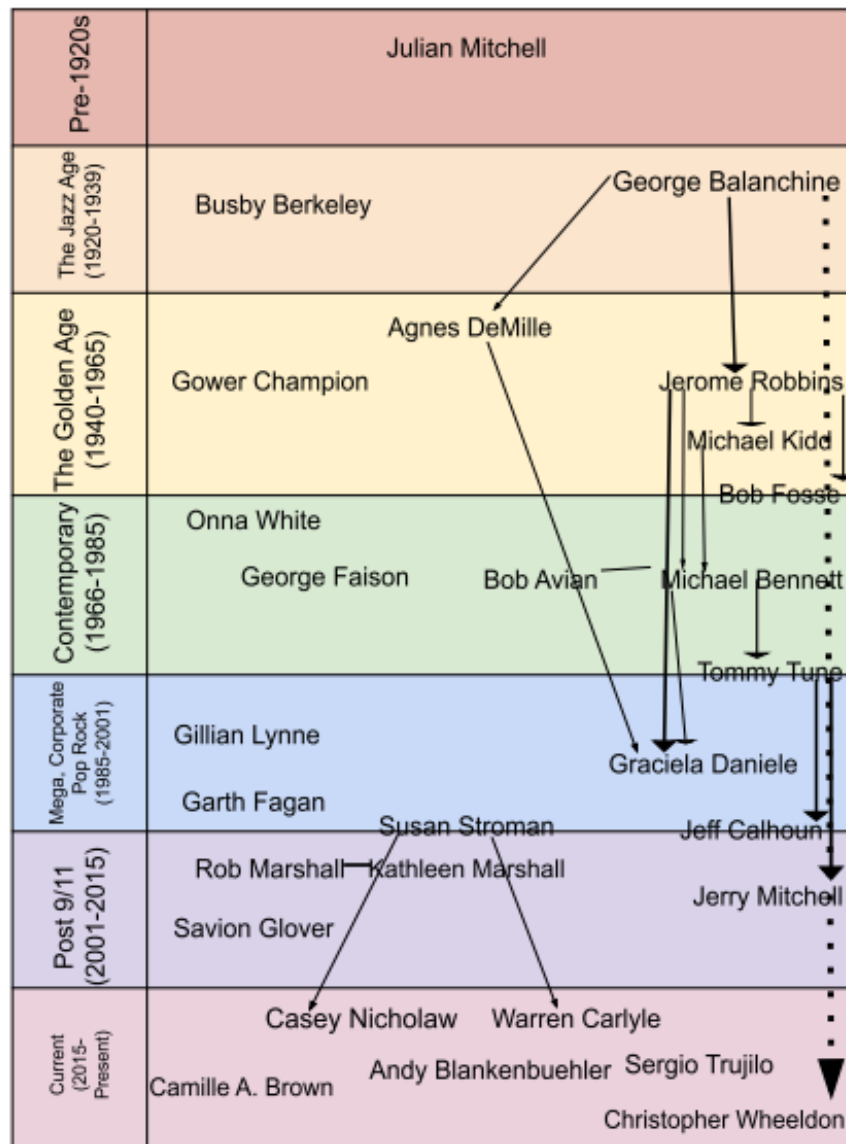


Fig. 2. Ben Lundy. *Musical Theatre by American Generation: Choreographers*, 2023, pp. 7.

Another course I took that summer was Introduction to Research Methods, and we ended the course by presenting explications of specific literary theories such as Marxism, structuralism, formalism, critical theory, gender studies, cultural studies, and queer theory. I wondered if anyone else had heard of generational theory and if it could also serve as an interpretive lens for analyzing theatrical works.

As I began researching the reception of Strauss-Howe's generational theory, I found that their theory has been popularized and highly criticized since publishing their initial theory and subsequent books such as *The Fourth Turning* (1996) and *Millennials Rising* (2000). I am sure Neil Howe's *The Fourth Turning Is Here*, to be published July 2023, will also be met with skepticism and scrutiny. In the *Chronicle of Higher Education*'s "Millennial Muddle: How stereotyping students became a thriving industry and a bundle of contradictions," Eric Hoover dismisses the "bold, almost mythical theory" discussed in *Millennials Rising* as "a hodgepodge of anecdotes, statistics, and pop-culture references" by "Washington wonks." Hoover also cites *Publishers Weekly* review of *Generations* "as wooly as a newspaper horoscope" ("Millennial Muddle"). Generational Theory has also become associated with Steve Bannon, a former White House Chief Strategist to President Trump and admirer of the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory. In *Quartz*'s "The Pseudoscience that Prepared America for Steve Bannon's Apocalyptic Message," Tim Fernholz claims "Strauss and Howe, you see, didn't just help invent Steve Bannon. They invented millennials. And society's obsession with that kind of generational pseudoscience has actually made it easier for Americans to believe in Bannon's prophecies of doom." *Politico* published a similar article in 2017 entitled "The Crackpot Theories of Stephen Bannon's Favorite Authors." In *Newsweek*'s "The Generation Game," the *Newsweek* staff suggests that Strauss and Howe "have written an elaborate historical horoscope that will never withstand scholarly scrutiny. But it is also a provocative, erudite, and engaging analysis of the rhythms of American life." The staff continues, "In their unrelenting determinism-by-birthday, Strauss and Howe deny the significance of any objective economic or international conditions in shaping generational identity; the only thing that matters is their inflexible cycle" ("The Generation Game"). In the *New York Times* "What's the Matter with Kids Today? Not a Thing,"

David Brooks, who ironically titles his review of *Millennials Rising* with a musical theatre reference to the beloved *Bye, Bye Birdie*, determines:

“This is not a good book, if by good you mean the kind of book in which the authors have rigorously sifted the evidence and carefully supported their assertions with data. But it is a very good bad book. It's stuffed with interesting nuggets. It's brightly written. And if you get away from the generational mumbo jumbo, it illuminates changes that really do seem to be taking place.”

After reading *Generations*, I can recognize how generational birth cohorts can be considered arbitrary, and I see how the dates Strauss and Howe derived deserve thought and latitude in interpretation. In fact, in the preface of *Generations*, they say, “We invite debate about our interpretation of social moments, our generational boundaries, and our peer personality descriptions” (16). Furthermore, Strauss and Howe encourage the *Generations* reader to research and test their theory in other fields of study: “We would be delighted to see others write on the generational history of any ethnic group, for example— or about the generational dynamic behind changes in technology, the arts, or family life” (16). Despite the controversy and, perhaps, contradictions that surround this theory, I believe generational theory, like other literary theories, could be a useful interpretive lens in analyzing history and literary texts, and I would argue that Strauss and Howe’s intention in publishing the theory is to start a conversation and get Americans to recognize how the shifts in generational upbringing and national events in our childhood affect the trajectory of our lives and the life of our nation.

As an aspiring musical theatre historian and current middle school educator, I seek to use generational theory as a lens and framework for interpreting musical theatre history. I want to identify ways in which the evolution of musical theatre history supports generational theory and

suggest how generational theory may be revised to fit the scope of musical theatre history. Hopefully, I can prove some merit in generational theory from this perspective so that other aspiring academics and scholars can use generational theory as an approach for future analyses and interpretations.

In researching and developing an interpretation of musical theatre history using generational theory, I have been fortunate to collaborate with my undergraduate professor, Valerie Accetta, and a fellow graduate student, Devin Franklin. Together, we were able to share our initial research at the 2023 Musical Theatre Educators' Alliance Conference, which declared the theme "Generation MT: Moving the Line." Though our research topic fits the theme, the conversation surrounding our current crisis must focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and advocacy. Through this conference, I was introduced to a musical theatre educators' podcast, *Carefully Taught*, and found a new text, *Fifty Key Stage Musicals*, which features essays from a diverse cohort of professors, professionals, and enthusiasts and recognizes "the long-neglected need for diversity in the musical theatre" (Schneider and Agnew 2). They continue the conversation, "As history shows, musical theatre was dominated by White males and the stories were told through their lenses. We cannot alter history's past by denying this fact...we eagerly await a second edition when many new voices will have created stories that celebrate the rich diversity musical theatre so desperately needs" (2). As my colleague Franklin eloquently discussed in our conference presentation, generational theory can also help explain the evolution of diversity and inclusion in musical theatre and hopefully points to exponential growth in this area for the future of the industry.

In addition to demonstrating generational theory and chronicling its evolution of diversity and inclusion through musical theatre history, I also hope to further the scholastic and academic

conversations that surround the musical theatre industry. Schneider eloquently states, “Musical theatre has been one of the most celebrated art forms to emerge in the past two hundred years. Despite these incredible contributions, it has only recently entered academia as a valid field of study. Therefore, in the grand scheme of scholarship, it is still in its embryonic stages” (1). He repeats this notion on the podcast that accompanies this new musical theatre history text, “Musical theatre scholarship is very new in the grand scheme of academia” (Schneider, “Introduction”). Hopefully, engaging in conversation about musical theatre history and its relationship with generational theory will contribute to the scholastic and academic canon of musical theatre studies and help legitimize this burgeoning field.

Another new musical theatre history text that also references the classic Hammerstein lyric, *Carefully Taught: American History Through Broadway Musicals* by Cary Ginell features a foreword by Doug Reside, the curator of the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, who contributes, “In America, musical theater in particular has been used as a kind of secular liturgical drama—a communal retelling of sacred stories using music to elevate the sense of transcendent truth that such myths demand” (Ginell and Reside v). Reside’s sentiment is recounted in the Museum of Broadway which recently opened in November 2022 and is another example of how musical theatre scholarship is being embodied. While at the MTEA conference, I escaped to the Museum of Broadway for a few hours and was struck by a George C. Wolfe quote that embodies the proposition of generational theory, “When art is created, it is not created strictly by an individual. A culture, a people, a time, and a place created it” (Filichia).

In addition to newly published materials, I often use Stanley Green’s *Broadway Musicals: Show by Show* which assembles a fairly comprehensive timeline of Broadway

musicals and the seasons they occupied. Interestingly, Cary Ginell offers the preface to Green's 9th edition and, in May 2019, concluded, "As Broadway hurtles toward the end of the second decade of the 21st century, it appears to be healthier than ever, reaching out to new, younger generations by continuing to reflect the imagination and innovation of its practitioners" (Green xxii). I also consult Scott Miller's *Strike Up the Band* which, in its "Overture" chapter, offers Leonard Bernstein's definition of musical theatre: "an art that arises out of American roots, out of our speech, our tempo, our moral attitudes, our way of moving" (5). I will even include Kenrick's *Musical Theatre: A History*. How could I not? Kenrick echoes generational theory and legitimizes the study of musical theatre history at the beginning of his book stating: "Musicals vividly reflect the popular culture of their time...they help you know how the art form got to where it is now...they aid in enriching your theatregoing...They make you realize that your heroes/heroines are flawed and human" (10). Perhaps, the best support for generational theory is a source that is not even, technically, a musical theatre history text: Jack Viertel's *The Secret Life of the American Musical*. Though Viertel's purpose is to discuss how Broadway shows are built, he accomplishes this objective while commenting on the history and development of the Broadway musical while also seeking to legitimize the study. He posits, "If Shakespeare is England's national theater, aren't Broadway musicals ours?" (Viertel x). In his "Overture" chapter on the evolution of the American musical, he offers this:

"From *Bloomer Girl* to *Hair* to *1776* to *Hairspray* to *Hamilton*, we keep wrestling with the questions raised by Rodgers and Hammerstein's first hit...*Oklahoma!* joined subject to form in a genuinely new way and created the template that continued to work for generations...It questioned American attitudes while promoting American values, and it gave us a soundtrack suitable for courtship and moral authority in equal measure." (10)

In this one comment, he provides the structure for the research presented. Musical theatre historians often start with *Oklahoma!* as the beginning of the American musical. I tend to agree with that diagnosis. Interestingly, *Oklahoma!* precedes the start of Strauss and Howe's Millennial Cycle by three years. This would mean that musical theatre, as scholars know and define it, has only existed in the most recent generational cycle of which we are now in the fourth turning or crisis moment. This also means that musical theatre has evolved through the past four turnings by the last four generations: GIs, Silents, Boomers, and 13ers. Millennials are just beginning to make their mark on the industry and the adaptive, Gen Z is emerging and maturing quickly. I was going to focus on each generational turning and a show that defines that generational era. Though I will not discuss in detail the fifty key Broadway musicals considered in Routledge's newest text, I will focus on four musicals that revolutionized and redefined musical theatre and are mentioned at length in all of the musical theatre history texts I have mentioned: *Oklahoma!*, *Hair*, *Rent*, and *Hamilton*. However, to truly appreciate and understand the cyclical nature Strauss and Howe describe through generational theory, it would be beneficial to first examine both the Great Power Cycle (1865-1946) and the Millennial Cycle (1946-2029?). What we might find is, in fact, a strange loop.

Chapter 1: "Illustrating the Strange Loop, a Fascinating Rhythm"

Almost one hundred years ago, Ira Gershwin published his lyrics, "Fascinating rhythm/You've got me on the go! Fascinating rhythm/ I'm all a-quiver...Oh, how I long to be the man I used to be!/ Fascinating rhythm/ Oh, won't you stop picking on me?" (Gershwin). According to the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory in *Generations*, "American history has pulsed to the rhythm of the generational cycle" (82). They argue, "Most historians look upon this rhythm as, at most, a curious coincidence" (35). They believe by using their cyclical

interpretation of American history, “You may also gain a better sense of how you and your peers fit into the ongoing story of American civilization— a long and twisting human drama that offers each generation a special role. Appreciating the rhythm of this drama will enable you to foresee much of what the future holds for your own lifecycle” (8). Perhaps, the theory would support Usher’s ultimate conclusion in Michael R. Jackson’s *A Strange Loop*, “Cause change is just an illusion...and “I” is just an illusion...If thoughts are just an illusion, then what a strange loop.”

Originally, I was going to limit my focus to only the latest developing cycle in the Strauss-Howe Theory: The Millennial Cycle, from approximately 1946 to today. However, to better understand the generational theory and its cyclical nature, we at least need to examine and relate the past two cycles they consider— The Great Power Cycle and The Millennial Cycle— to fully appreciate the fascinating rhythm composed by the theory and the strange loop that is designed. Even if you consider generational theory an illusion (of historical allusions), you are familiar with adages such as “history repeats itself” or “history does not repeat itself, but it rhymes,” and generational theory offers a way of analyzing that repetition, rhythm, or rhyme. Using evidence of musical theatre history, we can see the strange loop taking shape.

In *The Fourth Turning*, Strauss and Howe maintain that the Great Power Cycle (1865-1946) begins at the Civil War's conclusion (the fourth turning of their "Civil War Cycle") and ends with World War II (68). This is illustrated in Figure 3 "The Anglo American Saeculum" Chart.

The Anglo-American Saeculum					
Saeculum	Time from climax of Crisis to climax of Awakening	(climax year) Awakening (full era)	Time from climax of Awakening to climax of Crisis	(climax year) Crisis (full era)	Time from one Crisis climax to next Crisis climax
LATE MEDIEVAL				(1485) Wars of the Roses (1459-1487)	
REFORMATION	51 years	(1536) Protestant Reformation (1517-1542)	52 years	(1588) Armada Crisis (1569-1594)	103 years
NEW WORLD	52 years	(1640) Puritan Awakening (1621-1649)	49 years	(1689) Glorious Revolution (1675-1704)	101 years
REVOLUTIONARY	52 years	(1741) Great Awakening (1727-1746)	40 years	(1781) American Revolution (1773-1794)	92 years
CIVIL WAR	50 years	(1831) Transcendental Awakening (1822-1844)	32 years	(1863) Civil War (1860-1865)	82 years
GREAT POWER	33 years	(1896) Third Great Awakening (1886-1908)	48 years	(1944) Great Depression and World War II (1929-1946)	81 years
MILLENNIAL	30 years	(1974) Consciousness Revolution (1964-1984)	51 years?	(2025?) Millennial Crisis? (2005?-2026?)	81 years?

Fig. 3. William Strauss and Neil Howe. *The Fourth Turning*. Broadway Books, 1998, pp. 68.

The first turning and “high” period in “The Great Power Cycle” is what they have coined “Reconstruction and the Gilded Age,” which they believe lasts from 1865-1886 (172). The second turning or spiritual awakening is “The Third Great Awakening” (1886-1908) which featured the labor movement, the progressive movement, the Haymarket Riot, and the student missionary movement (173). They mark the third turning or unraveling as “World War I and Prohibition” (1908-1929) and consider the fourth turning or crisis of this cycle “The Great Depression and World War II” (173). The next cycle is the Millennial Cycle, and the first turning is the “American High” in which America arose victorious from World War II as a “global superpower” (1946-1964) (*Turnings in History* 4). The American High ended with the Kennedy assassination, and the “Consciousness Revolution,” the second turning, ensued at the height of the Civil Rights movement and continued with counterculture, campus riots, Watergate, and the tax revolts (4). The third turning of this cycle or unraveling began with Ronald Reagan’s reelection (4). Strauss and Howe refer to this period as the “Long Boom & Culture Wars” (1984-2008). In *The Fourth Turning*, Strauss and Howe believed that the Millennial crisis would begin circa 2005 (176).

Since publishing *The Fourth Turning*, Neil Howe has continued the theory through his company LifeCourse Associates which helps companies manage and market with generational theory in mind (“History”). In the LifeCourse Associates document *Turnings in History*, Howe defines the fourth turning of the Millennial Cycle as the Global Financial Crisis and cites the 2008 global financial meltdown as its inception (5). He believes the current crisis will last until approximately 2029 when the Homeland Generation (Gen Z) enters the workforce (5).

In the introduction, I mention musical theatre history texts and how they each may share different musical theatre inceptions and how there is not much consensus on the musical theatre

eras or how musical theatre history should be divided into eras. *Strike Up the Band* by Scott Miller (2007) begins in 1900 with George M. Cohan and is mostly divided by decade with chapters spanning 1900-1919, 1920s, 1930s, and so on. Though I recommend this text, I do not believe that decades are the best way to analyze the development of musical theatre history because many shifts occur during the decade. Ethan Mordden's musical theatre history textbook *Anything Goes* (2013) starts with *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). He splits musical theatre into four ages. The first age constitutes *Beggar's Opera*, burlesque, minstrel shows, and extravaganzas ending with the early 1900s *Wizard of Oz* and *Babes in Toyland*. His second age is "the first two decades of the twentieth century...when forms were both consolidating and evolving" (51). The third age begins with the Golden Age which he believes begins circa 1920, continues through the 1970s, and he ends this section with the "Sondheim Handbook." In the fourth age, he addresses the "devolution" of the Broadway musical: constant revivals, new productions lacking originality, and the new voices in the industry.

This text covers a lot of ground but is like John Kenrick's second edition of *Musical Theatre: A History* (2017), whose work could be described as thematically and categorically chronological. Kenrick, however, begins musical theatre history in ancient times and takes an in-depth look at the various historic creators of musical theatre, but by the 1960s "The Parade Passes By" (the end of the Golden Age), Kenrick opts for Miller's decade-by-decade approach to musical theatre history. Larry Stempel's *Showtime* (2010) begins with The Astor Place Riot (1849) and looks at *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and *The Black Crook* (1866) as the predecessors to what we define as musical theatre. His "Part Two: Into the Twentieth Century" begins with Cohan and ends with Comden, Green, and Styne. The third part "Toward the New Millennium"

discusses early alternative musicals, the Off-Broadway renaissance, “*Cabaret* and the Concept Musical,” and ends with “Disney and the Movical.”

Another great musical theatre history resource often utilized is *Broadway: The American Musical* PBS series whose timeline is divided as follows: 1904-1919 (“Broadway Grows Up”), 1920-1932 (“Broadway Melody”), 1933-1942 (“Hard Times”), 1943-1959 (“The Golden Age”), 1960-1979 (“Changing Times”), and 1980-2004 (“Second Century”). Currently, my favorite Broadway history text is *Fifty Key Stage Musicals* (2022) because it is a collection of essays, written by different voices, on various game-changing musical theatre productions and how they innovated the industry. Schneider and Agnew introduce the book, “we are defining a ‘key musical’ as a musical whose existence had a major impact on the landscape and creation of musical theatre...If it had not been for Show A then we wouldn’t have had shows B, C, etc.” (1). In their introduction, they also include a brief history of musical theatre: 2000 BC-1800 AD, 1800-1900, 1900-1930 (“The Cinderella Era”), 1930-1943 (“The Champagne Era”), 1943-1966 (“The Golden Age”), 1966-1981 (“The Concept Era”), 1982-2000 (“The Techno Era”), 2001-2008 (“The Comfort Era”), 2008-Present (“The Inclusion Era”). Their introduction is a succinct, six pages chronicling the big picture of musical theatre, and my favorite moniker is the one they use for our current era: “inclusion” (Schneider and Agnew 6).

Jack Viertel says, “The architecture of the musical dates back to Broadway’s Golden Age, the dates of which can be agreed by no one. My opinion is that it begins on the opening night of *Oklahoma!* (March 31, 1943) and ends on the opening night of *A Chorus Line* (July 25, 1975)” (4). The fact that there is no consensus among musical theatre historians and practitioners has always bothered me. Although, I guess I should be satisfied that we all agree that *Oklahoma!* launched the standard, integrated form for what we consider to be American musical

theatre. However, I believe generational theory may help alleviate the great debate and serve as a model for how we categorize and label musical theatre eras.

Using generational theory and the brief history included in *Fifty Key Stage Musicals*, I divided Stanley Green's reference resource *Broadway Musicals: Show by Show* into new eras. Based on these works and the Strauss-Howe dates, I propose the following as the eras of musical theatre and their working titles. For the four turnings in musical theatre history of the Great Power Cycle, which I would argue is the American Industrial Age, I suggest 1866-1890 ("Gilbert & Sullivan Extravagance"), 1890-1907 ("Vaudevillian Spectacle"), 1907-1929 ("Roaring Decadence"), and 1929-1943 ("The Depression"). For the four turnings in musical theatre history of the Millennial Cycle, which I perceive as the Information Age, I submit 1943-1966 ("Golden Age"), 1966-1981 ("Concept Era"), 1981-2008 ("Corporate Boom"), and 2008-Present ("Inclusive Revolution"). In both cycles, one might notice particular themes, shifts, and moods produced during the sequential turnings that roughly coincide with the Strauss-Howe model. In both cycles, I have changed the dates of the turnings slightly to best reflect when I believe Broadway musical theatre loosely entered and exited these periods. Of course, these dates and the entire theory are open for interpretation, discussion, and debate. However, I seek to create a compelling case for how musical theatre has developed and evolved in this cyclical pattern illustrated by the Strauss-Howe generational theory.

1.1 The First Turning: The Great Power Cycle's "Reconstruction and Gilded Age"

Both Green's *Broadway Musicals Show by Show* and Schneider & Agnew's *Fifty Key Stage Musicals* begin with *The Black Crook* at Niblo's Garden in 1866, a production that we can all agree, if not a musical, is an American musical predecessor. Kenrick offers an astute view of *The Black Crook*, "That much-talked-about show was not so much a beginning as it was a culmination" (72). Kenrick, Stempel, and Mordden all cite pre-cursors to *The Black Crook*, such

as Laura Keene's magical spectacle *The Seven Sisters* (1860); however, *The Black Crook* was the first of its kind in many ways and is the first American production to have national commercial success. One should also note that this commercial success came after the Civil War which devastated the New York economy, caused Broadway ticket sales to plummet, and resulted in Laura Keene selling her theatre and touring smaller comedies including *Our American Cousin*, the play Lincoln was watching before being assassinated (Kenrick 77). With the Civil War over, *The Black Crook* ran for over an entire Broadway season with 475 performances, "the longest-running theatre production up to that point in world history," and between 1870 and 1895, *The Black Crook* also had fifteen New York revivals (Trainor 13). The show set a precedent for spectacular extravaganzas and "young ladies in tights and form-fitting bodices" (Kenrick 82). The post-Civil War nation had much to do with the success of *The Black Crook* which, in hindsight, depended on Manhattan's population boom, the state-of-the-art theatre facility of Niblo's Garden, and the controversy surrounding the scantily-clad women (77). In *Fifty Key Stage Musicals the Podcast*, Trainor says, "*The Black Crook*, to my mind, does innovate spectacular production in America. It certainly innovates theatrical touring as a model for every successful and elaborate show that would tour after it. But it really feels like the end of the era of a kind of German melodrama" (29:30).

In addition to spectacle extravaganzas such as *The Black Crook*, 1866-1890 constitutes the era of Gilbert and Sullivan, who, though British opera writers, were generating a musical form that would be celebrated and emulated by Americans. This is why *HMS Pinafore* is included in *Fifty Key Stage Musicals*. *HMS Pinafore*, like other Gilbert and Sullivan operas, featured topsy-turvydom, realistic settings, "humability," a patter song, and satire of public officials (Kenrick 114). Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* was the first British invasion in

musical theatre history and was an immediate sensation, and due to a lack of international copyright, “eight companies were simultaneously offering *HMS Pinafore* on Broadway” (114). In the *Fifty Key Stage Musicals* podcast, Rupert Holmes (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood* writer) suggests that there were actually fifteen productions within a couple of city blocks of New York’s west side (33:50). Holmes deems *HMS Pinafore* “a very easy shoehorn into a wonderful world of operetta, opera, and soon to be musical theatre, what we like to think of as musical comedy” (34:00). His brother Richard Holmes says *HMS Pinafore* “was such a sensation...it virtually created a new audience for musical theatre” (Holmes 19). For Gilbert and Sullivan’s next production, *The Pirates of Penzance* opened in London and New York at the same time in 1888, to establish copyright in both countries (Kenrick 115). In 1890, a disagreement about paying for carpet in the renovations of the Savoy Theatre in London resulted in the end of their collaboration (Kenrick 125). They eventually would work together again, but their later productions would not have the same commercial success and notoriety, and for this reason, I conclude the Gilbert and Sullivan period in the New York musical theatre scene in 1890.

1.2 The Second Turning: The Great Power Cycle’s “Third Great Awakening”

Fifty Key Stage Musicals does not suggest a “key musical” between 1890 and 1907, and much like the future concept era (1966-1982), musical theatre in New York was in a dark period during Strauss and Howe’s “Third Great Awakening.” This period was characterized by vaudeville acts and tours, revues such as *The Passing Show* (1894), a precursor to Ziegfeld’s *Follies*, and George M. Cohan’s productions. However, in the early 1900s, musical theatre would regain momentum with *Florodora* (1900), *Wizard of Oz* (1903), *Babes in Toyland* (1903), and *Little Johnny Jones* (1904), and these shows are all included by Stanley Green in *Broadway Musicals: Show by Show*.

Florodora by Owen Hall, Leslie Stuart, Paul Rubens, Edward Boyd-Jones, and George Arthurs constituted another British invasion musical comedy; however, this time the musical would feature idyllic women (Kenrick 167). Fighting British invasion, George M. Cohan and his productions during this awakening period would serve as a cornerstone and forefather to the “American” nature of the Broadway musical. Oscar Hammerstein II once said, “Never was a plant more indigenous to a particular part of the earth than was George M. Cohan to the United States of his day” (Kenrick 176). His loose musical comedies would feature America and what it means to be American. His American themes would be replicated, revised, and rejected by future generations of musical theatre creators. In many ways, Cohan would use this awakening period to solidify musical comedy as a distinguishingly American art form. In 1903, *Wizard of Oz* and *Babes in Toyland* were spectacular shows in the Majestic Theater on Columbus Circle (demolished in 1954) featuring children’s stories both produced by Fred Hamlin and directed and choreographed by Julian Mitchell, who would also serve as a producer on *Babes in Toyland* (Green 8). Interestingly, both of these productions would be adapted for the screen during the Depression and WWII crisis. During this awakening period, it is also important to note that New York City was making major improvements with the first subway opening in 1904, expanding access to the theatre for hundreds of thousands of audience members, and the theatre district was moving from Union Square up to the new transportation hub at 42nd street and Broadway, the area of Longacre Square (Kenrick 168). However, 1904 was also the year that the *New York Times* entered the newly built Times Building, and Longacre Square was thus renamed Times Square (168).

1.3 The Third Turning: The Great Power Cycle's Unraveling "WWI and Prohibition"

In musical theatre history, the American premiere of the international and commercial sensation *The Merry Widow* in 1907 seems to indicate a shift. It is no surprise that Florenz Ziegfeld's *The Follies of the Day* also premiered that year. The launch of these innovative and notable franchises would catapult America into the unraveling period of the Great Power cycle which will involve the roaring culture, World War I, and Prohibition. *The Merry Widow*, written by Viennese march composer Franz Lehar, premiered at the Theater van der Wien on December 30, 1905. It was "a risky operetta with scandalous subject matter that delighted audiences and critics and laid the groundwork to take the world by storm and inspire the next generation of musical theatre artists" (Child 24). The production, which was translated into twenty-five languages, became a brand that boasted its own corsets, cigars, cocktails, parasols, dance styles, and hats that were designed by the famed costume designer Lady Duff-Gordon who was transforming women's fashion and was pioneering the runway show (24). If it were not for World War I and England's fight against Vienna, the Viennese operetta could have become a lasting Broadway standard. Instead, World War I would extinguish the life of the production, but Lehar's music would influence the next generation of American composers such as Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers who grew up with the popular tunes of *The Merry Widow* (27). The production was "a predecessor to the mega-musical franchises of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (28). The production was globalizing and premiered at The New Amsterdam Theatre, where Charles Dillingham, producer and theatre manager, lit the first marquee with moving lights on Times Square (28).

Before Britain's illustrious producer and marketer Cameron Mackintosh's invasion of Times Square in 1982, American producer Florenz Ziegfeld—"an instinctive manipulator of

publicity, a world-class “spin doctor” decades before that designation was invented”—would light the lights of Broadway (Kenrick 188). His companion, Anna Held, suggested that he produce a revue based on the Parisian *Folies Bergère* (194). He partnered with theater owner, Abe Erlanger, for theater roof space, librettist Harry B. Smith, and director Julian Mitchell to produce *The Follies of the Day* in 1907 at the newly appointed Jardin de Paris (194). Anna Held was of great renown, and he billed the chorus girls as “the Anna Held Girls,” though Anna Held was not a member of the production (194). The revue featured the ladies, who entered the house to give audience members a closer look, and sketches depicting celebrities such as President Teddy Roosevelt (194). He had a second edition of the production in 1908 that boasted 120 performances, and with business booming, Ziegfeld had a franchise in his hands: one that would debut the great comedians of New York, make him the most powerful producer in American musical theatre, and last almost three decades (194).

This booming period (1907-1929) also showcased “the once-in-a-generation cultural phenomenon” of *Shuffle Along* (1921) which made black creators cultural icons, changed the map of New York City, and launched the careers of artist-activists. Reese Europe, an orchestra leader and member of the Missionary Generation (1860-1882), dreamed of creating a black Broadway musical, and lyricist Noble Sissle and composer Eubie Blake of the Lost Generation (1883-1900) were able to fully realize his dream with the successful production of *Shuffle Along* (Henderson 30). The musical featured the contemporary and popular jazz-style music of evolved ragtime and would inspire the great minds of the Harlem Renaissance such as Langston Hughes, “who claimed he attended Columbia...because it made it easier for him to see productions of *Shuffle Along*” (32). Because of the show’s popularity, 63rd Street, a two-way road, had to be changed to one lane to accommodate the traffic (32). The show was also innovative as it allowed

blacks the first opportunity to integrate the orchestra seats which had always been reserved for white people (32).

1.4 The Fourth Turning: The Great Power Cycle's Crisis "Great Depression and World War II"

The booming period was building to Jerome Kern's *Show Boat* (1927) which some consider the first character-driven score and others consider an integrated musical form (Nissen 36). Miles Kreuger, President and Founder of the Institute of the American Musical, said, "The history of American Musical Theatre, quite simply, is divided into two eras: everything before *Show Boat*, and everything after *Show Boat*" (36). Though its structure and precedence are debated, *Show Boat* was a unique musical that stepped away from musical comedy in treating serious social issues such as "addiction, individual obligation, and racial discrimination" (36). Stempel says *Show Boat* is the "first American musical to integrate the elements of musical theater into a credible drama" and "deal with serious issues in a suitably mature fashion" (37).

The stock market crash on October 24, 1929, would trigger the Great Depression, bring America into its fourth turning or crisis period, kill vaudeville, and make Florenz Ziegfeld, the "Glorifier" and *Show Boat* producer, a debtor. America had entered its next crisis period approximately sixty-nine years after its previous crisis, The Civil War. Though it was a trying time that decimated Broadway audiences, Broadway musicals would figure out how to survive, stay relevant, and rise with resilience. Many musicals of this period (1929-1943) would have a profound effect on the future of the Broadway musical, establishing its legitimacy and launching the Broadway musical as a form of advocacy, social commentary, and protest. *Fifty Key Stage Musicals* identifies *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), *Anything Goes* (1934), *Porgy and Bess* (1935), *The Cradle Will Rock* (1938), and *Pal Joey* (1940) as examples. The Gershwin musical *Of Thee I Sing*, a musical comedy centering on the selection of a new national anthem, was the first

musical to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama (Frankos 43). The Pulitzer Prize Committee acknowledged *Of Thee I Sing* as:

“A biting and true satire of American politics and the public attitude toward them.... It may well be that this play will influence our stage as much as *The Beggar’s Opera* influenced the 18th-century stage, and Gilbert and Sullivan that of our fathers. ...the award will have an excellent effect on future productions ...helping to raise the tone of popular musical comedies” (43).

Of Thee I Sing would pave the way for other Depression-era shows that would address political issues through satire and future musicals to win the Pulitzer Prize. *Anything Goes* by Cole Porter would serve as another humorous satire and social commentary “skewering Americans’ habit of turning religion into show business and criminals into celebrities” (Miller 46). The musical utilized and popularized the “list song” such as “You’re the Top” (46). Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*, though preceded by *In Dahomey* (1903) and *Shuffle Along*, would continue to blaze the trail for black musical theatre and would serve as another serious musical that would innovate and inspire the work of future composers such as Leonard Bernstein (Wooden 56). Marc Blitzstein’s *The Cradle Will Rock* was a famous Federal Theatre Project intended to be silenced by government censorship due to its socialist ideas promoting unions over greedy, capitalist corporations (Pinzler 59). However, despite being locked out of their theater, they found another venue and performed in the house refusing “to be deterred” and with nothing but a piano, demonstrating “just how little is needed to create a great piece of theatre” (63). Pinzler concludes, “In their refusal to be silenced, they inspired an entire generation of theatre artists to downsize” (63).

The Cradle Will Rock redefines “the show must go on” and is a prime example of Broadway’s resilience due to the will, bravery, fortitude, and stubbornness of the musical theatre performer and practitioner. With *Pal Joey*, America was on the precipice of a new age. This Rodgers and Hart musical features the “Pal Joey” *New Yorker* stories of John O’Hara, based on the life of a “cocky, self-deluded” Chicago nightclub dancer and MC, Joey Evans (Maslon 64). Rodgers wrote, “Joey was a disreputable character, and Larry understood and liked disreputable characters” (65). The musical is best known for its shocking frankness. Maslon says, “Joey’s campaign of sexual conquest with a brutal lack of sentimentality [is] rarely seen in plays of the period, let alone in the venue of musical comedy” (66). Vivienne Segal said of the show, “It was quite a shock in those days. Audiences were afraid to laugh, they said to themselves ‘Oh my God, I’m not supposed to know what this is all about’” (66). Rodgers said of Joey, “Joey was not disreputable because he was mean, but because he had too much imagination to behave himself and because he was a little weak. If you don’t understand this about Joey, you’ll probably find him hard to take...Nobody like Joey had ever been on the musical comedy stage before” (67). Richard Rodgers also believed that *Pal Joey* was “the first musical to deal with the facts of life” (68). Maslon concludes, “*Pal Joey* was groundbreaking in two ways: it introduced the “anti-hero” to the American musical and set a much broader standard for sexual frankness in the genre” (69). For the most part, this concludes a brief look at the musical theatre that developed during Strauss and Howe’s suggested Great Power Cycle (1866-1943).

I wanted the focus of the thesis to be the current Millennial Cycle because it starts with *Oklahoma!*, the musical most historians consider the first fully integrated American musical. However, to illustrate the strange loop of how one cycle feeds into the next, I must add a few details about how the turnings of the first cycle of musical theatre history connect to the patterns

we will examine more closely in the subsequent chapters. In Figure 4, I identify the various Strauss-Howe dates and the dates I propose for a more accurate discussion of musical theatre development.

Turnings	Great Power Cycle-Generational Theory	Great Power Cycle-Musical Theatre History	Millennial Cycle-Generational Theory	Millennial Cycle-Musical Theatre History
HIGH	Reconstruction & Gilded Age (1865-1886)	“G & S Extravagance” 1866-1889	American High (1946-1964)	“Golden Age” (1943-1966)
AWAKENING	3rd Great Awakening (1886-1908)	“Vaudevillian Spectacle” (1889-1907)	Consciousness Revolution (1964-1984)	“Concept Era” (1966-1981)
UNRAVELING	WWI & Prohibition (1908-1929)	“Roaring Decadence” (1907-1929)	Long Boom (1984-2008)	“Corporate Boom” (1981-2008)
CRISIS	Great Depression & WWII (1929-1946)	“The Depression” (1929-1943)	Global Financial Crisis (& Pandemic?) (2008-2029?)	“Inclusion Revolution” (2008-2029?)

Fig. 4. Ben Lundy. *Generational Cohorts and Turnings versus Musical Theatre Eras*. 2023, pp. 28.

The turnings of generational theory tend to correspond to coincidental shifts in musical theatre history. The high turning seems to be characterized by a new production form that sweeps the nation, becomes popular culture, and serves as a structure for future successes. The awakening period shifts to a “darker” time of sociopolitical unrest in which practitioners experiment with newer forms amidst protest and clashing cultures. The unraveling is associated with a business boom, commercialism, and activism. The fourth turning or crisis results in bare, minimalist productions that help to legitimize the form and the “fight for what’s right” in the given time period.

The Black Crook (1866) launched the high of the Industrial Age or Great Power musical with powerful displays of spectacle and women, and forty-one years later in 1907, *The Merry Widow* and Ziegfeld’s *Follies* become commercially successful franchises. In the Information Age or Millennial Cycle, the “high” musical is catalyzed by Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* (1943), and thirty-nine years later, Cameron Mackintosh produces and markets *Cats*,

setting a new precedence for musical theatre commercialism. Between 1889 and 1907 during the Third Great Awakening, New York was rife with labor movement riots and new evangelicalism. Similarly, 1966-1981 was the Studio 54 era of New York City in which the Vietnam War was protested, the counterculture movement ensued, and “sex & drugs & rock & roll” ruled Times Square. Though important events occurred in the most recent awakenings, the second turning seems to be a transitional and experimental shift in musical theatre development. There are fifty-five years from the spectacle *Black Crook* (1866) to the activist *Shuffle Along* (1921) during the height of the unraveling period. We find that fifty-three years lie between *Oklahoma!* (1943) and Broadway’s 1996 season, the height of its unraveling, featuring activist musicals such as *Bring in ‘Da Noise, Bring in ‘Da Funk* and *Rent*. *Black Crook* (1866) to *Oklahoma!* (1943) spans seventy-seven years, from high period to high period. *Oklahoma!* (1943) to *Hamilton* (2015) spans seventy-two years, from high period to crisis. If we look back at the Figure 3 chart by Strauss and Howe, we see that the generational cycles used to be a little over a hundred years but have contracted over time. Perhaps, our current cycle is starting to expand its reign like the older cycles pre-Civil War. Hopefully, we can now begin to see the strange loop emerging. To better understand generational theory and its application, we will take an in-depth look at each of the turnings in our current cycle in musical theatre history and the generational cohorts who influenced and led each shift.

Chapter 2: The Golden Age- “Oh, What Beautiful Morning”

Musical theatre practitioners might not enjoy reading the discursive *Generations*, especially since the first reference to musical theatre does not occur until page 259 as Strauss and Howe discuss the elderhood of the “Lost Generation:”

“The Lost stand as America 's most gifted cadre of wordsmiths: They won five of America's nine Nobel Prizes for Literature and produced our culture's most memorable song lyrics (Cole Porter, Oscar Hammerstein). Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington introduced improvisational jazz, America's first naughty-sounding music. These are lasting gifts from a generation for whom, in Dorothy Parker's words, ‘art is a form of catharsis.’” (259)

2.1 The GI Generational Cohort in Musical Theatre

However, it is interesting that this is where Strauss and Howe make the first mentions of musical theatre because this moment—the Lost generation’s elderhood and the GI generation’s adulthood—is also the era in which musical theatre matriculates and matures into a structured and revered popular art form. Strauss and Howe describe the GI generation as beneficiaries of the US government, “a buddy who has grown up right alongside them” (265). They explicate, “When they were coming of age, the government gave them jobs. When they were rising adults, the government provided them with numerous preferential advantages in education, employment, and family formation. When they were in midlife, they benefited from tax cuts and an economy run full throttle” (265). Strauss and Howe describe the GIs as a “trendy” generation, one that set and established trends, and many of these GI musical theatre practitioners such as Richard Rodgers, Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, and Jerome Robbins would establish the trend and formula for a compelling and structured Broadway musical. Joseph Goulden deemed the GIs “a

generation content to put its trust in government and authority” (265). Like Jimmy Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, the GIs had an optimistic, enthusiastic energy to “clean up a greasy Lost world” (272). Strauss and Howe said, “GIs gave institutional firmament to the ‘Brotherhood of Man’ envisioned by their beloved Missionary fathers” (277). “Brotherhood of Man” is an interesting moniker for this generational cohort given that *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* is one of the Tony-winning musicals of this generation, featuring a song entitled “Brotherhood of Man.” Figure 5 lists a few of the GI musical theatre practitioners and the musical titles that shaped musical theatre’s Golden Age Era (Strauss-Howe’s American High Period).

GOLDEN AGE 1943-1966
The American High • The High • 1946-1965

Elders: Lost Generation (Reactive Nomads b. 1860-1882)
Mid-life: GI Generation (Civic Heroes b. 1901-1924)
YA: Silent Generation (Adaptive Artists b. 1925-1942)
Children: Boomer Generation (Idealist Prophets b. 1943-1960)

GI Practitioners

Composers	Directors	Choreographers	Writers
Frederick Loewe ('01) Richard Rodgers ('02) Jule Styne ('05) Betty Comden ('17) Leonard Bernstein ('18) Sheldon Harnick ('24)	Moss Hart ('04) Josh Logan ('08) Arthur Laurents ('17)	George Balanchine ('04) Agnes de Mille ('05) Michael Kidd ('15) Jerome Robbins ('18) Gower Champion ('19) Onna White ('22)	Adolph Green ('14) Betty Comden ('17) Alan Jay Lerner ('18) Hugh Wheeler ('12) Michael Stewart ('24)

Tony's Best Musical
1949-1966

1949: *Kiss Me Kate*
1950: *South Pacific*
1951: *Gypsy & Dolls*
1952: *The King & I*
1953: *Wonderful Town*
1954: *Kismet*
1955: *The Pajama Game*
1956: *Damn Yankees*
1957: *My Fair Lady*
1958: *The Music Man*
1959: *Redhead*
1960: *The Sound of Music & Fiorello!*
1961: *Bye, Bye Birdie**
1962: *How to Succeed*
1963: *A Funny Thing...Forum*
1964: *Hello, Dolly!*
1965: *Fiddler on the Roof*
1966: *Man of La Mancha*

Important Theatre Events

1943: Death of Lorenz Hart
1944: First Original Broadway Cast Album
Oklahoma!
1947: Mixed reviews and bad box office
Allegro
1948: The First Tony Awards
1950: Kurt Weill dies
1954: The Public Theatre Founded
1960: Oscar Hammerstein II dies
1961: Kaufman & Hart die
1963: Cole Porter dies
1966: *Sweet Charity & Cabaret*

Production Trends

-Focus on a fully integrated story where the songs forward the plot
-Dream ballets
-Addressing serious topics

Fig. 5. Ben Lundy. *Golden Age: The First Turning*. 2023, Data from Wikipedia, pp. 32.

2.2 Oklahoma! Ushers in the Golden Age, The American High Period

Though many dates of eras, genres, and shifts in musical theatre are highly debated and disputed, a date that most historians can agree on is the opening of *Oklahoma!* as the launch of Broadway's Golden Age. In "'Does Anybody Have a Map?': The Impact of 'Virtual Broadway' on Musical Theater Composition," the authors consider the supposed "Golden Age" to start with *Oklahoma!* in 1943 and end with *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1964 (294). Viertel says, "*Oklahoma!* in 1943 was a revolutionary moment" (9). Stanley Green agrees that *Oklahoma!* is "a recognized landmark in the evolution of the American musical theatre" (119), and Scott Miller expounds, "For the first time in a popular musical, neither the stars nor the songwriters were the stars of the show; this time the real star of the show was the plot" (48). Viertel, Miller, and Green each discuss how Rodgers and Hammerstein re-envisioned musical theatre. In fact, just the simple opening number "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" made audiences realize that they were witnessing something new. A love triangle set in a time when Oklahoma was seeking statehood, Viertel says that *Oklahoma!* asked the audience "what it meant to be an American, to become an American" (9). Viertel's book, which focuses on the structure of the American musical, begins by praising Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* for creating "the template that continued to work for generations" (10). Miller finds that this GI-musical is about "responsibility to the community" and is a theme that would be further explored forty-four years later in Stephen Sondheim's innovative *Into the Woods* (49).

Oklahoma! was revolutionary particularly in its innovative choreography, the conditional love song, the death scene, and its cast recording. Miller calls Agnes DeMille's choreography "a fully formed narrative language," that was revolutionary in that it gave Laurey, the female protagonist, a sex drive (49-50). Of course, female sex drive and choreography would be revived again in musicals such as *West Side Story*, *Man of La Mancha*, and *Cabaret* (50). Viertel

suggests that “People Will Say We’re in Love” improved *Show Boat*’s love song “Make Believe,” transforming the Broadway love song from “light entertainment into something deeper and better” (80). Of course, Rodgers and Hammerstein would not stop perfecting the conditional love song. They would later write *Carousel*’s “If I Loved You” and *South Pacific*’s “Twin Soliloquies,” saturating the score with visceral human intimacy. In Charlotte Greenspan’s “Death Comes to Broadway,” Greenspan discusses how serious tones shape the American musical once death entered the narrative. Greenspan says, “During World War II, death came to the Broadway musical, particularly in musicals by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. Jud Fry dies in *Oklahoma!* (1943); Billy Bigelow dies in *Carousel* (1945); Lieutenant Cable dies in *South Pacific* (1949); the King of Siam dies in *The King and I* (1951)” (155). *Oklahoma!* was also the first musical to have its own Original Broadway Cast (OBC) recording, another innovative measure of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s work that would serve as a foundation for future Broadway productions. Ultimately, *Oklahoma!* ushered in the American Golden Age by making the musical a serious thing to be reckoned with. Through *Oklahoma!*, Rodgers and Hammerstein revolutionized the musical into a cultural force to be taken seriously and, with an innovative structural model, ushered in the American Golden Age.

Unfortunately during the run of *Oklahoma!*, Richard Rodgers’ previous collaborator, Larry Hart, died “as did Hammerstein’s former partner Jerome Kern” (Miller 51). Miller identifies the death of Hart and Kern as further evidence of the end of one era and the beginning of the next. Rodgers and Hammerstein would remain partners, and after World War II while many women were widowed, they would bring another serious musical *Carousel* to the Broadway stage and handle “the sorrow of real life” (Miller 53). Though musicals were now addressing serious topics, musical comedy was still alive in musicals such as Frank Loesser’s

Guys and Dolls which would feature two major plots and two primary couples. Clearly, Rodgers and Hammerstein were not the only musical team innovating the American musical, and the musical would continue to evolve through the Golden Age. However, the Golden Age musical would mature alongside movements in American culture.

2.3 A Curious Paradox: “Soon It’s Gonna Rain”

Miller discusses the GI-production of *Love Life* (1949), a Kurt Weill musical with a book by Alan Jay Lerner and choreography by Michael Kidd, which he adds was surrealistic and ahead of its time. The musical features the disintegration of a marriage as a metaphor for the “growing cynicism” and “decay of American culture” (57). Perhaps, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Allegro* (1947) also fits the bill for a concept musical ahead of its time and a musical that would foreshadow the future of musical theatre. Viertel notes the late 50s musical productions of *Gypsy* (1959) and *The Music Man* (1957) as further evidence of the American cultural shift. In these musicals, characters struggle with “a world that is lurching scarily toward modernity, away from safe, old-fashioned values into a new America of mass production and homogeneity” (39). The backdrop of these late 50s and early 60s musicals features America “in transition and the instability that ensues” (39). Miller furthers this argument citing Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt’s Off-Broadway musical *The Fantasticks* (1960): “the end of romanticism and the embrace of cynicism” (83). Just like the changing seasons, a central metaphor of *The Fantasticks*, America was changing on and off the stage.

The Golden Age as exemplified by Lerner and Loewe’s *Camelot* (1960), which served as a metaphor for the Kennedy administration’s dream, would not last. Miller poignantly reflects, “Like Arthur’s dream, Kennedy’s Camelot would not survive either. And within a few years, much of American musical theatre would turn dark and cynical to match the national mood” (88). In 1964, Arthur Laurents’ collaboration with Stephen Sondheim, a member of the Silent

Generation, *Anyone Can Whistle*, would break the rules of traditional comedy, and Bock and Harnick's *Fiddler on the Roof* would ultimately question tradition.

In fact, *Fiddler on the Roof* serves as a metaphor for America at this pivotal time in US history after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Ami Eden, editor-in-chief of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, finds that the brilliance of *Fiddler on the Roof* is “its portrayal of change and tradition as a dangerous dialectic—experienced by a struggling milkman who never loses his sense of humor” (Burrier 117-118). Viertel says, “*Fiddler* is about the destruction of a culture and its hoped-for transmutation to a new place” (43). Tevye is a man “confronting the end of an era” (44). *Fiddler*'s importance is also linked to its GI director-choreographer Jerome Robbins. In this production, Robbins was a “driving creative force” and his innovative brilliance as a director auteur would serve Hal Prince, a member of the Silent generation, as he ushered in the age of the concept musical through Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret* (Burrier 118).

The Strauss-Howe Generational Theory marks the end of the American high period in 1964: the aftermath of John F. Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963 (*The Fourth Turning* 10). I argue that musical theatre does not specifically follow that date. However, the content and the questions raised by *Fiddler on the Roof* which opened September 22, 1964 seem to illustrate the shift in the national mood. However, the 1966 *Sweet Charity* and *Cabaret* productions better serve as bookends to the American Golden Age. America would enter Vietnam on November 1, 1955, and eventually Americans would distrust government as post-World War II optimism waned (Miller 105). Miller affirms that *Cabaret* would tap into America's “growing political anger” (105).

Because Strauss and Howe conclude that the American High culture was “bland, modernist, and spirit-dead,” *Sweet Charity* and its “The Rhythm of Life” song sequence must be

considered as a piece that foreshadowed the approaching spiritual awakening: The Consciousness Revolution (*The Fourth Turning* 175). “The Rhythm of Life” highlighted America’s “growing disenchantment with organized religion, its growing spiritual bankruptcy, and subsequent search for ‘alternative’ spirituality” (Miller 103).

By 1966, “The Rhythm of Life” demonstrates how far America had progressed from Gershwin’s “Fascinating Rhythm.” Much of the evolution of the musical at this time was owed to Rodgers and Hammerstein whose musical *Oklahoma!* was pioneering. If we refer to the last high period, the Reconstruction and Gilded Age, we can see parallels between the pioneering partnership between Gilbert and Sullivan and Rodgers and Hammerstein. Gilbert and Sullivan innovated the “patter song” while Rodgers and Hammerstein established the “conditional love song.” Both duos would also create a catalog of commercial, structural successes that featured realistic settings and “humability.” Rodgers and Hammerstein were responsible for creating “a new landscape,” and Viertel adds that *Oklahoma!* has had “notable productions in every decade” (10). Viertel concludes that *Oklahoma!* took “all the innovations, experiments, and surprises that had shown up in numerous separate musicals over the previous twenty years” and incorporated “them seamlessly and thoughtfully into the drama of the story—much the way *Rent* did more than fifty years later” (50).

Chapter 3: The Awakening- “The Age of Aquarius”

In the *Fifty Key Stage Musicals Podcast*, Peter Filichia is a guest on the “Ch. 14- My Fair Lady” episode, and he discusses the acclaim of the *My Fair Lady* original Broadway cast album. However, he digresses on a tangent about the shifting sound circa 1964. Filichia says that baby boomers began buying albums now that they were over eighteen and had jobs. Though *Hello, Dolly!* was the number one album and *Funny Girl* was number two in the summer of 1964, their

records would be eclipsed by the boomer-purchased *A Hard Day's Night* by the Beatles in August 1964. Filichia goes on to say:

“As strange as this may sound, part of this had to do with the Kennedy assassination because the assassination took place on November 22, 1963. The Beatles released “I Want to Hold Your Hand” in December of that same year, and by February, they were on the *Ed Sullivan Show* which really cemented their success. The point was that we needed something new in this country after the assassination of this young president...a lover of Broadway musicals...*Hello, Dolly!* and *Funny Girl* were the last grasps of greatness...There would be another big original cast album four years later, *Hair*, but that didn't sound anything like a conventional Broadway musical. Yes, that made it to number one, but again those sounds had nothing to do with Rodgers and Hammerstein and Lerner and Loewe, believe me.” (25:41)

It was the dawning of a new era, “the new age of Aquarius.” Strauss and Howe titled this turning, the second of the Millennial Saeculum, “The Consciousness Revolution” which was characterized by “urban riots, campus fury...Vietnam War protests and rebellious counterculture” (*The Fourth Turning* 175). What musical could represent this awakening better than *Hair*? Strauss and Howe cite this period as the beginning of “feminist, environmental, and black power movements” and the rise of violent crime and divorce (175). Strauss and Howe believed that the peak of this awakening was the Watergate Scandal of 1974 (175). At this time, the Silent generation was entering midlife. Unlike the “hero” archetype of the GI, Strauss and Howe deem this next “Silent” generation the “artist,” which makes sense when we consider the “artist” Broadway figures such as Bob Fosse, Stephen Sondheim, and Hal Prince—people who, like Andy Warhol, saw the world differently and reflected their unique perspective on the stage.

Figure 6 shows examples of the Silent generation who came into their own during the Consciousness Revolution.

Generational Theory: Musical Theatre History

Turning 2

CONTEMPORARY 1967-1982
Consciousness Revolution • The Awakening • 1966-1984

Elders: GI Generation (Civic Heroes b. 1901-1924)
Mid-life: Silent Generation (Adaptive Artists b. 1925-1942)
YA: Boomer Generation (Idealist Prophets b. 1943-1960)
Children: 13ers (Reactive Nomads b. 1961-1981)

Silent Practitioners

Composers	Directors	Choreographers	Writers
Mel Brooks ('26)	Hal Prince ('28)	Gillian Lynne ('26)	Neil Simon ('27)
John Kander ('27)	Wilford Leach	Bob Fosse ('27)	Fred Ebb ('28)
Charles Strouse ('28)	('29)	Bob Avian ('37)	Thomas Meehan
Jerry Bock ('28)	Jack O'Brien ('39)	Tommy Tune ('39)	('29)
Burt Bacharach ('28)	Trevor Nunn ('40)	Graciela Daniele ('39)	Peter Stone ('30)
Cy Coleman ('29)		Garth Fagan ('40)	Alain Boubil ('41)
Stephen Sondheim ('30)			
Jerry Herman ('31)			
Mary Rodgers ('31)			

Tony's Best Musical 1967-1979
1967: *Cabaret*
1968: *Hallelujah, Baby!*
1969: *1776*
1970: *Applause*
1971: *Company*
1972: *Two Gentleman of Verona*
1973: *A Little Night Music*
1974: *Raisin*
1975: *The Wiz*
1976: *A Chorus Line*
1977: *Annie*
1978: *Ain't Misbehavin'*
1979: *Sweeney Todd*
1980: *Evita*
1981: *42nd Street*
1982: *Nine*

Important Theatre Events
1967: Tony's air on TV
1968: Theatre Development Fund Founded
1971: ALW's JCS on Broadway
1973: TKTS Booth Opened
1979: Richard Rodgers dies
1980: Gower Champion dies
1984: Ethel Merman dies

Production Trends
Rock Musicals
Concept Musicals
Musical Revues
Revivals
Longest-Running Shows Competition

Fig. 6. Ben Lundy. *Contemporary Era: The Second Turning*, 2023, Data from Wikipedia, pp. 39.

3.1 The Silent Generational Cohort in Musical Theatre

According to Strauss and Howe, the Silent Generation was born between 1925 and 1942 (*The Fourth Turning* 174). They were the children of the Great Depression and World War II, raised during the last crisis (174). Strauss and Howe generalize this generation as “sensitive,” “risk adverse” advocates (175). They are the mediators of the “stolid” GIs and the “passionate” Boomers. Their midlife was characterized by fragmented families, diversity, complex institutions, and “prolific litigation” (174). In their elderhood, they are known for their “affluence, hip style, and reputation for indecision” (174). These characteristics describe these essential innovators of musical theatre. Many of Stephen Sondheim’s characters such as Bobby from *Company* and the Baker and his wife from *Into the Woods* wrestle with this indecision, reflecting the mindset of this generational cohort. The “hip style” of Bob Fosse and Hal Prince is also influential in the evolution of the “concept” musical during this awakening period. Fosse, Prince, and Sondheim are also known today for their affluence and the great wealth they provide to the musical theatre canon. Strauss and Howe suggest that the mission of the Silent Generation was to “refine and humanize the GI-built world” (*Generations* 281). Strauss and Howe find that “The Silent Generation has produced virtually every major figure in the modern civil rights movement...from Martin Luther King, Jr., to Malcolm X, from Cesar Chavez's farmworkers' union to Russell Means' American Indian Movement” (285). It should also be noted that “Silent Congresses in the mid-1980s convened twice as many hearings, debated for twice as many hours, hired four times as many staff, mailed six times as many letters to constituents-and enacted one-third as many laws” (285). They are called the Silent Generation because until 2021 they had no presidential representation (281). Joe Biden, born in 1942 and a member of the Silent Generation, is the first of the Silent Generation to make it to the highest office in the US. Musical theatre aficionados will enjoy how Strauss and Howe conclude their discussion of the Silent

Generation: “From youth forward, this most considerate of living generations has specialized not in grand constructions or lofty ideals, but rather in people, life-size people...Barbra Streisand's agemates would like to believe that ‘people who need people are the luckiest people in the world.’ But, true to form, they have their doubts” (294).

Viertel takes an interest in this period and discusses how the advent of television contributed to the “demise of the classic Golden Age musicals” (11). He supports the Strauss-Howe “Consciousness Revolution” by saying, “Once we saw the dogs attacking black children protesting in Birmingham on the nightly news in 1963, a new America entered our consciousness” (11). Viertel reflects, “Experimental recreational drugs, loud rock, quick cuts in the movies, and the scattershot delivery of bits of information on children's shows...produced a cumulative effect—people were receiving information in a different way than they had a generation before” (47). During this turning, the sexual revolution took hold, and rock music became the status quo.

3.2 Hair: The Consciousness Revolution

Viertel reiterates Filichia, “Louis Armstrong's version of ‘Hello, Dolly’ was virtually the end of the line until the rock anthems of *Hair* came along” (12). Wes Drummond discusses the innovations of *Hair*: its energetic and emotional nonlinear plot, naked actors, expletives, sexual content, a broken fourth wall, a live rock band that escapes the confines of the pit, and electrical amplification (124). *Hair* was inspired by Megan Terry’s *Viet Rock* but was largely more accessible and commercial probably, unintentionally, due to the involvement and support of The Public Theatre, which would become a revolutionary presence and vehicle for subsequent innovative musicals (Viertel 107). Initially, Joseph Papp, the GI who founded The Public Theatre, was not particularly interested in *Hair* but was adamant about producing something that would reflect the current culture (Drummond 124). Eventually, *Hair* broke the mold and the

boundaries on Broadway. Viertel describes *Hair* as “the first shot across Broadway’s bow, and it caused an uproar...Some of the traditional audience was offended...by the nudity and the inanity of the lyrics. Traditional Broadway's very way of life was threatened, and Broadway fought back” (150). In 1967, Howard Taubman of the *New York Times* proclaimed, “another generation of gifted newcomers...expressing themselves with a freshness and vigor that warn they mean to take over uptown one of these days,” and Clive Barnes said *Hair* was “an honest attempt to jolt the American musical into the 1960s” (Drummond 125). Miller cites the *Saturday Review*, “Director Tom O’Horgan is pushing the medium to new limits...he has encouraged a bunch of mainly hippie performers inventively to explore their own natures with song and dance,” and John O’Connor’s *Hair* review in the *Wall Street Journal*, “No matter the reaction to the content. I suspect the form will be important to the history of the American musical” (108). Director Tom O’Horgan described *Hair* as an opportunity to create a new theatrical form “whose demeanor, language, clothing, dance, and even its name accurately reflect a social epoch in full explosion” (108). Green surmises, “*Hair* grew out of the emotional turmoil of the Vietnam War years with its concomitant anti-establishment movement that produced a generation of drug-influenced, sex-obsessed social dropouts” (224).

Miller cites *Hair* as the impetus and forefather to the nonlinear concept musicals that would be perfected in the 1970s with *Company*, *Follies*, *A Chorus Line*, and many others (108). However, in *Fifty Key Stage Musicals*, David Spencer makes a case for *Promises, Promises* (1968), a musical that, like *Hair*, would redefine the way in which Broadway musicals sound. In the article, Spencer discusses the work of the Silent Generation orchestrator Jonathan Tunick who brought the Burt Bacharach sound to Broadway and improved the balance of the pit by being the first to use amplification, impressing future collaborator Stephen Sondheim (133).

Tunick would go on to orchestrate Sondheim's *Company*, and *Company* would solidify the potential success that concept musicals could achieve. Sondheim's next project was *Follies*, and Viertel says, "*Follies* was emblematic of the America that had been rudely awakened from the dreams fostered by *Oklahoma!* and its descendants" (103).

3.3 Singular Sensations: Thrilling Combinations of the Late 70s

In 1975, *The Wiz* and *A Chorus Line* would become the peaks of this era. Finally, black musicals, which largely disappeared during the Golden Age, returned during this awakening period with *The Wiz*: a gritty, edgy, black musical that initially survived due to word of mouth (Ward and Henderson 148). *The Wiz* would become a blockbuster film launching Michael Jackson into solo stardom and, more importantly, inspire musical stories that celebrate the black experience (Ward and Henderson 148). The Civil Rights movement marked the return of black creatives to the Broadway stage and the success of *The Wiz* would spark other successful musicals that celebrate the black experience such as *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Dreamgirls*. Workshopped with Papp at The Public Theatre, Michael Bennett's *A Chorus Line* inventively explored the lives of Broadway chorus dancers, broke records, and ran for fifteen years, becoming a Broadway staple (Fassler 154). In 1977, children returned to Broadway with Charles Strouse's *Annie* (Kirsch 156). Hal Prince warned Strouse, "If it's a children's show, nobody will come. But if it's a show that's an adult show that parents can bring their children to, you'll be a hit" (156). Charles Kirsch asserts, "If you look at Annie's predecessors, there is no Broadway musical that was written for a young audience" (156). Perhaps Kirsch has forgotten about the previous awakening during the Great Power Cycle, Strauss and Howe's Third Awakening, which featured dark children's musicals such as *Wizard of Oz* and *Babes in Toyland*. As previously mentioned, these musical stories would eventually become important cultural films. Similarly, *Annie* and *The Wiz* would achieve cinematic fame as well. In 1978, *Ain't Misbehavin'* would

spark a trend of new and improved character-driven musical revues on the Broadway stage, and after winning a Tony, this musical can be attributed to having made the revue a type of musical theatre to be taken seriously (Morrison 161).

In 1979, Prince and Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* shook the ground and Broadway began shifting again. *Newsweek* critic Jack Kroll remarked, "In sheer ambition and size, there's never been a bigger musical on Broadway" (Morooney 166). Perhaps musical theatre historians can agree that the "mega-musical" was born. Prince had directed and produced a piece of Epic Theatre that made audiences think critically while partaking in a spectacle (167). Alison Morooney concludes, "Prince's grandeur and Sondheim's black humor combined to make a piece of theatre that was such an amalgamation of genres that critics and audiences were left unsure how to react" (169). The *Sweeney Todd* epic was followed by a British epic: Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's *Evita*, another musical that elicits ambiguous responses. In 1980, *42nd Street* became another Broadway hallmark, spectacle, and Gower Champion's final musical. The posthumous Tony-winning director-choreographer died on the opening night of his musical (Kenrick 458). Another shift occurred in 1981 with Michael Bennet's latest musical *Dreamgirls*. In *Fifty Key Stage Musicals*, Bill Russell, a self-identified Boomer, recalls that the *Dreamgirls* Motown score was a "touchstone" for him and the boomer generation (172). This was another musical workshopped at Papp's Public Theatre (173). *Dreamgirls* was noted for Bennett's cinematic staging made possible by Robin Wagner's incredible set design, featuring five moving towers, and Tharon Musser's lighting design, sporting four lighting bridges that could be raised or lowered (175). Frank Rich of *The New York Times* said of *Dreamgirls*, "When Broadway history is being made, you can feel it," and he compares the production to *Gypsy* (Miller 162). Both *Gypsy* and *Dreamgirls* premiere towards the end of their respective turnings and

seem to highlight trends that will be adopted in the productions of the next turning. Though *Gypsy* is a Golden Age musical, future concept musicals would expound upon the fragmented, soliloquy moments of complicated characters like Mama Rose. Similarly, many mega-musicals and corporate musicals would follow the lead of *Dreamgirls* epic and cinematic storytelling. Douglas Watt of the Daily News wrote, “*Dreamgirls* represents an inordinate expenditure of talent and money on a musical that resembles a series of rehearsal periods for some slick TV commercial” (162). Though *Dreamgirls* did not win the Tony, “its Baby Boomer friendly score ran almost twice as many performances as the artsy *Nine*” (Bill Russell 176). Bill Russell mentions the Baby Boomers often in his chapter and concludes, “By tapping into musical genres which spoke to the Baby Boomers, *Dreamgirls* opened the door for much more of that generation’s music on Broadway—a trend whose end is nowhere in sight” (177).

The American musical was waking up to possibilities and was growing up into something even more mature than Rodgers and Hammerstein would have imagined. Strauss and Howe’s previous Third Awakening period might be best known for the popular vaudeville productions of the time. One can draw parallels between the vignette structure of vaudeville shows and the concept musical. Interestingly, both awakenings concluded with productions featuring children and spectacle. The spectacular innovations would usher in the next turning. During the Consciousness Revolution, Fosse, Sondheim, Prince, and many others were bringing the Broadway musical into uncharted territories. As artists, their tones and style shifted from piece to piece; however, their personal style and critical display of indecision made these Silent practitioners influencers, innovators, and craftsmen of the musical whose legacy is undeniable and unforgotten.

Chapter 4: The Unraveling- “At the End of the Millennium: You’re What You Own”

Viertel suggests that 1975 was a year in which American storytelling culture shifted (128). He cites E.L. Doctorow’s novel *Ragtime* and Robert Altman’s film *Nashville* as new, innovative stories with multiple narratives (128). Perhaps, these cultural pieces would influence the epic, narrative storytelling we would find in the “mega-musical” and the corporate musical: musicals of the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s.

4.1 *The Baby Boomer Generational Cohort in Musical Theatre*

Strauss and Howe suggest that the next turning begins during Reagan’s second term as president in 1984 (*The Fourth Turning* 176). This turning is labeled the “Long Boom and Culture Wars” and was characterized by “individualism drifting toward pessimism” (176). Overall, there were few national problems, but it was also a time involving “growing violence, incivility, widening inequality, pervasive distrust of institutions and leaders, and a debased popular culture” (176). In 1998, Strauss and Howe feared that the culture wars were further dividing and splitting our country into two sides or “competing values camps” (176). It’s fairly apparent that a divisive America became the product of the Long Boom and Culture Wars, and it is no surprise that Strauss and Howe consider this period to be an “unraveling” of culture. By 1998, they were at the pinnacle of the unraveling as they published *The Fourth Turning*, and they thought the Long Boom and Culture Wars would end in 2005 (176). However, they did leave a question mark after the date. Bill Strauss died in 2007, but Neil Howe eventually published the year 2008 as the end of the Long Boom and Culture Wars (*The Turnings in History*). Howe suggests that the recession and global financial crisis were the catalysts of the next turning: the crisis.

The Baby Boomers have been the rulers of the unraveling period as they lived out their midlife dreams. Strauss and Howe said that Boomers “came of age rebelling against worldly blueprints of their parents” (176). Boomers were the first young urban professionals or

“‘yuppies’ with mainstream careers but perfectionist lifestyles” (176). As of 1998, Strauss and Howe found Boomers “trumpeting values, touting a ‘politics of meaning,’ and waging scorched-earth Culture Wars” (176). Perhaps, the Boomer mindset has provided a framework for the “cancel culture” that we witness today in our crisis period. In 1991, Strauss and Howe identified Donald Trump as the prototype of a Boomer who “sees himself capable of becoming a titan of whatever world he chooses fully to inhabit—providing cover for personal disappointments or (as a Boomer might put it) ‘deferred’ ambitions” (*Generations* 303). At this point, it is important to note that both Bill Strauss and Neil Howe are Boomers and that the image of their own generational cohort reads like a fraught condemnation. In their first book, they say, “Always the distracted perfectionists, they first apply a light hand, then (once they start paying attention) a crushingly heavy one. They ‘graze’ on munchies until they figure it's time to diet, and then they don ashes and sackcloth” (315). They recall a *Good Housekeeping* ad in the *New York Times* that considered the 90s the “Decency Decade...It will be a very good decade for the Earth, as New Traditionalists lead an unstoppable environmental juggernaut that will change and inspire corporate America” (316). In 1991, they concluded, “In ways other generations partly applaud and partly loathe, Boomers today stand midgame in a many-pronged reworking of American society. The righteous fires of People's Park are still smoldering” (316).

This turning in musical theatre history was first dominated by British Boomers: composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and producer Cameron Mackintosh. However, notable Americans would become strong, determined Broadway leaders such as Stephen Schwartz, Marc Shaiman, Julie Taymor, Susan Stroman, Jerry Mitchell, Rob Marshall, Tony Kushner, and Howard Ashman. These names connote images of vivid and epic productions. Figure 7 outlines the productions

and practitioners of the Long Boom & Culture Wars, or, what I suggest we call, The Corporate Boom.

Generational Theory: Musical Theatre History

Turning 3

MEGA-MUSICAL/CORPORATE (1983-2007)
Long Boom & Culture Wars • The Unraveling • 1984-2008

Elders: Silent Generation (Adaptive Artists b. 1925-1942)
Mid-life: Boomer Generation (Idealist Prophets b. 1943-1960)
YA: 13ers (Reactive Nomads b. 1961-1981)
Children: Millennials (Civic Heroes b. 1982-2004)

Boomer Practitioners

Composers	Directors	Choreographers	Writers
Charlie Smalls ('43)	Jerry Zaks ('46)	Michael Bennett ('43)	Tim Rice ('44)
Marvin Hamlisch ('44)	Julie Taymor ('52)	George Faison ('45)	Marsha Norman ('47)
Claude-Michel Shonberg ('44)	Des McAnuf ('52)	Susan Stroman ('54)	Lynn Ahrens ('48)
Elton John ('47)	Scott Ellis ('57)	Jerry Mitchell ('60)	James Lapine ('49)
Stephen Schwartz ('48)	Ivo van Hove ('58)	Rob Marshall ('60)	Howard Ashman ('50)
Andrew Lloyd Webber ('48)	Bartlet Sher ('59)	Jeff Calhoun ('60)	Harvey Fierstein ('52)
Alan Menken ('49)	Michael Greif ('59)		Craig Lucas ('51)
William Finn ('52)	Michael Mayer ('60)		Mark O'Donnell ('54)
Marc Shaiman ('59)	Stephen Daldry ('60)		Tony Kushner ('56)
Stephen Flaherty ('60)			Douglas Carter Beane ('59)
Jonathan Larsen ('60)			

<p>Top Grossing: (Taylor, 2022)</p> <p><i>Lion King</i> (#1) <i>Wicked</i> (#2) <i>Phantom of the Opera</i> (#3) <i>Chicago</i> 1996 Revival (#5) <i>Mamma Mia!</i> (#7) <i>Jersey Boys</i> (#8) <i>Cats</i> (#10) <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> (#11) <i>Les Misérables</i> (#12) <i>Miss Saigon</i> (#13) <i>Mary Poppins</i> (#15) <i>The Producers</i> (#16) <i>Rent</i> (#17) <i>Hairspray</i> (#20)</p>	<p>Tony's Best Musical 1983-2007</p> <p>1983: <i>Cats</i> 1984: <i>La Cage aux Folles</i> 1985: <i>Big River</i> 1986: <i>The Mystery of Edwin Drood</i> 1987: <i>Les Misérables</i> 1988: <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> 1989: <i>Jerome Robbins' Broadway</i> 1990: <i>City of Angels</i> 1991: <i>The Will Rogers Follies</i> 1992: <i>Crazy for You</i> 1993: <i>Kiss of the Spiderwoman</i> 1994: <i>Passion</i> 1995: <i>Sunset Boulevard</i> 1996: <i>Rent</i> 1997: <i>Titanic</i> 1998: <i>Lion King</i> 1999: <i>Fosse</i> 2000: <i>Contact</i> 2001: <i>The Producers</i> 2002: <i>Thoroughly Modern Millie</i> 2003: <i>Hairspray</i> 2004: <i>Avenue Q</i> 2005: <i>Spamalot</i> 2006: <i>Jersey Boys</i> 2007: <i>Spring Awakening</i></p>	<p>Top Grossing by Year 1980-2007</p> <p>1984: <i>La Cage aux Folles</i> 1985: <i>Cats</i> 1986: <i>Cats</i> 1987: <i>Ms and My Girl</i> 1988: <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> 1989: <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> 1990: <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> 1991: <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> 1992: <i>Miss Saigon</i> 1993: <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> 1994: <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> 1995: <i>Show Boat</i> 1996: <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> 1997: <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> 1998: <i>Ragtime</i> 1999: <i>Lion King</i> 2000: <i>Lion King</i> 2001: <i>Lion King</i> 2002: <i>The Producers</i> 2003: <i>Lion King</i> 2004: <i>Wicked</i> 2005: <i>Wicked</i> 2006: <i>Wicked</i> 2007: <i>Wicked</i></p>
<p>Production Trends: Mega-musicals Corporate Musicals</p>		

Fig. 7. Ben Lundy. *Mega- and Corporate Musicals: The Third Turning*. 2023, Data from Wikipedia, pp. 48.

4.2 *Tick Tick: Broadway's Mega-Corporate Boom*

Viertel compares the contemporary unraveling with the most previous unraveling 1908-1929 (13). He compares the “spectacle and big rococo melodies” of the 80s and 90s with that of Sigmund Romberg and Rudolf Friml’s early operettas (13). *Cats*, which came seventy-six years after its sensational commercial ancestor *The Merry Widow*, seems to be the true mark of the presence of the mega-musical. The mega-musical was here to stay on Broadway as proven by *Cats*’ significant Broadway run which lasted until 2000 (Kenrick 463). Miller found *Cats* to be a “character study really, virtually no plot, only a few relationships, just a bunch of cats, harkening back to the massively produced spectacles of the 20s and 30s” (156). Miller, too, seems to see the parallels between the “unraveling” periods Strauss and Howe identify. Eventually, I would argue that these mega-musicals became the corporate musical. Miller says, “In the era of the mega-musical, producers wanted every audience throughout the entire run of a show to see the exact same performance” (156). Perhaps, this is the distinction and what makes corporate musicals corporate: the ability for both production and performance to be consistently replicated. Cameron Mackintosh is often considered the king of this effect, and Miller describes him as “a commercial genius...responsible for turning the American musical into an international art form” (156). *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Les Miserables* were all Mackintosh productions that became international sensations much like *The Merry Widow* eighty years earlier. Viertel adds that each of the British musicals’ “names became its own brand” (51).

Susan Russell, Penn State professor and former *Phantom of the Opera* company member, reflects upon her commercial and corporate experience while performing *Phantom of the Opera*. In hindsight, she suggests, “What if *Phantom of the Opera* not only made musical theatre history by breaking all those records, it became musical theatre history by transforming live actors into data” (195). After a whirlwind performance understudying Carlotta, she was told by producers

and managers that she could never perform Carlotta like that again. She realized that she would have to replace her Carlotta “with a replication of Judy Kaye’s Carlotta from 1988, which, according to the rules, was a replacement of Rosemary Ashe’s Carlotta from 1986” (196). Her experience has informed her understanding of the beast that is the corporate musical.

Mackintosh and Webber were not the only ones to enter this market. Disney had remained dormant having “not produced a full-length animated feature in decades” (Viertel 63). By 1989, their last fairy tale was roughly thirty years old, so Alan Menken and Howard Ashman used the musical theatre construct to create *The Little Mermaid*, an instant commercial hit grossing over \$100 million and winning the Academy Award for Best Original Score and Best Original Song (“Under the Sea”) (Hildebrand 216). This launched the Disney Renaissance and the 42nd Street Now program: Disney’s infiltration of Times Square to legitimize the theatre district with commercial businesses (217). Disney’s first stage musical would be an adaptation of their most recent animated feature *Beauty and the Beast* and from its success emerged Disney Theatrical Productions (218). In its first year, *Beauty and the Beast* grossed over \$35 million, primarily due to Disney’s marketing strategies (219). Disney transformed the New Amsterdam lobby into a bazaar and sold merchandise at booths on every floor of the theatre (219). Disney’s purchase and renovation of the New Amsterdam created an unforeseen boom in Times Square (Viertel 176). In 1997, Disney opened its second production *The Lion King*, and “the under-eighteen theatre crowd had doubled in size” (220). Viertel cites historian Amy S. Osantinski who remarked, “Today’s Times Square is a wonderland of wholesome, American consumerism” (221).

Mackintosh may have started the corporate movement, but Disney solidified the status of the corporate musical. John Kenrick coins the term “corporate musical” and credits Disney

Productions as the inventor (481). He defines the corporate musical as “a genre of shows conceived, produced, and managed by multifunctional entertainment corporations” (482), and in the early 2000s, Dreamworks and Paramount would also contribute to this burgeoning genre of musical theatre. The fact that the Disney Corporation selected The New Amsterdam Theatre as its home is also interesting considering that The New Amsterdam was home to Ziegfeld’s *Follies* almost eighty years earlier during the previous unraveling period which was also characterized by consumerism.

Another innovation of the 90s, the height of the unraveling period, was stunt casting introduced by the 1994 *Grease* revival (Madama 224). *Grease*’s producers, the Weisslers, initiated a Broadway phenomenon in which “producers may choose celebrities for their ability to sell tickets rather than their capability to perform a role” (221). George Wachtel, president of Audience Research and Analysis determined that *Grease*’s stunt casting of celebrities contributed to an audience composed of twenty-five to thirty percent of first-time Broadway theatergoers (224). They would solidify this strategy in their revival of *Chicago* which is still running on Broadway today. Jordan Dragutsky, a faculty member at New York Film Academy, considers “For twenty-five years and counting, they have been plugging celebrities from all mediums into this production, making it, at the time of this publication, the second longest-running show in Broadway history” (225). From a different perspective, Viertel believes that the original *Chicago* was “too cynical” for the awakening of the Consciousness Revolution and that its revival “opening right on top of the O. J. Simpson verdict...suddenly...seemed right in line with the times” (289). Unintentionally using the framework of generational theory, Viertel adds, “Fosse, it turned out, knew exactly where American jurisprudence was going; he just got there ahead of schedule” (289).

4.3 *Rent: The Unraveling at the End of The Millennium*

Arguably the best representative of the Long Boom and Culture War unraveling period is Jonathan Larson's *Rent*. Larson's favorite meaning of the word "rent" was "torn," and this is notable because this "rent" or tear serves as a metaphor and image for the period Strauss and Howe perceive as an "unraveling" (Miller 190). Stanley Green suggests that *Rent* is the first musical since *Hair* "to deal with concerns of a generation" (305). Larson would probably appreciate this comment because his goal was to write a musical for the MTV generation (Dragutsky 227). The musical opened at the New York Theatre Workshop, a 150-seat theater, on February 13, 1996, and "immediately sold out" (Green 305). By the end of April, *Rent* was on Broadway, "opening to rave reviews, four pages in the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*" (305). Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* found that Larson had "discovered a winningly accessible and ground-breaking musical formula that combines rock's drive, pop's memory-grabbing melodiousness and the leitmotifs and harmonic counterpoints of opera" (Dragutsky 229). Jeremy Gerard of *Variety* claimed that Larson would have the impact of Stephen Sondheim and Tony Kushner and foreshadowed *Rent's* ability "to reach a non-theater audience" (229). Miller said:

"It was the first musical in decades that younger audiences really identified with, that spoke in their voice, that voiced their concerns, that tackled their issues. It breathed new commercial life into the Broadway musical, possibly signaling the beginning of the end of the great divide between pop music and theatre music which had existed since the advent of rock and roll." (189)

Jordan Dragutsky adds, "*Rent* didn't just reignite interest in musical theatre for the MTV generation, but also ignited it for every generation, thereafter, making it one of the greatest gifts for audiences around the world" (230). Miller recognizes that *Rent* accomplishes what *Hair*

accomplished twenty-eight years before. In 1992, Larson said, “*Rent* exalts Otherness, glorifying artists and counterculture as necessary to a healthy civilization” (Miller 191). Daphne Rubin-Vega, the original Mimi, believed in Larson’s mission and recalls, “We didn't want to go to Broadway to become Broadway stars; we went to kick the motherfuckin' doors of Broadway open because it's old-school and stodgy” (191). Unfortunately, similar to Gower Champion, Jonathan Larson passed away the night before the Off-Broadway opening of his magnum opus, but before his death, he wrote, “In these dangerous times, where it seems the world is ripping apart at the seams, we can all learn how to survive from those who stare death squarely in the face every day and [we] should reach out to each other and bond as a community, rather than hide from the terrors of life at the end of the millennium” (188). Again, he interestingly uses the image of unraveling: “the world ripping apart at the seams” (188). He was not the only Boomer practitioner who was lost too soon. The Strauss-Howe unraveling period also coincides with the AIDS crisis which claimed the lives of many performers and directors including Michael Bennett. Through generational theory, we can consider the magnitude of pandemics and natural disasters and how they affect the artists of a period. I often think about how different Broadway might be if game-changers like Michael Bennett or Jonathan Larson were still with us today. In any case, their legacy lives on through their work and the lives they touched through their work.

In catering to the MTV generation, *Rent* was the first Broadway musical to offer rush tickets (Dragutsky 230). Rush would eventually become a standard Broadway box office practice that is still in effect today. *Rent*’s pop-rock score and diversity in music led to innovations in the crafting of new and unique breath and sound placement techniques for the pop-rock vocalist (228). *Rent*’s music and vocal requirements would pave the way for rock-heavy scores such as *Spring Awakening* (2006) and *Dear Evan Hansen* (2015) (228). In addition to these important

innovations, it also won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama that year, making it the seventh musical to be honored. *Next to Normal* (2008) and *A Strange Loop* (2022) would later follow *Rent*'s template and achieve the Pulitzer Prize status (Green 305). *Rent*'s rock-inflected score would also influence the rest of the acclaimed musicals of the “mega” and “corporate” musical unraveling period in Tony award-winning shows like *Lion King*, *Hairspray*, *Avenue Q*, *Jersey Boys*, *Spring Awakening*, *In the Heights*, and *Memphis* (Viertel 264).

Though *Rent* might be the best representation of this generational cohort and turning, there were many other musicals in the early 2000s that would profoundly innovate the Broadway landscape. In a chapter on *The Producers* (2001), Kasey Graham concludes, “*The Producers* reinvigorated a hunger for adult satire on Broadway, paving the way for Tony-winning productions of *Avenue Q* (2003) and *The Book of Mormon* (2011)” (239). Also, in 2001, *Mamma Mia!* would take over Broadway in “what Playbill called ‘Broadway’s first true mega-hit jukebox musical’” (240). Like *The Merry Widow* almost ninety years earlier, *Mamma Mia!* became an international sensation. Malcolm Womack concludes a chapter on *Mamma Mia!* by quoting Tsuneo Takeuchi, a Japanese theatre critic, who said, “*Mamma Mia!* is the kind of language the whole world can understand, and I want adults and children to go and see the show and feel the joy of being alive” (243). Another corporate musical of the early 2000s is *Wicked* (2004) which was able to recoup its record-breaking \$14 million investment within fourteen months, breaking another Broadway record (Gillis 247). Today, *Wicked* continues breaking box office records even after surviving the 2008 recession and the Covid-19 pandemic (248). *Jersey Boys* (2005) is also of note because its creative team perfected the jukebox musical proving that “a catalog of popular songs” can be “used to tell a gritty, truly dramatic story worthy of the Broadway stage” (Buxton 254). These musicals along with many, many others illustrate the

corporate boom on Broadway produced by Boomers. However, small shows like *Avenue Q* would foreshadow a shift and change in the trends of Broadway musicals as America entered its next turning involving a global financial recession, a global pandemic, and insurrection: the crisis era.

Chapter 5: Our Current Crisis- “Passionately Smashin’ Every Expectation”

Strauss and Howe foreshadowed our current crisis: “The alienating event will take the form of an economic downturn. Even a brief one will serve the purpose” (*Generations* 409). In their chapter “Completing the Millennial Cycle,” they discuss each of the current living generations and how they might progress into the crisis-era or the fourth turning. In *The Fourth Turning*, they define the crisis as “a solstice era of maximum darkness, in which the supply of social order is still falling but the demand for order is now rising” (323). In theory, old institutions will be destroyed while new institutions are being developed. As a reminder, during the unraveling in 1998, they posit the following options as crisis events: a fiscal crisis sparking a war for states’ rights, global terrorists blowing up an aircraft launching a war on terrorism, a federal budget impasse reaching a stalemate, the spread of a new communicable virus involving quarantine measures and government shutdown, and anarchy in former Soviet republics prompting war against Russia causing “gold and oil prices to soar” (345). They conclude, “It’s highly unlikely that any one of these scenarios will actually happen” (345). In fact, since their publication, it feels that all these events have happened in one way or another. However, the greatest catalysts seem to be the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. They foreshadowed that during the crisis “Boomer leaders in their sixties would neither hide nor ponder the rumor; instead, they would exaggerate the threat (who said there was a bomb in only one city?) and tie it to a larger sense of global crisis” (375). Maybe you will agree that this has come to pass in some

ways. They argued, “The Boomer and 13er cultures will by then be moving into self-contained camps: loud, moralizing aggressors on the older side and atomized, pleasure-seeking victims on the younger—a vindictive age polarization America has not witnessed since the Roaring Twenties” (380). Despite the crisis period, the theory gives us hope, “Three of the four antecedents ended in triumph, the fourth (the Civil War) in a mixture of moral fatigue, vast human tragedy, and a weak and vengeful sense of victory” (382). Strauss died in 2007, but Howe cites the global financial crisis of 2008 as the start of the crisis period (*Turnings in History*).

5.1 13ers/Gen X: “Revolting Children Living in Revolting Times”

The fourth turning is largely dominated by the 13ers or Gen X, America’s thirteenth generation, a reactive generation. In 1991, they were “young Americans uninterested in labels” and Shann Nix called them “the generation with no name,” so Strauss and Howe decided to identify them by their number. They are best described by 13er Tim Minchin’s “revolting children living in revolting times” from *Matilda*. 13ers are the “most aborted generation” and the “most impacted by parental divorce” (*Generations* 324). As of 1991, they were the “most heavily incarcerated generation in American history” and “were at higher risk of dying from accidents, murder, and suicide” (325). They were the children of the “devil-child movies” when cinema shifted “from G to R ratings” (*The Fourth Turning* 176). During their childhood, there was a rise in youth crime and a fall in test scores, so the 13ers were denounced for being “so wild and stupid as to put *The Nation at Risk*” (176). Strauss and Howe remind us that “these were the babies of 1961, 8-year-olds of Woodstock, 13-year-olds of Watergate, 18-year-olds of energy crisis and hostage humiliation” (*Generations* 318).

As a result, 13ers tend to “embrace risk and prefer free agency over loyal corporatism,” and therefore, “politically, they lean toward pragmatism and non-affiliation and would rather volunteer than vote” (*The Fourth Turning* 176). A late-1980s survey of “Cynical Americans”

considers this generation as distrustful, “They think it’s all bull” (*Generations* 328). Other articles have dismissed this generation as “lost, ruined,” and “even wasted” (319). 13ers are often blamed for “bad things...from AIDS to drug addiction, from suicides to homicides” (323). Strauss and Howe say that 13ers are like the music they listen to “shocking on the outside, unknowable on the inside” (318). Despite the criticism, 13ers have a decent self-image: “pragmatic, quick, sharp-eyed, able to step outside themselves to understand the game of life as it really gets played” (321). Strauss and Howe assume, “They’re proud of their ability to poke through the hype and the detail, to understand older people far better (they sense) than older people understand them” (324). Being raised in Patrick Welsh’s “world of information overload,” 13ers “struggle to filter out noise, cut through rhetoric, and isolate the handful of practical truths that really matter” (323). Perhaps, this qualitative observation speaks to why their musicals tend to be shorter and why this generation has started reviving a one-act structure for their stories. Strauss and Howe conclude that this “streetwise generation does indeed bring a bag of savvy tricks their elders lacked—skills that may come in handy the next time America gets into real trouble. More than anyone, they have developed a seasoned talent for getting the most out of a bad hand” (334). Figure 8 highlights some of the 13er musical theatre practitioners and productions that have shifted the industry during the crisis of the fourth turning.

INCLUSION REVOLUTION 2008-2029?
Global Financial Crisis • The Crisis • 2008-2029?

Elders: Boomer Generation (Idealist Prophets b. 1943-1960)

Mid-life: 13ers (Reactive Nomads b. 1961-1981)

YA: Millennials (Civic Heroes b. 1982-2004)

Children: Homeland Generation (Adaptive Artists b. 2005-2027?)

13er Practitioners

Composers	Directors	Choreographers	Writers
Jeanine Tesori ('61)	Joe Mantello ('62)	Kathleen Marshall ('62)	Joe DiPietro ('61)
Adam Guettel ('64)	Christopher Ashley ('64)	Sergio Trujillo ('63)	David Lindsay-Abaire ('69)
Duncan Sheik ('69)	Diane Paulus ('66)	Andy Blankenbuehler ('70)	Trey Parker ('69)
Jason Robert Brown ('70)	Marianne Elliott ('66)	Warren Carlyle ('72)	Chad Beguelin ('69)
Tom Kitt ('74)	Casey Nicholaw ('72)	Savion Glover ('73)	Dominique Morisseau ('78)
Robert Lopez ('75)	Thomas Kail ('78)	Christopher Wheeldon ('73)	Michael R. Jackson ('81)
Lin Manuel Miranda ('80)	Sam Gold ('78)	Camille Brown ('79)	
	Alex Timbers ('78)		

Top Grossing (Taylor, 2022)
<i>Hamilton</i> (#4)
<i>The Book of Mormon</i> (#6)
<i>Aladdin</i> (#9)
<i>Kinky Boots</i> (#14)
<i>Beautiful</i> (#18)
<i>Dear Evan Hansen</i> (#19)
<i>Spider-Man</i> (#21)
<i>Matilda</i> (#22)
<i>Come From Away</i> (#23)
<i>Waitress</i> (#24)
<i>Billy Elliot</i> (#25)

Tony's Best Musical 2008-2022
2008: <i>In the Heights</i>
2009: <i>Billy Elliot the Musical</i>
2010: <i>Memphis</i>
2011: <i>The Book of Mormon</i>
2012: <i>Once</i>
2013: <i>Kinky Boots</i>
2014: <i>A Gentleman's Guide...</i>
2015: <i>Fun Home</i>
2016: <i>Hamilton</i>
2017: <i>Dear Evan Hansen</i>
2018: <i>The Band's Visit</i>
2019: <i>Hadestown</i>
2020: <i>Moulin Rouge!</i>
2021: NO CEREMONY

Top Grossing by Year 2008-2022 (Broadway World)
2008: <i>Wicked</i>
2009: <i>Wicked</i>
2010: <i>Wicked</i>
2011: <i>Wicked</i>
2012: <i>Wicked</i>
2013: <i>Kinky Boots</i>
2014: <i>Lion King</i>
2015: <i>Lion King</i>
2016: <i>Hamilton</i>
2017: <i>Hamilton</i>
2018: <i>Hamilton</i>
2019: <i>Hamilton</i>
2020: <i>Hamilton</i>

Production Trends: Movicals Jukebox Musicals One Act Musicals
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Fig. 8. Ben Lundy. *Inclusive Revolution: The Fourth Turning*. 2023, Data from Wikipedia, pp.

In 2007, *Spring Awakening* won the Tony award for best musical and journalist Harry Haun asked Bert Fink, an executive of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, “Do you think we can safely say the Rodgers and Hammerstein era is dead, now that we have a song on Broadway called ‘Totally Fucked?’” (Viertel 264). Certainly, *Spring Awakening*, *In the Heights*, *Next to Normal*, and *American Idiot* were shifting the sight and sound of the Broadway musical, preparing the way for teen musicals. In “New Conventions for a New Generation,” Lindsay Mantoan discusses the new communities represented on stage in these teenage musicals:

“Unlike golden age musicals, in which the community is often divided into two groups (farmers and cowhands in *Oklahoma!*, Jets and Sharks in *West Side Story*, gamblers and missionaries in *Guys and Dolls*), the opening songs of 2010s high school musicals often reveal a highly fractured and ossified environment, with many small communities situated in a rigid hierarchy ruled by a queen bee, a gatekeeper girl with all the social capital and who determines others’ social status.” (193)

With the musicals of the late 2010s, it seems that we are not in Oklahoma anymore. Joe Dziemianowicz heralds *Next to Normal* director Michael Greif, a late Boomer who seems to fall into the 13er cohort in artistic scope, for launching this new musical movement (260). Greif believed the successors of *Next to Normal* would be “any pop-rock musical trying to take on an important issue” (260). Greif goes on to say, “The theme of the unhappy family, the chosen family, is something that I’m drawn to” (260). His thoughts have surely come to pass, as these small pop-rock musicals that feature unhappy families and chosen families are trending, and his next musicals *If/Then* and *Dear Evan Hansen* would also promote these themes. When reviewing the Tony Award winners of this period, it seems that we fluctuate between large corporate musicals such as *Book of Mormon*, *Kinky Boots*, and *Moulin Rouge* and small-scale musicals

such as *Once*, *Fun Home*, and *Dear Evan Hansen*. Nevertheless, at the center of the Tony Award-winning musicals of this period, there seems to be strong storytelling by bold characters advocating social inclusivity. Courtney Laine Self writes about the innovation of *Fun Home* “a show about queer women” with “actual queer women in charge” (269). Self even compares *Fun Home*’s thematic content with *The Color Purple* (2005) suggesting that “the milieu of 2005 compared to today when it comes to how we talk about race and the intersection of sexuality has vastly evolved” (271). Perhaps, this is why *The Color Purple* revival (2015) was able to win the 2016 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. Our conversations have vastly shifted, and just like *Chicago* was meant for the unraveling period, perhaps, *The Color Purple* is meant for the crisis period. Self also includes insight from the current Public Theatre artistic director, Oskar Eustis, who places *Fun Home* in our current sociocultural climate. Eustis said:

“This also means that we have turned a corner on what it means to be gay in the United States. *Angels in America* was the first time I could see mass audiences identifying with gay characters—Prior Walter was an Everyman—and that’s what Alison is. She’s a lesbian, and one never forgets that, but she’s a lesbian who speaks for all of us” (272).

Alison, like Lola in *Kinky Boots*, becomes a transcendent character, an every-woman of sorts, demonstrating that we all deserve the right to explore our identity in hopes of being our unique and true selves.

5.2 *Hamilton: “History Has Its Eyes on You”*

Though there are many exciting contemporary musicals of this period to discuss, none have changed the industry as much as Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton* which turned the world of musical theatre upside down. Jerome Stevenson introduces *Hamilton*:

“One of only ten musicals to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, *Hamilton* secured an unprecedented sixteen Tony Award nominations—making it the most nominated production in the award’s history. Certainly, *Hamilton*’s financial success makes it noteworthy setting box office records for the most money grossed in a single week in New York City (3.3 million dollars in November of 2016) and commanding a staggering 75 million dollars for its distribution rights.” (276)

In Viertel’s *The Secret Life of the American Musical*, Viertel supposes, “Away from Broadway, in New York’s alternative spaces and also in theatres across America, hip-hop musical theatre is finally taking hold. These are musicals that use some of the conventions of American musical theatre but the vocabulary and style of hip-hop” (237). *Hamilton* solidified the hip-hop musical theatre form and more importantly, speaks to the America we continue to build. Stevenson says, “Through its multiracial company of actors, *Hamilton* immediately reminds the audiences that WE (in all our diversity) are the America that the founders dreamed of building” (279). Like the previous unraveling musicals such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita* that got their start with concept albums, Miranda began the *Hamilton* project by “crafting what he called *The Hamilton Mixtape*, a collection of hip-hop and R&B musical numbers chronicling Hamilton’s life” (277). In the process, Miranda created a musical that “redefines what musicals can accomplish and integrates new voices into the conversation even as the country it celebrates continues to struggle to live up to the same promise” (281). Viertel agrees that *Hamilton* “implicitly raised questions about how race, immigration (Hamilton was born on the island of

Nevis in the Caribbean), political cowardice, and class have been burning American issues since before the beginning of the nation and have never gone away” (15). Viertel adds that *Hamilton*’s ingenuity lies in its form, “Unlike rock, rap is a narrative form by nature, and *Hamilton* has a huge story to tell with it, as the very first iteration of the American landscape is built right before our eyes” (16).

Though *Hamilton* is edgy and innovative, its structure still seems to follow the Rodgers and Hammerstein form which is why Viertel considers *Hamilton* “a work that grows out of a tradition and grows radically away from it at the same time” (16). *Hamilton* is a great example of a reactionary, 13er musical, not only because it has innovated the musical theatre form with a hip-hop style and nontraditional casting, but because it follows the model of previous musicals by incorporating the American landscape (set during our revolution), a struggling musical protagonist who rivals Mama Rose and Harold Hill in contemplating legacy, and conflicts that have pervaded our nation since its inception. When we look back at the previous crisis period, *Hamilton* seems to combine the best elements of *Porgy and Bess*, *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Of Thee I Sing*, and *Pal Joey*. Like Joey, Alexander Hamilton is a complicated character the Broadway stage has not yet seen. Like *Of Thee I Sing*, one of the plots of *Hamilton* consists of political satire worthy of a Pulitzer Prize. Like *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Hamilton* is both organic and revolutionary, staged simply with a deconstructed and fragmented design. Like *Porgy and Bess*, *Hamilton* explores the black experience, albeit in a strikingly nontraditional way and through its diverse casting practice, celebrates the melting pot that is the United States. Stevenson puts *Hamilton* in our political context reminding us that “in an America that saw the consecutive elections of Presidents Barack Hussein Obama (2008) and Donald John Trump (2016) and the

resulting division in American politics, *Hamilton* may well remind audiences of America's dream to build 'one nation under God'" (281).

One can only hope, and thankfully, we find some of that hope in Strauss-Howe's generational theory. When Viertel reflects on musical theatre history, he says:

"We've come full circle. For the first half of the twentieth century, theater writers supplied the most potent popular hits. For the second half, rock and rollers supplanted them on the hit parade, while Broadway scores maintained their integrity, but rarely visited the record charts. And in the twenty-first century, the pop writers have invaded Broadway, and the lines have become blurred beyond recognition." (266)

In his book, Viertel poignantly asks, "How could anyone expect a living art form to remain stagnant when the world is changing around it?" (238). Whether or not one agrees with Strauss and Howe, their theory illustrates shifts in the national mood, and clearly, Broadway has responded to those historical events and continues changing and evolving so that its reflection, the mirror it holds up to society, stays relevant.

Chapter 6: The Future- "All the Directions the Narrative Could Go"

Strauss and Howe finish their book *Generations* by completing the diagonal of the Millennial Cycle using their theory as a guide and framework. They forecast into 2069 and believe that by then, "The 1980s will then be recalled as dimly as Americans today know the decade after 1900—and school history lessons will breeze through the years between 1945 and 1990 much as today's move briskly from 1865 to 1910" (383). In 1991, they start by completing the cycle of the Silent generation. As of 2023, I would argue that many of the Silent Broadway practitioners such as Sondheim and Prince have recently made their exits and lasting marks. As they look into the future, Strauss and Howe warn of the Boomers "vast size" which will give this

generational cohort “unusual electoral power” (395). In 1991, Strauss and Howe speculated, “A decade of abortion prohibition could be for Boomers what a decade of alcohol prohibition was for Missionaries” (397). In recent cases such as *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* (2022) in which the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, it seems that this prediction is coming true. Strauss and Howe felt that Boomers would “disdain party allegiances” and would “take far less interest in flesh-and-blood candidates than in abstract issues” (397). This notion also seems to describe our current political climate in which issues take precedence rather than individual candidates. They prophesied, “Some of the most promising Boomer politicians (and presidential candidates) will spring from outside the ranks of law, government, and party politics” (398). This came to pass with the election of Donald Trump in 2016, and as of this paper, the possibility of re-election in 2024. Strauss and Howe also predicted that Boomer women would take control of board rooms and would make “plausible runs for the White House” (399). Again, the 2016 presidential race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump seems to illustrate Strauss and Howe’s forecast. Strauss and Howe believed that “Boomers will develop new ‘shaming’ approaches to punishment, emphasizing confession, humiliation, and personal reform where the Silent always thought it fairer to stick to rules” (400). Today, this notion may be evident in the practice of cancel culture and the divisiveness of the political parties. They foreshadowed, “The Boom may split along geographical lines—for example, with urban, bicoastal New Agers squaring off against heartland evangelicals. This could prompt talk of regional secessions” (401). Though talks of secessions have not necessarily entered the conversation, Strauss and Howe were apt in saying that geographical lines would separate Boomers in electoral voting. Strauss and Howe believed that at some point 13ers would press “Boomers to hurry up, get old, and get out of the way” (408). In 2019, Paul Davidson of *USA*

Today wrote an article “Millennials, Gen Xers to Baby Boomers: Can you retire so I can get a job promotion?” illustrating Strauss and Howe’s forecasted sentiment. Strauss and Howe believed that “13ers will turn toward isolationism—and, like the 1920s-era Lost, will take pleasure in revealing elder ‘lies’” (412).

6.1 The Millennials: “Anybody Have a Map?”

Now we can discuss the advent of Millennials: my generation. Based on trends of past cycles, Strauss and Howe believed that young Millennials “will bring unremitting good news” (418). They thought that Millennials would “accentuate, even celebrate, sexual distinctions” which hopefully is evident in the diversity, equity, and inclusion movement that has recently focused on the rights of non-binary and trans people (419). Strauss and Howe assumed that if “the crisis turns out well, Millennials will be forever honored as a generation of civic achievers” (421). They concluded with their most profound prediction for Millennials, “As Millennials try to rid the nation of racial and ethnic distinctions...they will be opposed by rising Adaptives who will see advantage in preserving pluralism” (423). I think we see this playing out because there seems to be some differences between the Millennial approach and that of Gen Z, the Adaptives Strauss and Howe reference and later label “The Homeland Generation” (*Generations in History* 4).

Based on this information, where is Broadway headed? It is both “hard to say” and yet simple when we consider the trends that have been happening post-*Hamilton*. Frederick Miller writes about *Dear Evan Hansen*, a musical that speaks to those upcoming Gen Z “Adaptives.” Frederick Miller looks back to *Spring Awakening* as *Dear Evan Hansen*’s forefather (283), but Pasek and Paul, Millennial practitioners taking the stage and screen by storm, sought to involve the teens that grew up with social media. Miller discusses Strauss-Howe’s Homeland generation, “Dubbed ‘Generation Z’ (those born mid-1990s through early 2010s), this cohort of individuals

have used digital technology since birth, making them quite comfortable with the internet and social media” (283). The producer, Stacy Mindich, recognized *Dear Evan Hansen*’s parallel themes with *Rent*, so naturally, she wanted Michael Greif to direct (283). According to the Broadway League, the 2016-2017 Broadway season saw the highest number of theatregoers under eighteen years old (284). *Dear Evan Hansen* was also unique in that it was a show about the internet and financed by the internet through revolutionary marketing using social networking applications (286).

6.2 Future Forecasts: “When the Chips Are Down”

I am not a meteorologist, but I am an optimist. I forecast a bright future for Broadway. Like Ashley LaLonde, a Harvard junior, quoted in Clay Oxford’s article, “Broadway Goes Mainstream Again,” I am excited about the inclusivity and the stories being told, “lots of different stories being told by a very diverse variety of performers...and [audience members] are drawn to stories that [they] can connect with” (40). Clay Oxford urges that “popular music will inevitably change, and Broadway must reflect those changes, shows also have to react to new technologies and consumption patterns in order to stay relevant” (40). He argues, “Popular music and relatable stories are the bread and butter of the Great White Way...To continue to grow, however, Broadway must stick with many of its newest innovations...It must strive to tell the stories of all Americans. If it can do that, the shows will go on for generations to come” (40).

Generational theory can help us forecast the future as we look back at the previous crisis era. In the previous crisis, *Pal Joey*, the disreputable anti-hero, took the stage, shocking audiences as he dealt with the facts of life. Eighty-two years later, Usher from *A Strange Loop* radically explored “his anxieties of being a plus-size Black queer man, his alcoholic father’s constant denigration and his mother’s pleas to stop running ‘up there in the homosexsh’alities” (Phillips). This is a bold comparison, but more importantly, *Pal Joey* and *A Strange Loop* are

bold works featuring bold characters. They both do something new. In her *New York Times* review Maya Phillips says of *A Strange Loop*, “There’s something almost naughty about the show’s subversions. ‘I’m sorry, but you can’t say N-word in a musical,’ says one of Usher’s thoughts” (Phillips). There seems to be a case for parallels that can be drawn between these crisis musicals. As we look at the current 2023 Broadway season, *Some Like It Hot* seems like a modern *Anything Goes*: “a grand, old-fashioned love letter to the form with a slick and engaging contemporary gloss, both wholly recognizable as a template for Broadway success and smartly attentive to the times” (Kumar). For that matter, *Shucked*—“feel-good sentiment, as a laugh-out-loud crowd-pleaser, *Shucked* is a shucking good time—” also fits the comedic relief we seem to seek in crisis (Hempstead). Then, there are musicals like *Hadestown*, *Jagged Little Pill*, and the most recent Best Musical Tony-award winner *Kimberly Akimbo* that directly tackle characters in crisis. More recently, musicals such as *Six* and *& Juliet* make us question our history or, more importantly, white patriarchal hegemony. Unfortunately, these crisis musicals live among lots of “movicals,” musicals based on movies, and jukebox musicals featuring the lives of famous Americans like *MJ* and *Tina*.

In examining the past through generational theory, I have some personal conjectures. When I review the previous Great Power Cycle, I think thematically of the Industrial Revolution where the central conflict of America at that time seems to be workers’ rights. By the next high period, unions, like Actor’s Equity, and the government with its extended reach from the New Deal would provide protections, offering stability and future prosperity for the working class. Also, during the end of this period, America was concerned with suffrage and women’s rights. In the Roaring 20s, Langston Hughes along with *Shuffle Along* solidified what would become the Harlem Renaissance. The prominence of women and black voices would spark the Millennial

Cycle's central conflict that awakened in the 60s and that we are directly facing in crisis today: equity, diversity, and inclusion for all. It seems as though we are still in the process of securing human rights, and those rights sit on a threatened precipice daily. Hopefully, the diversity of Gen Z, cited by NBC News as "the most-diverse, fastest-growing segment of the electorate," will solidify a diverse, equitable, and inclusive high period starting around 2030. As we approach the next high period, there are already murmurings of a new conflict: the role of AI technology. Our next great awakening might be a conflict of human interaction and connection against a culture that has embraced a virtual reality.

As far as Broadway goes, I wonder if *Hamilton* is the *Show Boat* of our crisis. The high period of our previous Golden Age offered *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *Guys and Dolls*, *South Pacific*, and *My Fair Lady*, featuring strong love stories, flawed characters, a sense of timelessness, a nostalgic feel, and generally tidy endings. I guess with this criteria *Hamilton* might set the mold for what we expect on Broadway in the coming high period. In a diverse, equitable, and inclusive world, perhaps the new romances will feature queerness and nontraditional partners. Like the Tik-Tok *Bridgerton* musical and *Six*, these high musicals might reflect upon previous historical eras with nostalgia but also a fresh, contemporary lens in which a more inclusive community is formed.

I wonder if there is also a place for adapted limited television series. Most of the Golden Age musicals were based on books and stories while our unraveling and crisis period adapted cult movies into classical musicals. Could there be musical versions of *Friends*, *Modern Family*, *Gossip Girl*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* or *Succession*? *SpongeBob the Musical*, based on the beloved, animated television series, found a way to accomplish this form essentially by creating a musical episode. From a Broadway perspective, forecasting the next high period during a crisis

period is difficult. It is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Assuredly, new technologies will be embraced, and I wonder if musical theatre might shift into more participatory and interactive forms. As we speculate the future of the industry, my hope is that new voices emerge both on the page and on the stage. I dream of this diverse, equitable, and inclusive world that we are seeking to make a reality, and though not perfect, I believe the Broadway musical is one of the forms that is demanding and making the incremental changes the fastest.

I will borrow Anaïs Mitchell's line from *Hadestown* as I toast, "To the world we dream about, and the one we live in now."

Conclusion: "Nothing Is for Sure/Nothing Is for Certain"

In the finale song of Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss's *Six*, the ensemble sings "But we want to say/ Before we drop the curtain/ Nothing is for sure/ Nothing is for certain" (Wax).

Perhaps that is not entirely accurate. Scott Miller quotes a profound prophesy from Jerry Bock:

"The American musical will shed its present polished state and become an untidy, adventurous something else. Shortly it will exchange its current neatness and professional grooming for a less manicured appearance, for a more peculiar profile. It will swell beyond or shrink from the finesse that regulates it now. It will poke around. It will hunt for. It will wander and wonder. It will try and trip. But at least it will be moving again, off the treadmill, out of the safety zone, crossing not at the green, but in between." (223)

Bock was right. One thing is for certain: the musical would change and has changed.

Strauss and Howe's generational theory chronicles the American story in a provocative way, and they conclude *Generations* referring to the dramatic structure of this narrative, "It has been a vast and magnificent pageant, with so many acts and so many actors since John Winthrop first felt the hand of God. Yet surely one with even more acts and actors yet to come" (424). My

hope is that this exploration of musical theatre through the lens of generational theory would inspire others to use Strauss and Howe's generational theory as a model for presenting, discussing, and reflecting upon this truly American art form. Though their theory is far from proven and has shortcomings and weaknesses, the way they have presented the history seems to suggest, "constellational eras and generational lifecycles follow predictable patterns, within which each generation has a limited choice of scripts. During social moments—secular crises, especially—those scripts become more fateful, more determinative of history, more likely to result in triumph or tragedy" (376). I like that Strauss and Howe think of American history as scripts. It seems the script, our story, is dependent upon historical moments and our upbringing, the conditioning brought upon by our parents: the generation who raised us. The pattern, though not perfect, makes some sense and demonstrates how dramatic and narrative this theory can be. I feel that Strauss-Howe generational theory can be used like other literary theories for contemporary analyses. In fact, by framing the pattern as potential scripts to be used by generational cohorts, the theory seems to align with dramaturgical theory: a sociological theory based upon the theatrical practice of dramaturgy. I would like generational theory to stand alongside formalism, critical theory, structuralism, queer theory, gender studies, new historicism, and cultural materialism as an analytical approach.

As we think of generational theory, we need to navigate the waters with some trepidation. At times, the prescribed nature of the generational cohorts yields some skepticism, and too much fluidity in the interpretation lends to dismissing the entire theory as astrological pseudoscience. However, recognizing some fluidity in the dates is pivotal in interpreting the theory and using the theory for analysis. For instance, in this thesis, I have discussed Joe Biden as the first Silent president, and the chair of my thesis remarked that such an assertion is based solely on the

arbitrary dates provided by Bill Strauss and Neil Howe. Jimmy Carter and George H. W. Bush Sr. were both born in 1924, right before the 1925 start date for the Silent generation. This begs the question, “Does a strict adherence to the generational cohort-defining years yield any worthwhile conclusions?” Furthermore, in writing and studying Strauss and Howe’s generational theory, newer generational studies at the Pew Center, Beresford Research, and Jason Dorsey’s Center for Generational Kinetics (CGK) offer different suggestions for generational cohorts as compared in the chart of Figure 9.

Generational Cohort	Strauss-Howe	Pew Center	CGK	Beresford Research
Silents	1925-1942	1928-1945	Pre-1945	1922-1927 (WWII) 1928-1945 (Post-War)
Boomers	1943-1960	1946-1964	1946-1964	1946-1954 (Boomers I) 1955-1964 (Boomers II)
13ers	1961-1981	1965-1980 (Gen X)	1965-1976 (Gen X)	1965-1980 (Gen X)
Millennials	1982-2004	1981-1996	1977-1995	1981-1996 (Millennial)
Homelanders	2005-2027	1997-2012 (Gen Z)	1996-2015 (Gen Z)	1997-2012 (Gen Z)

Fig. 9. Ben Lundy. *Generational Cohort Variation*. 2023, Data from Pew, CGK, & Beresford, pp. 71.

This chart seems to highlight the greatest weakness of the Strauss-Howe generational theory: the dates. However, it is important to remember that Strauss and Howe offer generational cohort ranges in addition to the ranges of the turnings: the generational-defining events. The newer models issued by the Pew Center, CGK, and Beresford Research seem to incorporate the data from turning events in their generational cohort models. Beresford’s Research is particularly illuminating because in *Generations* Strauss and Howe discuss first wavers and second wavers in each generational cohort and how peer personalities may shift from the first to the second wave. Essentially, Beresford Research defines these first and second-wave generations for Strauss-

Howe Silents and Boomers. Interestingly, they do not indicate first and second-wave generations for the more recent generational cohorts. Beresford Research says, “We increasingly break up Boomers into two different cohorts because the span is so large, and the oldest of the generation have different sensibilities than the younger. In the U.S., Generation Jones (Boomers II) are just young enough to have missed being drafted into war.” I wonder as we approach the next generation if Beresford Research might notice new patterns emerging among Gen Xers that would suggest separate generations for that cohort. Pew Research Center and CGK offer some information on how they decided upon these seemingly arbitrary years. Michael Dimock of the Pew Research Center says, “Generational cutoff points aren’t an exact science. They should be viewed primarily as tools, allowing for the kinds of analyses detailed.” The Pew Research Center also notes that Baby Boomers are “the only generation officially designated by the U.S. Census Bureau, based on the famous surge in post-WWII births in 1946 and a significant decline in birthrates after 1964” (Dimock). Their decision for the Millennial cohort span is based upon the events of 9/11 and the election of Barack Obama (Dimock). The Pew Research Center maintains that Millennials were between ages of 5 and 20 when 9/11 occurred and were the young voters of the 2008 election who significantly helped America elect the first black president (Dimock). The Pew’s argument is that Gen Z children would not recall the events of 9/11 nor be involved in the election of Barack Obama (Dimock). The Pew Research Center maintains, “Perhaps, as more data are collected over the years, a clear, singular delineation will emerge. We remain open to recalibrating if that occurs. But more than likely the historical, technological, behavioral and attitudinal data will show more of a continuum across generations than a threshold” (Dimock). CGK says variation in cohort years among different groups and studies is due to different conclusions (usually by people who have not done adequate research) and the geography of

where people were born and how certain events affect regions around the world differently. They offer an example of Millennials in America, who have low unemployment rates, being behaviorally different from the Millennials of Athens, Greece, who are involved in an unemployment crisis. This is an interesting point and suggests that even in America generational differences might exist along geographical lines (CGK). In an article on “Generational Birth Years,” CGK asserts, “We believe generations are not boxes but powerful, predictive clues on where to start to faster connect with and influence people of different ages and life stages” (CGK). CGK also believes, “It’s really important to note that you can be born within three years on either side of the beginning or ending of a generation and have all the characteristics of the generation before or after” (CGK). They also suggest that their generational dates are based upon research of generational-defining events like 9/11. In a way, these newer models incorporate events or Strauss and Howe’s turnings into their cohort models. I think as generational theory is explored less emphasis should be placed on the dates and more emphasis placed on generational-defining events and national moods.

Though there are limits to Strauss-Howe’s generational theory, the way it chronicles the shift in national moods can be applied to a comprehensive and inventive exploration of musical theatre history. There are several ways in which the theory could serve as an analytical approach for various studies.

In *The Secret Life of the American Musical*, Viertel mentions:

“If Tony is a descendant of *Carousel*'s Billy Bigelow—an earlier man with poetry locked away inside him and violence in his future—and Hamilton is his offspring many generations down the line, Seymour Krelborn, the meta-schlep at the center of *Little Shop of Horrors*, stands between them as the nephew or uncle they would probably both want to forget. *West Side [Story]*, *Little Shop [of Horrors]*, and *Hamilton* all deal with a dangerous underbelly of the American landscape, in three wildly divergent tones.” (60).

Future analyses of musical theatre using generational theory could explore the evolution of the leading man or the Broadway diva, looking at how each one develops the other and responds to the turning from which it came. The analysis could also look at how the interpretation of these pivotal characters has shifted over time due to the generational cohorts and the national mood. The concept of generations which seems to center around upbringing and parental involvement could also be explored in musicals like *Gypsy* which focuses on “the crushing damage that a parent can inflict on her children and the myriad consequences” (32). Through a generational theory lens, we could explore what Viertel says, “How we love, ignore, or smother our children, how we project our own dreams onto their unwitting psyches, how we may drive them away while living in terror of their abandoning us” (32).

Viertel focuses on the structure of the American musical in his anecdotal text, but using his structural model, generational theory might help explain the development of the musical structure. For example, another analysis could look at the development of the “I Want” song by examining its function and composition in various generational eras. More specifically, someone might write about the evolution of the “list” song in musical theatre with a focus on Gilbert and

Sullivan's "I've Got a Little List," Cole Porter's "You're the Top," James Rado & Gerome Ragni's "Ain't Got No," and Jonathan Larson's "La Vie Bohème."

Viertel also compares *The King and I* and *Book of Mormon* in *Secret Life of the American Musical*. His main idea seems to be, "*The King and I* opened on March 29, 1951. Flash forward sixty years, practically to the day. On March 24, 2011, "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" returned to Broadway in recognizable but thoroughly fractured form as "Joseph Smith American Moses," the main event of *The Book of Mormon*" (214). Generational theory could also help in comparing musicals from different eras. Viertel also has an interesting analysis of *Caroline or Change*, a crisis musical that debuted towards the end of the unraveling period but has found more respect in our current crisis era. He concludes, "Caroline's admission that we have to 'learn how to lose things' reflects a very different America, where dreams have all but vanished, where we admit out loud that struggle is constant and slow, and people—especially outsiders—are ground down by it" (236).

Most conversations in our industry today center on equity, diversity, and inclusion, and as we consider learning how to lose things, generational theory might be a helpful guide as we develop new ways of doing Broadway business. In 2023, two non-binary artists took home the Tony for Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor. Meanwhile, non-binary actors are now finally being legitimized and taken seriously as they audition and receive callbacks for musicals like *Six* (Workman). Generational theory could help us examine history, spark productive conversations, and hopefully craft a guide for diversity and culturally conscious casting. Generational theory could be effective as we reimagine, revitalize, and revive the Broadway musical for the next high period.

Hopefully, this exploration of musical theatre through the lens of generational theory creates a provocative look at the evolution of this American art form. Generational theory might be a fun and different way to approach a musical theatre history course in the future. If you are not a musical theatre artist, I hope this exploration has sparked your interest in this phenomenon. As Strauss and Howe said in 1991, I want others to take the ideas presented in generational theory and wrestle with them. Let us apply the concept to the development of film, television, commercials, art, music, or literary movements—just to name a few. Generational theory, like any other critical analysis or literary theory, could be a relevant means of studying, exploring, and analyzing sociocultural developments. Like any theoretical approach, generational theory has its strengths and weaknesses. As we embrace new modes of learning, teaching, and storytelling, “nothing is for sure, nothing is for certain,” but if generations can reconcile, rebuild, and recover, generational theory supports a bright horizon for a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive future in which all can say, “We know we belong to this land, and the land we belong to is grand” (Hammerstein). May our next high period be “the world we dream about:” “a rare moment of perfect balance” where we soar above.

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