

 a Man With a Gun' and

Other Life Lessons: Biography and Musical Theatre.



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"'You Can't Get a Man With a Gun' and Other Life Lessons: Biography and Musical Theatre



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Date

2008-05-05

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Abstract

This dissertation compares the versions of Annie Oakley's persona that have been presented in American popular culture from 1885 to 1999 and analyzes the startling similarity to the state of womanhood in America across the same period. It also examines musical theatre's ideological potential, gender problems that emerge at particular historical moments, and the

reciprocal relationship between audience and cultural context. *Annie Get Your Gun* and its revivals function as a case study that reveals the complicity of musical theatre in advancing certain agendas. Because the creators and producers molded the biography of Annie Oakley for different ideological purposes that suited different audiences, the various versions are particularly useful for comparative analysis and they offer insights into the way the present shapes and reshapes the past. This investigation aims to identify what each production teaches us about American cultural life and to reveal and describe the ideological operations of musical theatre in order to establish its significance in the larger landscape of American popular culture. In its many reincarnations, *Annie Get Your Gun*'s ideological agendas primarily address American female spectators, millions of whom have watched it, largely uncritically. It is my contention that over the course of the late-nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, several artists, from Oakley and Buffalo Bill, to Irving Berlin and Dorothy Fields, to Graciella Danielle and Peter Stone, have used the life story of Annie Oakley in order to convey specific ideological content and to reflect the moral views and behavior of women in the audience. In 1946, the musical collaborators took Oakley's story and crafted a message that would resonate with post-World War II female spectators. Through this investigation, I have identified changes that have been made to Oakley's biography and to the original *Annie Get Your Gun* script and read them in light of their cultural moment in order to offer possible reasons why these changes appealed to particular audiences; essentially, why spectators forgive and even applaud the factual omissions and changes that occur. A non-redacted version of this dissertation with the images is available in the University of Maryland library.

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