TO YOU AND YOUR KIN: HOLIDAY IMAGES FROM AMERICA'S POSTCARD PHENOMENON, 1907-1910

by

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By

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Master of Arts
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Dedication

For Steve
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There are friends and family who been by my side every step of the way, especially my parents. Ancestors too have played an important role in this project, for it was the postcards sent between my great-grandfather and great-grandmother that first piqued my interest in the topic. But the most encouraging of them all has been my partner in life Steve, to whom this dissertation is dedicated. Without his support and understanding, To You and Your Kin would be a collection of half-formed thoughts and questions rattling around in my head. Thank you for making the road from idea to completion such a pleasurable journey.
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Abstract

TO YOU AND YOUR KIN: HOLIDAY IMAGES FROM AMERICA’S POSTCARD PHENOMENON, 1907-1910

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This dissertation draws from the fields of history, art history, and visual culture to generate a deeply contextualized analysis of early twentieth century holiday postcards. It first argues that holiday postcards are significant cultural artifacts, overlooked by scholars in favor of more familiar souvenir “view cards” of people and places. By contrast, greeting cards—and holiday cards in particular—are a period-specific source with the potential to represent a far more egalitarian and wide-reaching audience. This project next offers an approach to quantitative history that reconstructs historical postcard audiences by combining information gleaned from eBay.com with census records. After quantitative analysis of 2,000 holiday postcards, it argues that these postcards circulated primarily among rural and small town, Northern, white women with Anglo-Saxon and Germanic heritages. Audiences and actual users are thus moved to the center of this project, and extensive primary sources reconstruct the postcard phenomenon from their perspective. This “bottom-up” approach reveals the ways in which postcards were
appropriated by these particular groups, especially women. It is their interactions with postcards that helped turn the medium into a major popular phenomenon in the early 1900s. Such postcard use is described as image-based conversations between these specific audiences and networks of community and kin. The second half of the dissertation then examines over 100 holiday images in the context of significant contestations and tensions within these groups’ lives: the Country Life Movement; the rise of the “New Woman”; and the influx of “new immigrants.” It looks at how these historical contestations added contextual meanings to holiday images, and how those images mediated and addressed a multitude of fears, desires, and understandings among postcard audiences. The images studied cover a wide range of popular holiday themes—Santa Claus and Easter bunnies; flag-waving turkeys and gun-toting cupids; Halloween witches and New Years drunks. The dissertation describes the interplay between three important categories of information: the specificity of audience demographics; a thorough understanding of historical context; and consistent visual themes and tropes. Knowledge of audience and context reveals the ways in which holiday postcards and their attendant images engaged with historically-specific conflicts, tensions, anxieties, and contestations in people’s lives.
Introduction

In 2004, the popular television program *Antiques Roadshow* featured an album full of early twentieth century postcards. The woman who had brought the album for appraisal told the expert it was from a grandmother who had familial roots in Minnesota and New York State. Rudi Franchi, the collectibles appraiser and *Antiques Roadshow* veteran, opened by claiming: “I would think that the item that we get the most of, on *Roadshow*, is postcards.” Franchi said his “standard spiel” was that “most postcards are worth anywhere from a quarter to 50 cents to a dollar”; however, this particular album actually held several valuable cards. In flipping through the album, Franchi highlighted a wide assortment of cards—several familiar tinted images of tourist attractions and locations, but also, perhaps surprisingly, greeting cards, and holiday cards in particular. In fact, one of the album’s more valuable cards contained an image of Santa Claus in a mauve robe. Franchi concluded the segment by telling the woman, “I go through all these albums all day long and I will not see anything worth more than five dollars, and in this one, small item, you’re looking at about $1,400 to $1,500.”¹

The segment is revealing on a variety of levels. In a show known for the diversity and abundance of antiques brought in for appraisal and evaluation, the suggestion that

postcards are the single most common item is a startling one.\(^2\) Why do so many people have collections of postcards that have been moved through attics, cupboards, and garage sales to their curious owners today? The original owner of the 1907 album was apparently white, female, and from the Northern U.S., either Minnesota or New York. One wonders if she was typical or indicative of postcard audiences at the turn of the century. Yet perhaps the segment’s most important revelation (though not necessarily the most surprising) was that the images on postcards drive both interest and value. The album displayed on the show contained a wide variety of postcard images and designs, altogether different from the location-specific tourist postcard we might imagine as typical. Certainly there were examples of buildings and ships and trolleys—the markers of a burgeoning tourist industry in the early twentieth century. But there were just as many or more images that had nothing to do with travel—flowers and beautiful women, advertisements and Christmas greetings. In fact, these non-travel-related images garnered the most attention and the highest appraisals, including the Santa Claus in the mauve coat.

Holiday postcard images from the early 1900s grab attention, and not just from collectors and owners looking at their economic value. While the world of antiquities, appraisals, and auctions serves as the most common entry point to those interested in postcards today, these artifacts also have historic value separate from their monetary worth. Like other forms of visual culture, holiday images on postcards reveal multiple

\(^2\) Unless quoting from a period source, I have chosen to call these artifacts “postcards,” rather than “post cards.” George Miller, a frequent author within the postcard collecting community, suggests: “Both spellings exist; both have existed since the birth of the post card (postcard).” George Miller, ““Post Card” or "Postcard": A Final Word,” American Postcard Journal 8, no. 4 (September 1983): 26
layers of meaning and signification, and offer a largely unexplored vantage point onto American culture at that moment. Pause to consider these three images and questions quickly emerge: Why does Santa stand at a fence with a megaphone shouting Christmas greetings over a vast rural landscape? Why is he set between images of idealized rural solitude? Why does a valentine offer such prominence to a woman with a gun? What is signified by the stylistic similarities between this postcard and early twentieth century visual renderings of the “New Woman”? Are there certain cultural understandings at play in the third card, where white women are simultaneously shown as laborers preparing a Thanksgiving meal and as inhabitants of a nostalgic past? (Figures 1-3)

By contextualizing these images, their social and cultural meanings come to the surface. This project contends that holiday postcards can reveal valuable knowledge about early twentieth century America, its conflicts and contests, and its diverse identities and
consciousnesses. The study of holiday postcards, this project suggests, adds to our understanding both of the history of the period, and of American visual culture more broadly.

What distinguishes holiday postcards from other holiday images of the period is their use. Holiday postcards are dual-sided artifacts, offering up two very different kinds of data for analysis. Largely ignored by collector and scholar alike, the verso side of the card is rich in demographic information. This information can be useful for a historian. Postcards sent through the mail retain their demographic data, and this information can be gathered and used to situate and inform the cultural reading of the equally important images.

In fact, this demographic information is the key to resolving many of the problems and dilemmas inherent in image analysis. The assumption that an item of visual and popular culture would have cultural meaning and significance has a well-established historical tradition. We have come a long way from Lawrence Levine’s lament that “from an early age we’ve been taught that whatever else this stuff is, it isn’t art, and it isn’t serious and it doesn’t lend itself to critical analysis.”3 Not all such analysis treats popular and mass-produced cultural artifacts in the same way, or begins with the same assumptions; however, some of the most useful examples follow in the tradition of Levine, Roy Rosenzweig, T.H. Breen, Nan Enstad, and George Lipsitz. These and other scholars have been skeptical of top-down analyses, particularly those promulgated by some members of the Frankfurt School and others starting in the 1930s. These theories

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suggest that the production of mass and popular culture creates a hegemonic “circle of manipulation and retroactive need” forcing individuals into the helpless role of the passive consumer. 4 In direct contradiction to such assumptions Enstad writes of her subjects, “Consumer culture offered working-class women struggling with extremely difficult material and ideological constraints a new range of representations, symbols, activities, and spaces with which to create class, gender, and ethnic identities.” 5

Still, Enstad insists that studying objects and images for their cultural meanings also requires knowing something about their viewers and audiences. The boom of new social history and cultural history, starting in the 1960s, motivated scholars to examine the lives of “regular folk.” A rising generation of social and cultural historians pursued their lines of inquiry because their subjects were not, in Levine’s words, “inarticulate, impotent, irrelevant historical ciphers,” 6 but neither were they “traditional” in any sense of the word, including the source materials they left behind. Now, a half-century later, we have mountains of scholarship that has radically altered how we see US history; however, in so many of these cases the folk led historians to their folk culture, the people to their popular culture, the consumers to their consumer culture. There is much to support Daniel Miller’s assertion that a positive appropriation of consumer goods can be found among “the inevitably pluralistic, small-scale communities which make up the population,” including women, African-Americans, ethnic groups, the working class,

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6 Levine, The Unpredictable Past, 6-7.
gays, and other core constituencies of this new wave of scholarship.7 But in example after example, scholars selected their subjects and then studied those subjects’ (those audiences’) evidentiary objects, not the other way around.

By contrast, a postcard sent through the mail retains enough information to reverse the process—it enables scholars to start with the evidentiary object and have it lead us back to its communities. This is one reason why the postcard is such a unique historical object; however, postcards are important for other reasons, including their popularity. There are good reasons why 21st century antiquarians at the Antiques Roadshow see more postcards than anything else—the scale of the phenomenon was breathtaking. In 1909 the New York Times observed that “the whole world is now flooded,” with picture postcards.8 United States Post Office figures for the year ending June 30, 1908 cite 667,777,798 postcards mailed in this country.9 Based on 1910 census numbers, that would be seven postcards a year for every man, woman and child in the nation, and that does not even count postcards collected in albums and boxes and never mailed. University of Oslo’s Bjarne Rogan, in looking at postcards on a global scale (indeed the fad stretched beyond the US to Canada, Great Britain, the European continent, and parts of Asia and South America), suggests: “Roughly estimated, between

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200 and 300 billion postcards were produced and sold,” during the Golden Age of the phenomenon, which peaked between 1907-1910.10

Such an extensive and ubiquitous practice, with its attendant outpouring of imagery, deserves a systematic and encompassing cultural and historical examination. One could cite lessons learned from reading Jules David Prown and Daniel Miller that objects of popular and mass-produced culture do matter and that, in the words of Prown, artifacts can lead us to “the beliefs—values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time.”11 A handful of cultural historians have noted that holiday postcards in particular are uniquely important emblems of cultural practice and norms. In his recently published book on Thanksgiving, James K. Baker writes that Thanksgiving postcard images “were originally very much the expression of a particular period and culture…,” a sentiment shared by scholars such as David Skal and Kenneth Ames.12 Aside from these books, holiday postcards garner little more than passing references in the larger historiographies of visual culture, holiday culture, and American history.13

13 This trend continues in the most recent addition to the historiography. The 2010 collection of essays Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity draws together “specific case studies of different varieties of postcards, their designers and artists, and their audience,”; however, holiday postcards are missing as a topic among the 14 essays. See David Prochaska and Jordana Mendelson, eds., Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), xii.
Thus part of the purpose of this project is to situate both the holiday postcard, and the larger postcard phenomenon of the early twentieth century, more prominently within these fields of scholarship. It is worth noting that these are two distinct but interconnected tasks because the phenomenon—the sending and receiving of postcards—and the object itself were not necessarily one and the same. As the Roadshow segment demonstrated, the postcard phenomenon was actually composed of multiple and diffuse parts. I emphasize this point because postcards are almost instinctively imagined as byproducts of travel. Stephen Brown and Darach Turley (building off the work of J. Uurray) certainly thought so when they wrote, “the growth of the picture postcard is, of course, inseparable from the gradual development of the modern tourist industry—the so-called ‘democratization of travel.’” Postcard historian Dorothy Ryan, like many others in her field, writes, “the majority of cards published in the United States during the postcard era were view cards.” And during the years of the fad, view cards were regularly pushed as the backbone of postcard sales. “Fancy postcards are of value only during specific times of year,” lectured a 1909 trade journal for druggists, “whereas view cards are at all times most desirable, because they sell all year round.”

Certainly the postcard phenomenon did include the more familiar photographic view postcards of locations and locales, but it also included comic postcards with their cruder drawing styles and carnivalesque jokes; art postcards with their lithographed reproductions of “high art”; and artist-drawn greeting cards spanning every conceivable

15 Ryan, Picture Postcards in the United States, 1893-1918, 144.
topic and occasion. Even as postcard historian Ryan cites the predominance of view cards, earlier in her book she writes of a “gradual evolution from the initial ‘Souvenir cards’ of vacation resorts to the diverse lines of view cards, holiday greetings, and advertising issues, which eventually placed postcards within the means and interest of almost everyone.” The 1910 French novel Jean-Christophe includes a description of German postcards in a postcard shop that highlights their diversity: “sentimental scenes, comic and obscene drawings, the town prostitutes, the imperial family, the Emperor as a sea-dog holding the wheel of the Germania and defying the heavens, were all thrown together higgledy-piggledy.” Photographs of American postcard shops reveal similar eclecticism.

Part of the work of this dissertation is to challenge the standard assumption that postcards were solely connected to social mobility and travel. This assumption is a problem in and of itself because it too narrowly defines a postcard; however, it has also produced a second problem in the historiography. We can see this problem if we return to social/cultural history’s focus on the relationship between popular cultural products and the “small communities” (to borrow Daniel Miller’s term) that use and appropriate such products in the construction of identity. The custom of sending a postcard while on travel has helped to establish a particular idealized audience of travelers for historians to consider. In a typical contemporary description of the postcard fad, Eleanor Boykin wrote

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17 Ryan, Picture Postcards in the United States, 1893-1918, 16.
that: “…every Monday morning’s mail was heavy with the reproduced scenic views of various small villages where your friends were spending their week-end, returning by the same train which brought the postcard.” Accounts like these are inevitably classed; they presume a decidedly middle and upper class community; and they relegate postcard use to a facet of the burgeoning bourgeois travel experience of the early twentieth century.

Holiday postcards, by contrast, do not fit into this model, thus pointing to another problem currently unresolved by the historiography. It is harder to presume audiences for those cards that remain unfixed to what we imagine to be the core function of postcards—expressions of travel and mobility. University of Alberta professor Mark Simpson, for example, has chosen photographic view postcards as his primary focus for an upcoming book on postcard culture. His project hopes to “read this culture in light of overlapping developments in human mobility, commercial traffic, and social circulation,” and he concludes, “the significance of postcards in this period has to do not so much with their imagery as with the materiality of their production, circulation, and use within rapidly-transforming fields of print culture and mass media.” An account such as his overlooks the place of holiday postcards and the significance of their images.

If the fad is seen solely in terms of travel and mobility, many types of postcards remain unaccounted for. Of course, it is fair to ask: might these other types of cards have been minor ancillary offshoots of the main phenomenon? It is a possibility that becomes difficult to parse out because neither post office nor trade publication statistics

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differentiated between the various types. Moreover all the various kinds or genres of cards that collectively formed the postcard phenomenon seemed to rise and fall together, thus making it even more difficult to differentiate.\textsuperscript{21} Still, a few scholars have recognized that there were alternatives to the travel view cards—alternatives large enough in scope and important enough in cultural significance to merit both study and differentiation. These historians have noted that postcards also operated in ways that made them much closer equivalents to greeting cards.\textsuperscript{22}

Greeting postcards were material objects rooted in the sentimental culture of greetings, kinship, romantic courtship, familial relations, and correspondence, not travel. Writes Ellen Smith of Jewish New Years postcards: “In their visual structure, the cards reinforced the human, communal aspects of the holiday…”\textsuperscript{23} “For the long and written page no longer is the rage,” quipped a 1907 article entitled \textit{The Post Card Craze}, “but every form of missive on a post card is sent. Do you separate or marry? Do you hasten on

\textsuperscript{21} Determined through a survey conducted on 2/19/2009. This survey of 1,559 cards (matching the same number of postmarked cards in the holiday postcard survey, see Chapter One) took place at Mary Martin Postcards of Percyville, MD, widely acknowledged as the largest postcard dealer in the world. The survey tabulated postmark years from the postmarks of view cards. The survey drew from views specific to more than a dozen diverse states (AR, MO, ME, CA, NC, NY, DE, VT, WI, CO, RI, IL, GA), along with Yellowstone National Park, as well as a dozen topics that spanned all geographic regions: firehouses, colleges, courthouses, mansions, post offices, armories, libraries, fish hatcheries, monuments, ferries, canals, and lighthouses.


\textsuperscript{23} Smith “Greetings from Faith,” 237.
or tarry? You can spread the joyful tidings for the small sum of one-cent.”24 These questions stem from assumptions about the “Post Card Craze” that had nothing to do with location and place. And this article was not alone. Hundreds of period articles and letters drew upon an understanding of postcard use that was completely divorced from travel: postcards were replacing courtship and familial letters; postcards were replacing emotional connection; postcards were replacing human contact.25

Shifting the focus towards holiday greeting cards thus creates an opportunity to see the postcard fad in an entirely different light. If the craze was also tapping into a particular constellation of emotional, romantic, familial, patriotic, and sentimental constructs (just to name a few, and all of them unrelated to travel and mobility), then we need to reconstruct the historical circumstances that activated these broader contexts. This, in turn, suggests we need a better understanding of the larger postcard phenomenon—an understanding that remains attuned to images, since the phenomenon was one of the period’s largest physical outpourings of visual culture. So the question becomes, what types of images met this broader array of cultural needs? Was it just the collection of attractively tinted images of hotels and town squares we see in the travel genre, or was it the greeting card genre, made for every possible occasion and sentiment? The stakes of this question are important. By expanding our definitions of postcards and their purposes, we complicate our accepted understanding of this phenomenon. By employing a broader view of the fad we can see how postcards and their images helped

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early twentieth century audiences address a multitude of cultural issues such as ruralism versus urbanity; “old immigrants” versus “new immigrants”; and “traditional” gender roles versus the role of the “New Woman.”

In offering a description of postcard use that expands beyond expressions of travel and mobility, I am also suggesting that the rise and fall of the fad was propelled by this broader array of cultural conditions. The sentimental stream of greeting-oriented postcards served as an equally strong (perhaps even stronger) engine of the fad than travel cards. Not only does the discourse of the period suggest this logic, but it is hard to reconcile all those billions and billions of cards so tied to a particular class. The contemporaneous description of the postcard as a function of leisure in which “…a friend sends you a card bearing a picture of the Lover’s Leap or the Devil’s Bridge contiguous to the Summer resort at which he is stopping…,”26 does not adequately explain one of the twentieth century’s greatest outpouring of visual images. Instead, we should look towards the postcard genre with the widest reach and most egalitarian scope. A search for such scope and breadth leads to a specific focus on holiday postcards.27 Holidays are celebrated across cultural and economic groups; they are not specific to any one class or segment of society. If anything, the large body of literature detailing holidays as foci of conflict between classes, ethnic groups, and other constituencies underscores the far-

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27 Six holidays were examined for this project: Valentines Day, Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years. These were selected because they appear to have been the most popular holidays for sending postcards. Small amounts of St. Patrick’s Day, Decoration Day, and Fourth of July postcards can be found, but not in the quantities of the other holidays.
ranging social and cultural significance of these special days. Holiday postcards—with their potentially multivariate, cross-sectional recipients—have the greatest chance to represent the overall phenomenon. Put another way, holiday cards could still be used by traveling elites in a way that travel cards necessarily could not by other audiences—particularly rural audiences.

One reason the view card has been so popular among scholars is that the presumed (though narrowly defined) audience of middle and upper class travelers allows historians to proceed easily with image analysis without questioning audience. This accounts for the photographic postcard’s frequent use as source material for any number of studies, from garden histories to military analysis—the source does not require significant interrogation of audience or context. By reframing the source material, however, we must start over before we can advance towards teasing out the meanings and relevancies of holiday postcard images.

To accomplish this goal, I have selected a methodology that gives equal weight to three separate but interconnected elements—audience, historical context, and the images themselves. Ben Singer, whose book on the contexts of melodramatic cinema can serve as something of a model for this path, suggests a contextualist approach. The contextualist approach “explores the ways in which a cultural object…grew out of, and


existed within, a complex conjunction of social, intertextual, and commercial contexts.”

He goes on to add that although “most history is interested in placing events within relevant contexts [to which I would add most historians are interested in the same],” the contextualist approach more self-consciously stresses “the fruitfulness of investigating an unusually wide spectrum of qualitatively disparate historical determinants.”30 This self-consciously selected, “unusually wide” spectrum approach forms the basic methodological cornerstone of this project. There are other deeply contextual scholars who, like Singer, provide influence and inspiration, including Roland Marchand, Kristin Hoganson, and John Kasson.31 Put in vernacular terms: There is no such thing as too much historical context.

Running through each of these three elements—audience, historic context, and image analysis—is the issue of the holidays themselves. Holidays are societal constructions. They may vary in historical precedent, connection to religious versus secular practice, and organization of participants, but they are all days with no intrinsic meaning except that bestowed upon them by a society or culture. Because holidays are socially constructed, a certain quorum of rituals, meanings, symbols, etc. is shared among the participants in order to give the holiday shape and for participants to understand their significance. Practice may vary from family to family, generation to generation, or group

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to group; however, a baseline of communally understood assumptions about the holiday (its date, its purpose, its iconography) are shared. This act of sharing serves to create bonds in which “members worship the same objects [secular or consumer worship certainly applies] and share experiences that help form and sustain deep emotional bonds among the members,” as noted by Amitai Etzioni. But frictions occur (often on multiple and even simultaneous levels) when these objects and symbols are contested by competing groups. This means that images of holidays from the early twentieth century can provide a window into the conflicts, frictions, and contests relevant to the same period, even if those images have some thematic continuity continues to the present day.

Lastly, there should be a word about the images analyzed through this proposed contextualist model, as well as their sources. Unlike photographic view postcards, most of the images on the front of holiday postcards were drawn by artists, not reproduced from a photograph. What we find on postcards are astounding displays, in the words of one author, of “dreams of wealth, love, sex, travel, wit, and beauty.” This opens the door to a far-ranging look at elements of fantasy, codes contained within the styles of illustration, and choices of subject matter, themes, and representation, all within a specific, historically isolated moment during which postcards were all the rage. In other

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32 Etzioni and Bloom, We Are What We Celebrate, 7.
34 William Ouellette, Fantasy Postcards (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1975), 11.
words, these artifacts are ideally suited to a study linking history and visual culture. As for the sources of holiday postcard images, there are multiple repositories available to scholars. Collector books are a useful resource, containing reproductions of thousands of images, many in full-color and sized to scale.\textsuperscript{35} The archives of Smithsonian Institution contain two prominent collections of holiday postcards: the Beatrice Litzinger Postcard Collection, with more than 1,200 individual examples, and the Victor A Blenkle Postcards, with approximately 1,000 images. Online collections are also available, including the University of Louisville Libraries “Newton Owen Postcard Collection” of approximately 230 images (http://digital.library.louisville.edu/collections/owenp/index.php) and the University of North Texas Digital Projects Department’s “Portal to Texas History” with approximately 75 images (http://texashistory.unt.edu/searchform.tkl). The Winterthur Library in Delaware also offers large numbers within the John & Carolyn Grossman Collection.

Another significant source of images also exists: a scholar’s ability to acquire postcards. As appraiser Rudi Franchi noted in the \textit{Antiques Roadshow} piece, most postcards are extremely inexpensive. A historian of postcards has an opportunity not afforded to many of his colleagues—the chance to build a significant author’s collection easily and cheaply. By attending postcard collector shows, browsing antique shops, and using eBay.com, a historian can build a large representative sampling with minimal personal expense.

Utilizing all these available resources, particularly eBay.com, three large groups of images (spanning all six holidays, see note 24) were selected for this study—rural images; images of women and courtship; and images depicting race and concepts of nationhood—for reasons that will quickly become apparent. Yet as James Baker articulates in his own analysis of Thanksgiving postcard images: “Any attempt to survey this immense and diverse assortment of ephemeral images would be incomplete, but a sampling reveals how a few visual themes emerged to become widely accepted emblems of the American Thanksgiving holiday in the first decades of the twentieth century.”

The problem of completeness is exponentially compounded in a survey of six holidays, spanning a variety of audiences and uses. Although tens of thousands of postcards are thematically linked to the selected tropes and motifs of this analysis, I cannot even begin to claim that my selections account for every image available to scholars today. One compendium of just Halloween postcard images has over 3,000 individual examples.

Selected for analysis, then, are those visual themes that are repeated with enough regularity and consistency to register as more than mere accident or coincidence. Occasionally I have also selected images that are especially rare and absent from the larger stream of images, precisely because of their distinctiveness or a particularly notable feature. These are, of course, subjective choices, and I stipulate that counter-examples to my selections may very well exist—it was, after all, a vast and diverse marketplace. The popularity and repetition of certain themes begins to make sense only

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by pairing the context of the historical moment with the knowledge of who comprised the majority of the postcard-buying public. By bringing together knowledge of audiences, historic context, repeated tropes and images, and the larger theme of holiday practices themselves, this project will make visible meanings within holiday postcard images that might otherwise remain hidden or unnoticed. The result will address omissions in the historiography and contribute a new understanding about the importance of holiday postcards and the larger postcard phenomenon.

The first chapter describes the methodology devised for determining holiday postcard audiences and generating quantifiable data to define the postcard phenomenon. The process combined information gleaned from eBay.com’s auctions of holiday postcards with a wide variety of demographic data from corresponding census records. Demographic data from the 2,000 postcards was then compared to national statistics from 1910. In many cases the postcard data was a near-perfect reflection of national demography. However, in several key demographic categories, the postcard samples were divergent from national statistics, revealing that postcard audiences skewed towards specific demographics: white rural/small town women and children in the North who were not “new immigrant” stock.

Chapter Two is written with a two-fold purpose: to interpret the results of the 2,000-card survey and to use that information to revisit and revise the history of the postcard fad. It is structured around the six key findings from Chapter One—chronology, rural populations, race, gender, ethnicity, and geographic distribution. There are some significant secondary sources to consider in this review, but in most cases no one has ever
approached the postcard phenomenon from these perspectives. This chapter then provides a revised history of the craze that moves audiences to the center of the narrative. Audiences—not producers and distributors—are given the agency to determine the rise and fall of postcards’ popularity. African-Americans’ reasons for not participating in the fad are discussed and explored. We see the motivations behind women’s use of postcards, and why German-Americans perpetuated postcard use over other forms of cultural expression. Like two interlocking pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, each survey finding from Chapter One is supported by the research of this chapter and the research adds clarity to each previous finding.

Building on the last two chapters, Chapter Three interrogates what postcards meant to the audiences described, as well as their cultural functions. It argues that postcards were image-based conversations between specific networks and communities of people. These specific groups—the core participants in the fad—used holiday imagery to reinforce mutually reassuring messages amongst themselves. These conversations occurred in the context of historically situated social conflicts and moments of cultural contestation in their lives.

Chapter Four constellates one core postcard demographic (rural and small town Americans), a pervasive visual theme (the idealized rural landscape), and the relevant historical context (the rise of the Country Life Movement). It argues that the Country Life

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Movement—a Progressive reform movement to “improve” rural life—created anxieties for rural Americans through its contentious rhetoric. Rural and small town Americans used holiday postcard imagery to create a visual ideal of themselves—a nostalgic construction circulated to exclude countervailing narratives primarily from the Country Life Movement. The chapter examines such themes as Santa’s place in the forest, and the discursive importance of fences. It looks at common Easter and Thanksgiving greetings, and sees narratives about soil productivity and agricultural output. It explores depictions of rural homes, and parses out markers of class. It finds subtle differences between holiday postcard images and those in urban-focused magazines and periodicals. These differences allowed postcard users to make claims of superiority about their rurally situated holidays. It concludes that idealized holiday images not only refuted Country Life claims, but stood as a defensive bulwark against urbanism and modernism.

Chapter Five also draws together three distinct elements: Women as a core postcard audience; the historically situated contexts of the “New Woman”; and clusters of holiday postcard images reflecting courtship. It also argues that women in the early twentieth century used holidays to advance a gender-specific agenda on courtship. Christmas and Halloween joined Valentine’s Day in displays of adult, heterosexual rituals. Postcards show how holidays could be exploited by women to affect the power structures surrounding them. Deep readings of representative examples reveal the contested dynamics of gender roles. Although many normative assumptions about heterosexuality and gender hierarchy shaped these images, they still worked to create a new cultural space for women that emphasized their initiative and control of courtship.
Chapter Six constellates another core postcard audience (certain groups of whites), historical circumstance (the rise of “new immigrants” and their move into rural areas), and collections of patriotic images (flags, shields, stars-and-stripes, Uncle Sam, bald eagles). It argues that patriotic emblems in conjunction with Christmas and Thanksgiving advanced a non-inclusive vision of these holidays. Used by northern white audiences of Anglo-Saxon and German descent, Thanksgiving postcards especially fostered a specific narrative of the holiday based on hierarchy and privilege. The “old-fashioned” Thanksgiving, turkey-killing bald eagles, and Uncle Sam as fatherly provider, are fully explored. They are read as “racial holidayism,” a play off Gary Gerstle’s “racial nationalism” from *American Crucible*. After exposing the pervasiveness of this dynamic, the chapter engages images of African-Americans and Native-Americans in this same context. It concludes that holiday postcards represented a largely nativist landscape where patriotic emblems were used to privilege a particular vision of holidays for rural, Northern whites from specific ethnic heritages.

Wrote the editors of *The Bookman* in 1909: “We like to get our gallery of cards together and look them over, admiring their variety, and studying the handwriting of those who sent them. It is like communing with the writers whose moods have been fixed upon them indelibly in ink.”39 Our own “gallery of cards”—those selected and analyzed here—will indeed offer variety and a chance to commune with the past; however, the scholarship will, I hope, offer a corrective to *The Bookman*’s assumption. It is not the handwriting

and ink that reveals the multiple moods of those who sent postcards, but rather, the images. This project will have brought together demographic audience data, historical context, and holiday postcard images. It will situate the rural, Northern, white women who generated so much postcard use, and will reconnect them to the holiday images that were relevant and important to them. In doing so it will provide a richer understanding of early twentieth century America, its conflicts and contests, and its diverse identities and consciousnesses, thus adding another layer of understanding to both U.S. history at the turn of the twentieth century and the field of American visual culture.
Identifying an audience for the visual culture of a particular historical period is one of the most challenging and most important steps in the cultural analysis of images. Because mailed postcards contain names and addresses, they offer unique clues about their audiences, and an opportunity to quantitatively study audience demographics. Drawing from methodologies common to market research and other natural and social sciences, sample collection—along with large-scale surveys of these samples—can serve as models for this research. Yet such research also requires access to a pool of samples large enough and diverse enough to be considered representative. To access such a pool, we turn to the website eBay.com—not for the physical accumulation of postcards but rather for the scanned information common to many postcard online auctions. In gathering over 2,000 such samples into a database, the quantitative demographic information sought about postcard audiences begins to emerge.

Postcards, eBay, and Breadcrumbs

In introducing basic concepts of visual culture, authors Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright nicely summarize a series of choices a scholar must make in approaching images. First he must decide whether to “study images themselves and their textual meanings” or whether to “look at the modes of responding to visuality, as represented in
studies of spectators of audiences…” If this second path is chosen, then another theoretical fork in the road quickly emerges—shall the image be approached through the lens of an “idealized viewer, such as the cinematic spectator” or is there enough information to consider “what actual viewers do with popular culture texts”?\(^1\)

Such simple words—“actual viewers.” And yet they can present massive conundrums to historians. Who exactly do we presume is doing the reading, processing, and understanding of images from the past? When faced with this question, scholars have proven to be remarkably resilient and creative. Ben Singer, for example, overlaid data from city directories and building permit records onto a map of Manhattan to gauge nickelodeon audiences, while Lizbeth Cohen’s analysis of ethnic loyalty in buying habits emerges from tables of chain store distribution across Chicago.\(^2\) Such quantitative methods have often yielded exceptional findings, and a study of postcards should likewise offer a creative solution to the question of audience. This is what makes the pages of a small volume entitled *Postcards in the Library: Invaluable Visual Resources* somewhat ironic.

Published in 1995, *Postcards in the Library* is a collection of essays intended to highlight the value of postcards as a source of primary research. In other words, it was written to encourage postcard scholarship. As the book’s editor suggests in his opening essay: “It is, unfortunately, abundantly clear that, in most cases, existing postcard


collections are a vastly underutilized scholarly resource.”³ Yet in spite of trying to convince scholars of the value of postcards in their various library and archive collections, these authors seem resigned to the impossibility of determining audiences relative to the postcard phenomenon. As one contributor remarked about postcards from Yellowstone National Park, “given the tens of millions of Yellowstone postcards produced there is no way that an accurate sampling of postmark cancellations can be made.”⁴

My study challenges the claim that there is “no way” to accurately determine audiences for postcards—and holiday postcards specifically. Although such postcards range well above the tens of millions into hundreds of millions and beyond, there are ways to employ quantitative methods to help solve the problem. And after reading Postcards in the Library, one might be hopeful that the institutions in which these authors dedicate their services would serve as the key. Unfortunately this is not a practical solution. Simply put, the number of holiday postcards contained in libraries, even across the breadth of the country, is too small to create a viable national sample.

Moreover, even if a scholar could look at every card in every library and archive in the county (quite a logistical feat), what he or she would be examining could hardly be called representational of the nation as a whole. Cards in libraries and archives are often donated locally by someone with a connection to the institution. That list of donors typically does not trend towards the egalitarian; rather it favors the wealthy, the highly-

placed, and the urban. Just to cite a few examples: the Christmas postcards in the Filson Historical Society’s collection in Louisville, KY came from Rogers Clark Ballard Thurston, a major donor of antiquities to the Speed Museum; the postcard collection at Temple University is from the prominent doctor Chevalier Jackson; the holiday postcards at the Arizona Historical Society were the property of Rosa Ronquillo Rhodes, owner of the Diamond R. Ranch. While institutions such as the Winterthur Library in Delaware and the Smithsonian Archives in Washington, DC own some of the most eclectic and promising collections of holiday postcards, even these are not large enough to start making assumptions about national trends.

The answer, it turns out, is not in bricks and mortar institutions, in spite of the optimism of Postcards in the Library, and our automatic tendency to turn to libraries and archives first. Instead, we look to the online world, and to the world of online consumerism specifically. It is the advent of the world’s largest single marketplace—eBay.com—that makes an inquiry such as this one feasible. Filled with the ephemera of countless attics, cellars, closets, drawers, and trunks, the pages of eBay.com feature prodigious mountains of American material culture.

As an online auction platform accessible around the globe, eBay.com solves many of the problems inherent in libraries and archives. Its scope transcends any parochial or local affiliations, while the sheer size of the site ensures both breadth and depth in a particular form or medium, including holiday postcards. Because postcards can be sold by a variety of people with diverse backgrounds and circumstances—professional dealers as well as individuals just cleaning out the family attic—the source material becomes
cross-sectional in a way that is more difficult to achieve through archival and donated collections.

While eBay.com might not be the obvious choice for historical research, this is not the first time that the website has emerged as potential outpost of primary source materials. Philip Gura’s 2004 article “How I met and dated Miss Emily Dickinson: An Adventure on eBay” is a detailed account of one American literature professor’s acquisition of an Emily Dickinson photograph from an online auction. Historian Molly McCarthy rhetorically asked in 2001: “Would artifacts and manuscripts normally destined for archives now end up more readily in private hands? Is eBay driving up prices for antiquarian objects once easily acquired by archival institutions? In short, is eBay a good or bad thing for the teaching and preservation of history?” Yet both Gura’s experience and McCarthy’s questions point to using eBay for the physical collection and purchase of objects, not the accumulation of information solely through the scrutiny of eBay’s auction pages.

The Internet, like microfilm before it, has made archives of all kinds more accessible to researchers. In recognizing this value, scholars have moved past requiring tactile or physical interaction with a primary source. Thus, rather than simply accumulating items off eBay (a strategy employed here as well, as described in the introduction), scholars of visual culture can also do what they do every day with scanned

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5 “How I Met and Dated Miss Emily Dickinson,” Philip Gura, Common-Place, June 19, 2009, accessed February 8, 2011, http://common-place.dreamhost.com/vol-04/no-02/gura/. Gura’s retelling of his purchase is rooted in a traditional way of viewing both the website and its content. Gura’s goal was the physical acquisition of the photograph, a process that could only end satisfactorily when the object itself was bought and delivered.

versions of newspaper pages and magazine editions. They can simply look. Often with high-quality scans and searchable text descriptions, the information that flows across the pages of eBay.com can be every bit as valuable as the physical objects being auctioned and sold.  

eBay.com was founded in 1995 and yet in the more than 15 years since then, very few scholars have used the site as an online archive. There are numerous potential reasons for this, but none seems more powerful than eBay’s entire lack of permanence. If historians have crossed the threshold from hardcopy to digital in their employment of online databases, pdfs of articles, and scans of photographs, it is because those sources offer some semblance of longevity. Just as we expect to go into a library and retrieve a book that will always be there, so too we employ databases that will always have the article or pdf we are seeking. This notion of permanence forms the underpinnings of our entire system of notations and citations. We essentially leave breadcrumbs for our readers and colleagues to retrace our steps back to our original source materials. Even if the databases change or fold, the citation of the content points future scholars to other holdings. So what do we do with source materials that are both entirely unique and completely transient?

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7 This approach cannot help but raise the topic of fraud and authenticity. Certainly not every object of interest to a visual culturalist is appropriate for this technique; however, with postcards, fraud is simply more trouble than it is worth—the stakes are too low, the amount of work too high, and the backs of postcards (the portion of interest in this chapter) have no known commercial value, making counterfeiting unreasonable.

8 The one and only exception I have found is detailed in Molly McCarthy’s article. In it she describes Gretchen Adams, a University of New Hampshire doctoral student who monitored tourist ephemera relating to Salem and the witch trials. The article clarifies that McCarthy rarely purchased the items she was analyzing online. See McCarthy, “Consuming History?”
If eBay is an archive, it is the most dynamic archive ever conceived. Any library or archive can add and remove materials, and no archive is ever really, completely static; however, the changes are incremental and, compared to eBay, glacial. Imagine an archive where the books and documents change every second, appearing and disappearing off the shelves and out of boxes with each tick of the clock. Not only do the materials change—sometimes reappearing over and over again every few days, other times disappearing into the ether never to return—but the very shelves, boxes, corridors, and walls of this archive constantly shift, expand, and contract. It is a fascinating, frightening, and thoroughly 21st-century vision.

Still, it also is not quite as unconventional as it sounds. Scholars have worked with unique and ephemeral sources before and have crafted mechanisms for reporting their findings and leaving their own “breadcrumbs” for those that follow. In fact, two words are useful in describing this approach to research because their implications are readily understandable to the academic community, including historians: Survey and Sample.

The term survey typically conjures images of people—a telephone survey, a survey of historians, a public opinion survey. Like the dynamic archive, the people are not the same exact individuals each time, but rather a random selection based on some pre-existing criteria. A survey familiar to many historians is Rosenzweig and Thelen’s landmark *The Presence of the Past*, which was based on “standard survey practice that considers samples as small as 800 people adequate for a national sample from which to
make statistically valid comparisons among large subgroups within the population."


The authors provide extensive notes on how their survey was conducted, from Appendix One entitled “How we did the survey” to an accompanying website linked to the Center for History and New Media’s homepage.

While perhaps not obvious at first, the methodology behind the book’s survey (or any similar market research or public opinion survey) and a proposed survey of information from eBay have striking similarities. An important trait of the survey is that anyone wishing to replicate or test Rosenzwieg and Thelen’s methodology would naturally not expect to contact the exact same 808 individuals with whom *The Presence of the Past*’s researchers talked. Rather, the criteria and methodology (the demographic breakdowns of the original call lists, the time of day used to call across time zones, the use of home versus work numbers) would be reproduced with similar but entirely different individuals.

Thus, the subjects in any survey strategy become as unique, dynamic, and ephemeral as the eBay archive. They appear and then disappear in the course of the survey itself, with the event and its contents recorded for analysis and posterity; but once the survey concludes, they (like a closed eBay auction) are not retrievable through mechanisms such as a citation. Historians might also recognize the methodologies implied in the idea of the sample. Sampling denotes a similar process to surveying (the above authors use the terms almost interchangeably), but “sample” more often suggests things rather than people. Archeologists collect samples, as do biologists, pathologists,
and forensic scientists. The samples they take are likewise ephemeral, with the fibers or
dirt particles or tree drillings often destroyed during examination and analysis. The next
scientist looking to verify and replicate the analysis might do so with similar source
material—another vial of blood or another cross-section of tree bark—but would not
employ the exact same samples that her peer used.

William Cronon, a historian who works across “disciplines whose practitioners
are not usually familiar with each other’s work,” has tapped into the usefulness of
sample-based studies. He discusses the concept in his bibliographic essay to Changes in
the Land, citing a body of literature that examines “the influence of human beings on
pollen and sediment deposition rates”; “the decaying plant materials in forest floors to
reconstruct stand histories”; and “successional sequences on agricultural and pastured
lands.”¹⁰ Just as with Presence of the Past, Cronon’s work helps demonstrate the
intersections between traditional historical research and the methods of surveys and
samples.

Perhaps the best analogy (and metaphor for monitoring the dynamic archive of
eBay) is someone studying a river. The river never stops flowing. Its pace sometimes
slows or accelerates, the contents of the water might change from forces upstream, and
the form of the river might spread or contract depending on the seasons. To conduct a
river study requires collecting samples from a source that is both constant (it is always
the river) and ephemeral (it is never the exact same river at any time). Scientists are not
daunted by this…they simply adjust their methodology. Samples are collected using the

same system each time. If samples vary, they know the dynamic river has changed and set out to quantify the change and determine its causes. If the samples remain the same, this is also useful because it creates a stable baseline. It is important to remember, though, that each sample is different than the last because the river never stops moving—the water in one vial is not the same as the water in the next. But it is the accumulation of samples that provides the basis for analysis, and it is the repeatability of the process that provides the foundation for verification and citation.

Here, then, is the proposed model for this project, a methodology that borrows heavily from the sisters of Clio in the other scientific fields. These protocols suggest collecting sample after sample from a constantly flowing stream of source material, but solving the problem of uniqueness and transience by using the same criteria and methodology each time, and recording and cataloging the findings. The criteria and method are available for others to replicate (presumably with similar results), and the raw data from sample collections is analyzed and meaningfully graphed and reported.11

Survey Method and Sample Criteria

All the samples for this project were collected by monitoring the same part of eBay.com, a category on the auction site known as “Collectibles > Postcards >

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11 There are, of course, methods of citation for a webpage. These can include information such as the date and time the page was visited. I have chosen not to employ these “breadcrumbs” because of their ultimate uselessness. Unlike many webpages, eBay auction pages do not remain live for more than a few days. And on any given day, there are tens of millions of these pages. In just a month, much less a year, (and over all the eBay platforms), billions and billions of auction pages come and go. The chance of reconstructing a single search or page under these conditions is hopeless, even with webpage archiving services. Citations would simply give a false sense of permanence that does not exist—the river truly does flow at a prodigious rate, and recapturing a single water drop from downstream is impossible.
Holidays.” Within this category, anywhere from 3,500 to 9,000 individual auctions might be taking place at any given time. Not every auction was relevant to this study—auctions are sometimes mis-categorized by the seller; they might include “lots” of multiple postcards without giving a clear picture of any; or the postcard in question might be from a more modern era. Only auctions where the seller clearly showed a single postcard that appeared to be from the early twentieth century were examined for suitability and potential sampling. Even with all the caveats above, a conservative estimate is that at any one time, on any day of the year, more than 5,000 individual auctions were suitable for beginning the process of scrutiny.

Once an auction page was opened, there was a four-fold criterion to determine if the page contained the information necessary to continue with a sample. First, the seller had to include an image of the back of the postcard. Second, the back of the postcard had to have a name and address on it. Third, the postcard could not be postmarked after 1919. Informal analysis prior to the survey’s commencement suggested that post-1920 cards would be scarce, offering a logical termination point of 1919. More importantly, the visual composition of cards from the 1920s was markedly different than earlier cards. The 1919 endpoint was likewise logical in order to keep the study focused on cards of a similar style and substance. Fourth and finally, the postcard had to correspond with one of the six holidays being examined: Valentines Day, Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years.

Most auctions did not meet this four-point criterion, with the most significant cause for elimination being the first—finding auctions that featured the back or verso side
of the card. Some of the largest sellers of postcards on eBay do not include scans of the backs of postcards in their auction information since the collector’s market for postcards is largely based on the front image. However, this ultimately helped increase the diversity of the samples taken. Samples came from literally hundreds of sellers rather than just a few. Often these sellers were “amateurs” who might be selling family collections or a few postcards that had crossed their path. This ensured that samples were not clustered around any one seller, and thus not around any one geographic region or seller specialty (such as only postcards by a certain artist or from a particular holiday).

If an auction did meet the above criterion, the next step was to ensure the postcard recipient was not already in the database. This was an important step because sellers often relisted postcards that did not sell at the end of an auction. Thus there was the potential to fill the database with repeated information. To ensure the most diverse and representative survey possible, an auction was also rejected if the postcard appeared to feature the same family as one already in the database. Although the recipients might be different ages and genders, all of the household information including population of the hometown, occupation, nativity and parentage would have been duplicated in multiple records. Looking for not only new recipients, but also new households, minimized this effect.12

One might wonder if a database of postcard recipients is truly representative of holiday postcard ritual use, much less representative of the larger postcard phenomenon. After all, the survey as described is really a survey of those who received postcards, not

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12 In spite of these efforts, a few duplicate entries have been found in the database. I would estimate that they account for less than .5% of the overall survey.
those who bought them, which could possibly be the more useful information to historians. However, messages on the backs of postcards make clear that recipients were expected to become buyers and buyers could expect to become recipients. Sample #97 sums up the expectations of reciprocity between friends and kin that the fad created: “Dear Ella, I know it is my turn to write you a letter, but I am awful busy. I have got twelve postal cards here to write tonight.”

Postcards became quick conveyances of thoughts and greetings, often easier to generate than writing a full letter or even filling a greeting card; however, senders expected thoughts and greetings in return. Variations of “why don’t you write,” “I have not heard from you,” and “have you forgotten me,” are legion when reading the backs of cards, and are generally followed by the call to action: “write soon.” “For cards to function as social glue,” writes Bjarne Rogan, “the exchange principle was immediate reciprocity.”13 Even fronts of postcards could be employed in this effort, as in the Christmas postcard that asks, “Does my old friend remember me?,“ as opposed to simply offering Christmas greetings. (Figure 4) It is completely reasonable to assume that a database of recipients also represents a database of active consumers in the postcard marketplace.

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The notion that postcard recipients were expected to become postcard senders is reinforced here. The cycle of give and get was put into motion by sending this postcard; however, the recipient was then asked “Does my old friend remember me,” entreatingly the recipient to then become a sender herself.

Author’s collection

Once the aforementioned credentials of the postcard were established, the next stage was to see if the recipient could be found in census records. Just as this project was made possible by using an online resource as large as eBay, this next stage of the process was also just-recently feasible, this time through the advent of online, searchable census records. Attempting to find what essentially was an entirely random person from anywhere in the country would have been a Herculean (and ultimately insurmountable) challenge before these databases became available.14

Using the name on the postcard, fields such as first and last name, state, and township were entered into to the search screen. Wildcard searches with three or more letters meant that sometimes-illegible portions of the postcard could be worked around if

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14 There are two major census databases on the commercial market, available in many libraries including the Library of Congress—Ancestry.com and Heritagequest.com. I found Ancestry.com to be infinitely more accurate and usable, and used the “Annual U.S. Deluxe Membership” of this product for the entirety of the project.
enough other data matched. Deciding if someone was “James Whitney” or “James Whitley” was one challenge; finding someone by township was another. In small towns and rural communities, the town on the postcard might not bear the same name as the town listed by the census enumerator. Places that at the time (or even today) might be little more than wide-patches of a road could be folded into a nearby larger community for purposes of the census. This necessitated often going “up” from the township level to the county level, in order to determine if the person on the postcard matched the person in the census record.

Once the matching occurred at the street, township or county level, the census search continued using a trio of criteria. First, if there was no postmark on the card, only the 1910 census could be used. As we shall see, the postcard fad peaked in 1909 and 1910. In cases of an unmarked card we can only guess as to the number of years between the census enumeration and postcard mailing. By keeping the search relegated to 1910 (the year the greatest number of postcards were sent) we have the strongest probability that the census information was not out of date (moves, deaths, changes of occupation, etc). Information from the 1900 or 1920 censuses was only used if a postcard was dated or postmarked; and especially if said postmark was before 1905 or after 1915.

Second, the match had to be completely unique. Although it was not necessary that the street address on the postcard match the street address on the census record (people do move after all) or the township on the postcard match the township on the census record (as noted, census enumerators had their own system of grouping), it was
necessary that the person on the postcard be the only possible match in that city or county.

To illustrate: Sample #62 was sent to Miss Katherine Winch in Strykersville, NY but the card contains no postmark, keeping our search relegated to 1910 census records. A search of Ancestry.com reveals three Katherine Winches in New York, none living in a town called Strykersville. Two of the three results are a mother and daughter with the same name, listed at Sheldon, NY, while the third name is a young woman living in North Elba. However, quick research reveals that Strykersville is a tiny hamlet, likely too small for its own census designation, and it is in Wyoming County, which matches our mother/daughter’s home county. And since the card is addressed to Miss Katherine Winch, we are able to eliminate the mother, leaving the daughter as the only possibility. She is the only single female with that name living in Wyoming Country, NY.

One more example helps crystallize the process: Sample #803 was sent to Mrs. E.J. Harriman on 9 Pleasant St in Randolph, Maine, postmarked 1914. A 1910 census search reveals 15 Harrimans living in Randolph, ME. Only two, however, are married women (note the Mrs. in the salutation) and of those, only one is married to someone with those initials (Edward J. Harriman). Although the address is not 9 Pleasant St, this is considered a match, as there is only one possible match to Mrs. E.J. Harriman in Randolph, ME. Had there been another possibility—the wife of Elmer John Harriman, for example—this postcard would have to be discarded unless one of the two could be matched down to the street address on the card.
Third, particularly when working at the county level in order to secure a match, it was useful to research the town on the postcard relative to the town in the census enumerator’s record. Even if there was only a single match within the county, the match became more suspect if the two locations turned out to be on opposite sides of the county. Here, Google Maps and other online mapping services were invaluable. In a couple keystrokes one can quickly see, for example, that the distance between Sheldon, NY and Strykersville, NY in the case of Katherine Winch, is only four miles. Clearly it is the same area, just given different names colloquially versus bureaucratically by the census.

Only at this point—after searching eBay for an appropriate auction to sample; the existing database to guard against duplicates; and census records to find a unique match—only then could a postcard sample be collected into this survey and the data recorded in our database. A conservative estimate is that it takes approximately 30-40 individual attempts to secure one entry in the database. For a database of 2,000 entries, this means upwards of 60,000-80,000 postcard auction screens were examined and evaluated for suitability, with the vast majority of them ultimately discarded.

The fields of the database were then populated with information from both the postcard itself and the census record.\(^{15}\) Copies of the front and back of the postcard were digitally captured and placed into the sample record. These were also stored separately, with file names corresponding to the unique record locator number in the database (files 1022f, 1022b thus are the front and back images of sample #1022 in the database).\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) The database was constructed using FileMarker Pro version 8.5

\(^{16}\) It is worth noting that copying images off eBay stirs some ethical debate. Sellers often go to lengths to ensure images are not copied; however, eBay regulations make clear that the concern is one seller copying images from another in order to use them in his or her own auction. With no intent to use these images as
Also recorded was the holiday depicted on the postcard, the postmark (if there was one), and the name and address information.

![Figure 5: Screenshot of the database used to collect sample information.](image)

From the census record, much more was entered into the database starting with the name used in the census, as well as the year of the census. Also noted was the level of the match between the postcard back and the census record—whether at the street, anything other than an academic reference tool, one can evoke “fair use.” Certainly, none of these collected images could be published without first securing rights or buying the postcard. Nor does this process affect or inhibit the seller’s auction. Observing and recording the information in the auction does not interfere with it. Finally, it can be argued that the seller has an expectation that his or her auction page will be studied, and the information contained therein scrutinized. That is, after all, the whole point of the auction site—to supply information for the purpose of a sale. By making the information public for the sake of profit, the seller also must assume the possibility of public observance without commercial consummation. It might be more accurate to say the name used in the Ancestry.com database was recorded in this field. Usually these matched with the actual census-taker’s handwritten name, but occasionally the data was slightly mis-keyed. In order to find the record again easily in Ancestry.com, these typos were recorded as they appeared in the record locator. Only a very small number of records have this discrepancy.
towship or county level. The next group of data described the actual recipient of the postcard relative to the census records. Was the recipient him- or herself the head of household (HOH), the spouse to the HOH (which always meant a female wife), the son or daughter of the HOH, another family member, a servant, or a boarder?18 Was the recipient male, female, or was the postcard sent to a husband/wife couple? What was the age of the recipient, either as shown in the 1910 census, or as calculated from census data using the actual postmark on the card? And finally, what was the race of the recipient?

Next came employment and township information. First, it was denoted whether the employment information referred to the actual recipient or the HOH. If the recipient had a recorded occupation, this was tabulated. If no occupation was listed for the recipient, but there was one for the HOH, this was collected instead. The employment information was recorded by first transcribing the employment data off the census record, and then placing it into one of the categories the Census Bureau used to classify occupation groups.19 Lastly, this section was used to record which of the ten categories the recipient’s location would have fallen into, ranging from rural (less than 2,500 population) to cities of 1 million +.20

The last section of the database’s data-entry form addressed nativity (country of birth) and parentage (country of parents’ birth). First the recipient of the postcard had his or her information recorded: if they were born in the US or a foreign country, and if so,

18 Although census takers sometimes noted “adopted” or “step” in their notations of offspring, that level of detail was not parsed in my database when recording sons and daughters.
20 A complete list of all places having a population of 2,500 or more at: Department of Commerce, "Report on Population" Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1913), 87-97. Places not on this list were deemed rural.
which one. However, as we shall see, because so many postcards went to children, this has the potential to be a somewhat misleading snapshot of the country. Among the white population of children aged five and under in 1910, 9.2 million were born in this country, compared to just over 102,000 who were foreign born. The next age bracket is similar: 15.7 million aged 5-14 were born on US soil compared to 656,000 born abroad. The implication is clear—immigrants were more likely to start or expand their families after immigration, rather than risk moving babies and small children from overseas. To look only at postcard recipients’ country of birth would give a skewed view of the results. Almost everyone would appear as native-born individuals, without providing a more accurate picture of actual household composition, especially the nativity and parentage of the households’ parental overseers. Added then was the nativity and parentage of the HOH as well as the spouse of household (SOH), if there was one.

This, in its entirety, was the methodology used. Anyone wishing to replicate the process could easily do so, adhering to the criteria and the steps as outlined. In this case, the process was used over a seven-month period running from October 2007 to April 2008. It was repeated until four surveys, each of 500 separate samples, were completed. Why four surveys of 500 samples? In part it was simply the convenience of nicely rounded numbers; however, 500 was a large enough quantity to start discerning patterns in the data. Meanwhile, a total sample size of 2,000 was more than enough to

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21 Ibid. 300.
22 By census logic, every household had a head, which could be male or female; however, females could only be the head if single. Not every household had a spouse, therefore, but every spouse was female.
23 My own data is also archived, in both the database and the corresponding electronic folder of all 2,000 postcard fronts and backs.
project those patterns onto a national landscape.\textsuperscript{24} However, these choices needed to be affirmed by the data itself, and consistency of pattern between the four surveys was key to the entire project. Had results varied wildly between the surveys, it could be concluded that the sample sizes were too small or that the data was simply too diverse to fit into replicable categories. On the other hand, if the results between surveys were identical (or nearly so), then one could assume the information that was being imparted was sound and stable. In other words, consistency across the four surveys would either make or break the validity of the methodology.

Importantly, there was also an internal check on the researcher—the sheer randomness of the process itself. Postcards were sampled as they emerged onto eBay, sometimes new ones literally every minute. Yet looking at a postcard online, it was impossible to guess what information might be discovered about the recipient: would they be young or old? a farmer or a banker? born in the US or overseas? And with such large survey sizes, it would have been nearly impossible to “game” the process in order to secure desired results. Obviously the ethics and the integrity of the researcher were more than enough to ensure this, but the methodology’s impartiality and cold calculation of numbers also lends a sense of solidity to the data.

If the quantitative methods used here evoke qualms akin to Carl Bridenbaugh’s evisceration of those who “worship at the shrine of that Bitch-goddess QUANTIFICATION,” steps have been taken to not over-reach in the analysis.\textsuperscript{25} The data

\textsuperscript{24} As noted earlier Rosenzweig and Thalen found 800+ to be an acceptable representative number for a national survey.

\textsuperscript{25} As quoted in Peter Novick, \textit{That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession}, Ideas in Context (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 384
used here is confined to a single consistent period, and does not try to draw comparisons between very different periods of time, a criticism often leveled at quantitative historians’ attempts at *Annales*-esque interpretations. Nor is there any suggestion here that the census records consulted are infallible; however, by calculating statistics—primarily percentages—for our postcard survey using the 1910 census, and then comparing those results back to the 1910 census’ own calculated percentages (one of their favorite statistical devices), we at least keep our apples comparable to apples and our oranges comparable to oranges. Whatever flaws exist in the census data, they are consistent for the sake of accurate quantification and analysis.26

The Results

In Figure 6, the postmarks (when they were present) found on postcards were mapped across the scope of the survey, from the earliest card from 1903 to 1919.27 In every sample the increase in popularity occurred between 1907 and 1909/1910, and then steadily decreased for the whole of the 1910s.

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26 All the raw data used to calculate and construct the figures and graphs in the next section can be found in the Appendix.
27 The cut off of 1919 has already been explained. At the other end of the graph, a very small smattering of postcards can be found prior to 1903, but they are too rare to be statistically significant, and none were found while conducting the survey that fulfilled the selection criteria as outlined.
This is important for two reasons. First, it verifies the centrality of the 1910 census results to this analysis. When looking at the collective sampling of 2,000 as representative of the country, this data reaffirms the 1910 census as the point of comparison. Second, it provides core information for the contextualization of the postcard fad. By knowing the years that the fad grew and declined in popularity, we can look to the external factors that might have influenced that growth and decline, a topic taken up in detail in Chapter Two.

28 The five lines seen here are used in several of the next figures. They represent the four surveys, each of 500 samples, as well as the sum total of all 2,000 samples. They have been color-coded and shape-assigned consistently within each chart. The “All” line in turquoise blue and squares is additionally used in charts that compare results with census statistics, which are consistently set off in red and diamonds.
Figure 7: Population

Figure 7 offers another model of consistency. Across all four surveys, the great majority of postcard recipients were living in rural or small-town communities (populations of less than 10,000). The changes across the samples are minimal. They range from 67 to 69%, with the total for the entire survey of 2,000 at 69% of recipients. And here is the first opportunity to compare this with a census-derived version of the same information for 1910.
At most points, the collection of postcards clearly tracks with the national population dispersion, suggesting that the postcard survey is indeed representative of the nation as a whole; however, there are two points on the graph where differences emerge. First, postcard use notably favored small town America more than the 1910 dispersion of population would suggest. In both categories of towns 2,500-5,000 and 5,000-10,000, the number of postcard recipients was nearly double the national population—9% versus 5% in each case. Added to the rural population (which is slightly below national numbers at 51% versus 54%), the 69% of postcard recipients living in rural and small town America compares to 64% nationally. As if to underscore the point, the second place of divergence

Figure 8: Postcards Survey vs. 1910 Census, Population
between the two graph lines is at the cities of 1 million + populations. Whereas census data shows 9% of 1910 America lived in cities of this size, each 500-card survey only rose to 3%.

Because rural audiences are so important to this project, it is worth pausing here to think about this collective audience at the sparsely-populated end of the spectrum. Folding together both rural inhabitants (living in population centers with less than 2,500) and small town inhabitants (populations of 2,500-10,000) accounts for nearly 70% of the survey’s audience. Looking at this statistic, a claim that the postcard phenomenon was a rural, small town phenomenon begins to take shape. But do these people socially and culturally belong together under a larger rubric, such as “rural Americans”? Some may argue this takes liberties with the term “rural.” Certainly someone living in a community of 10,000 does not experience life exactly the same as an isolated farmer. However, there are several reasons to consider this group collectively.

Statistically and bureaucratically, they were often combined. Postal service regulations, for example, changed for communities above the 10,000 mark, which is why most of the postcards from these groups do not have street addresses. While the Census Bureau set the 1910 demarcation line between rural and urban at 2,500, their reports on the centers designated as the “cities” of each state begins with populations of 10,000. Communities of 2,500-10,000 are discussed as “places.”

Moreover, many still held that the Bureau’s older demarcation of 8,000 remained a viable division between rural and not, as when David Kinley wrote in 1909: “For

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census purposes, the line has usually been drawn so as to class as urban all places of 8,000 inhabitants or more…Obviously, however, there are places of less than 8,000 people that have all the characteristics of cities. Moreover, a small city may contain a considerable proportion of rural population.”

Working from Kinley’s definition of an 8,000 cutline, this should divide the 5,000-10,000 bracket of the survey into a roughly 60/30 split. Within the survey results, however, 65% of this population grouping lived in communities of 5,000-8,000, again hinting at slightly disproportionate leanings towards the rural. And as Kinley suggests, many of these communities (and the people within them) could appear more rural than urban to outside observers. From the 9% of the overall survey who lived in communities of 2,500-5,000, 22% of them worked in households dedicated to agricultural occupations. Among the 5,000-10,000 group it was 15% in agriculturally-based occupations. Even today, Department of Agriculture programs such as those under the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act, define their jurisdiction as communities of 10,000 or less.

Future discussion about the nature of the phenomenon draws on these statistics; however, as we shall see, it was not simply bureaucratic designations that combined these groups, but similar demographic experiences and a psychic alignment around the meaning of the country life.

In the interest of full disclosure, there was a concern early on that the methodology selected for this project might disfavor the larger urban areas, affecting the

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31 “Amending the Water and Waste Program Regulations: Federal Register Extracts” (Department of Agriculture, January 6, 2009).
results we see at the other end of the chart. By requiring a unique census record, it was possible that postcards mailed to larger cities might be disproportionately disqualified. The larger the city, the more chances you have of people sharing the same name, and unless a street match could be made when more than one name emerged, it would be impossible to authenticate which recipient matched census records.

When conducting the survey, however, this proved to be an unnecessary concern. First, knowing this was a possibility simply required a little more time and patience to go through multiple “John Crawford”s living in Manhattan until the right one was found. Second, the fact remained that in terms of the overall population of postcards being looked at (regardless of whether they made it into the database or not), one never really encountered more than about 2-3% of postcards going to New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn—the four urban areas of that 1 million+ size. And third, it turned out that in non-urban situations, when a record had to be adjusted to the county level because there was no street or town to verify the exact match, a name like “John Crawford” proved equally problematic in the rural areas as it did in the major urban ones.

It should also be pointed out that this is not a suggestion that cards to Philadelphia and Chicago are particularly difficult to find. Someone reading this right now might have ready access to several, especially if they have familial roots in a city. Rather, the important words here are “proportion” and “national”—in a national survey, what proportion of the population comes from these major urban areas? With an estimated 2.3 million postcards sold every day in the U.S. in 1910, many of those were certainly going
to the biggest cities; however, if this was not proportionally the case, then what might be the reasons behind this statistic?\textsuperscript{32}

The next data point is so striking and lopsided it cannot meaningfully be graphed. Out of 2,000 postcards only 8 were mailed to recipients who were African-Americans or of mixed race background—“mulatto” in census parlance. Each survey of 500 had just one to three postcards that matched up to a census record. Perhaps it could be argued that African-Americans were undercounted and under-recorded in the census. Still, the census did record more than 10 million African-Americans in 1910, making up nearly 11% of the national population.\textsuperscript{33} It is difficult to understand how, if postcards were being mailed to African-Americans in large numbers, a survey of 2,000 would miss so many. Therefore, assuming this data is sound, we have another facet to the portrait of the individual participating in the fad—not only predominately rural and small town, but predominately (almost exclusively) white.\textsuperscript{34} And then add to that portrait predominately women and children as well.

Figure 9 shows the dispersion of ages among postcard recipients. As can be seen, in each survey, the people most likely to receive a postcard were between the ages of six and 14. A very consistent and striking pattern emerges in Figure 10 which shows the breakdown of recipients by their sex and also folds together women and children by taking all females—adult and child-aged—and male children (ages 0-14). In each 500-card survey the percentage of recipients who were women and children is 85-87%, with

\textsuperscript{32} Statistic from Frederic Haskin, “Post Cards,” The Washington Post, June 22, 1910, 5
\textsuperscript{33} Department of Commerce, "Report on Population" Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, 125.
\textsuperscript{34} No other racial category appeared in any postcards including Chinese, Japanese, and Indian.
the total survey at 86%. Figures 11 and 12 show just how different these demographics were compared to the country as a whole.

![Figure 9: Ages](image)

![Figure 10: Gender](image)
Occupations were also examined, and tracked across the four surveys. There is less information to glean from this section than others, except for the reinforcement of two key points. First, the data across the four surveys is again very consistent (Figure
the kind of consistency one looks for when trying to establish the validity and
stability of a method and its results. Secondly, the data tracks almost identically to the
nation as a whole, as enumerated by the 1910 census (figure 14). This reinforces the
survey of postcards as representative of a national audience.

There are only three occupational groups in the postcard survey that deviate
significantly from the national baseline established by the census: trade, professional, and
domestic; however, each of these deviations is consistent with what we have already
learned about postcard audiences. Trade included shopkeepers and merchants,
occupations that were part of consumer culture. Those whose livelihood depended on the
burgeoning consumer economy could be seen as more inclined to use a popular
expression of that same economy. Professionals included teachers—an occupation that
came in constant contact with the group of we know received the most postcards:
children between the ages of six and 14. Domestic is the most interesting because it is so
under-represented among postcard recipients. However, if we remember how under-
represented large cities were—places where servants (the largest group of employees in
this sector) would be concentrated—then this disparity makes more sense, and
consistently reinforces the non-urban nature of the fad.
Figure 13: Occupations

Figure 14: Postcards Survey vs. 1910 Census, Occupations
The next category of analysis concerns the birthplace of the recipients, as well as the birthplace of their parents. This might seem a somewhat superfluous topic, especially when one considers that many recipients were children. Is it really all that important to know not only where the child was born, but also where his parents and grandparents were born—all of which can be gleaned from a single census entry and all of which was recorded in the database? As is certainly well-documented, concerns about nativity and parentage, immigration and nativism consumed early twentieth century America. The examination makes sense in the context of the period, but also reveals another surprise about who was actually participating in the exchange of holiday postcards.

Focusing on the two adult units of a household—the head and the spouse—the following figures (15 through 18) again show the dual consistency of data: each survey nearly matched the others, suggesting solid information and process, while the totals tracked almost identically to the national data, suggesting the samples are representative.

It is worth noting that data on nativity and parentage was parsed for whites only. As the census report suggests: “It should be borne in mind that, while the increase in the number of Negroes and Indians, whose numbers are only slightly affected by immigration or emigration, is essentially a natural growth by excess of births over deaths, this is not true of any one of the white nativity and parentage classes.” With African-Americans and mixed race individuals making up only 0.04% of the postcard survey, this distinction does not affect these comparisons. Also, because only women would be labeled as “spouse” on a census enumerator’s sheet, it was more accurate and useful to

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35 Ibid., 127.
compare SOH records to the national census data for white women, rather than the white population as a whole (as is necessary for HOH comparisons).

Figure 15: HOH Nativity and Parentage
Figure 16: Postcards Survey vs. 1910 Census, HOH Nativity and Parentage

Figure 17: SOH Nativity and Parentage
Examining whether these adults were born in foreign countries, or were of “foreign stock” or “mixed stock” (census terms for those whose parents, either both or one, were born overseas) is only illuminating to a point. As already seen, the data for this question is fairly consistent with the United States as a whole. Where the question gets more interesting is which foreign countries are we talking about? It turns out that the nativity or parentage of the 2,000 postcard sample recipients only reaches back to a
handful of countries—24 in all. There were significant differences between the four surveys. Unlike every other topic discussed thus far, this parsing did not remain consistent with each grouping, with percentages sometimes shifting significantly between surveys. Sample size was the issue here. With only a third of each group of 500 having a foreign country connection, dividing approximately 160 samples among approximately two dozen possible countries allows each record to over-determine the percentage change within the survey. Counts relatively close numerically could be altered significantly as a proportion of these tiny samples.

However, if we look at the complete survey of 2,000 and compare that with census records, an important trend emerges (Figures 19 and 20). In the United States in 1910, the overall foreign-born population who immigrated from the Southern and Eastern European countries in our sample (Russia, Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Poland) was one-third or 33%. Within the postcard sample it was 4%. On the other hand, foreign-born Germans made up about 19% of the total population of foreign-born people in the US; in the sample it was 34%. Although less pronounced, similar patterns exist for several other countries—England, Canada, Sweden, Norway, and Scotland. Results for foreign and mixed stock are largely the same, with the difference among those with German heritage even more pronounced. Holiday postcard use was favored by a particular constellation of ethnic stocks that hailed from Northern and Western Europe, and was disproportionately absent among the period’s “new immigrants” of Southern and Eastern Europe.

36 Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Canada (French), Cuba, Denmark, England and Wales, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Russia, Scotland, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, West Indies.
Figure 19: Postcards Survey vs. 1910 Census, HOH Nativity and Parentage Countries of Origin
(*Denmark, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, Luxembourg, French Canada; ** Russia, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland; *** Mexico, Cuba, South Africa, Australia)
Figure 20: Postcards Survey vs. 1910 Census, SOH Nativity and Parentage Countries of Origin

(*Denmark, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, Luxembourg, French Canada; ** Russia, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland; *** Mexico, Cuba, South Africa, Australia)
The database of 2,000 has one more surprise left. One might expect in a national phenomenon like the postcard fad for the distribution of postcards among the 46 states, two territories (Arizona and New Mexico achieved statehood in 1912) and the District of Columbia to more or less mirror the population of the country. Certainly some states would have fewer cards in a sample because of their sparse populations (western states).

Figure 21: Distribution of Postcard Survey by state relative to national distribution of population, 1910
like Montana or Wyoming for example), but the two would generally be synchronized. This map reveals the reality. (Figure 21) Consider the map as a “heat map”—the “hotter” the postcard fad based on sample results, the “warmer” the color (yellow and red) and “cooler” response is represented in cyan and dark blue. A baseline is set off in green. This is not just a representation of how many postcards from each state appear in the overall survey; instead, this map illustrates the percentage of the postcard sample by state relative to the percentage of the overall population of the country.

To illustrate: Georgia in 1910 represented about 3% of the overall population of the country, but in the postcard sample of 2,000, it was represented by just 5 postcards or .25%. Instead of being 100% proportional, the results are only 8% of what they should be. Maine, on the other hand, represented about .8% of the country’s population in 1910, but was 3.3% of the sample, more than four times (400%) what is proportional. Once one realizes what is being represented in the map, the information becomes quite exciting. At least as represented by holiday postcards, the postcard fad was not a national phenomenon at all, but largely bypassed all the Southern and Southwestern states, save the Far West in California, Oregon and Washington. Instead it was a phenomenon of the Industrial North, with growing popularity the closer one came to New England.37

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37 Again, it is important to emphasize this is not a suggestion that postcards from Southern states do not exist. They do, and perhaps in some collections or homes in great numbers. But across the totality of a national collection, they represent only a small fraction, and much smaller than they should proportionally.
Conclusion

Although using an online auction website to gain valuable historical data might appear unorthodox, the results of the process speak volumes about the possibilities. Through careful observation, recording, and tabulation of individual samples, a story begins to emerge about the audiences of holiday postcards and the participants in an extraordinary display of American visual culture. While vital to the success of our ultimate goal of image analysis, it is reasonable to question whether these results are indicative of anything else—particularly the larger postcard phenomenon itself. And like every scientific methodology, there are external factors that can impact the results, such as if rural households were more likely to hold onto their postcards because of space issues; or were Southern collections more likely to disappear to the ravages of heat and humidity.38

Thus, no matter how exciting the possibilities of unorthodox research might seem, this is really just a starting point, and should not (could not) replace the core historical research that must come next. However, by pairing the unorthodox with the traditional, the opportunity emerges to begin defining what the postcard phenomenon was all about. With the demographic information provided by the survey, the next step in the process is to go back and reexamine, reconsider, and rewrite the history of the postcard craze.

38 I wish to thank participants on the online forum postcardcollector.org for raising these possibilities in our discussions of my research.
As noted in the introduction, holidays postcards were selected as an entry point into the larger postcard phenomenon for very specific reasons—scope, reach, and cultural accessibility among them. There were six major conclusions drawn from the survey of holiday postcards. Like a treasure map from a dime novel, these can serve as a series of “X’s” that might mark the spot to begin digging into a larger history of the postcard phenomenon. As we shall see, these signposts prove to be remarkably precise guides for reconceptualizing the craze.

The six core conclusions of the survey taken together thus form an entirely new framework for the history of the phenomenon: the years 1907 and 1909/10 which bookend the fad; the more than two-third majority of audience who came from rural and small town communities; the particularities of race, especially whiteness; the vast majority of women and children within the audience; the constellation of recipients who were from native, Anglo-Saxon, and Teutonic backgrounds; and the prevalence of Northern and Midwest use, versus tepid to non-existent use in the South and Mountain West.

In order to fully explore our new framework, this chapter will look at each survey finding individually. First, the findings will be examined in the context of the current
historiography of postcards. Exploration of the literature and scholarship surrounding the postcard phenomenon will not only help to verify the findings of the survey, but will also reveal the parts of the historiography that have gone unchallenged or unexplored.

After a review of the literature specific to a survey result, each of the six findings can then be examined against a wealth of primary source materials, many of which have gone untapped.¹ Point-by-point, across all six of the survey findings, new research can correct or add to the existing historiography. Although each section shoulders its own task in clarifying and reaffirming a particular survey result (and adding to or amending a particular historiography), they share a common purpose of providing a more complete and rounded picture of the postcard fad. It is a narrative that has gone largely untold, in part because it places at the center an often forgotten figure—the actual viewer. In this new telling of the history of the postcard phenomenon, the survey results invite us to explore and emphasize the agency of audiences, purchasers, and senders of postcards. In accomplishing this overarching goal, the six sections also reaffirm the importance of postcard imagery and the linkage between audiences and the images they chose from the marketplace.

Perhaps most importantly, this research will verify all six conclusions of the 2,000-card survey. The 1907-1910 phenomenon was driven primarily by rural, white

¹ Whenever possible, I’ve tried to draw upon source materials that specify the types of postcards being discussed, even as I continue to focus on holiday greeting cards as a primary driver of the fad. However, such distinctions were not always made in the contemporary literature of trade publications, congressional hearings, and official reports. Nor did I wish to exclude valuable information about the overall fad simply because the topic under discussion came from another genre such as tourist view cards, or was discussed in broad, generic terms, as if all postcards were the same. Therefore, I’ve tried to make it as clear as possible the context and types of cards being discussed, even as I draw from sources that span the postcard spectrum.
women of Anglo-Saxon or German backgrounds from the northern half of the country. It would seem X truly does mark the spot.

Chronology

![Figure 22: Date of Postmarks](image)

The first finding from the survey shows holiday postcard use enjoying a significant surge in 1907, and then quickly peaking by 1909 or 1910, whereupon it began a steady march back into obscurity by 1920.

That the years 1907 and 1909 emerge in stark relief from the other dates around them may not surprise those familiar with the overall postcard fad. Both years are linked
to specific events that have long been known to the historians who have chronicled the postcard phenomenon. The huge spike in holiday postcards’ popularity in 1907 is indelibly tied to a new postal regulation that went into effect on March 1, 1907. The new rule allowed senders to write their message on the back of a postcard, along with the address of the recipient. Similarly, the Payne Aldrich Tariff of 1909 has traditionally been viewed as the major catalyst for the decline of the phenomenon, and as a cause for change within the industry of postcards. The Payne-Aldrich Act significantly increased the existing tariffs on imported postcards, the majority of which were printed overseas in Germany.

To the extent that the 1907 regulations have been discussed in the postcard literature, it is often from the standpoint of modern-day collector priorities. The rule ushered in what collectors have dubbed both the “divided back” era and the “golden age of postcards.” Writes one author of the new regulations, “This meant that the image could now take up the entire front side of the postcard. The address had to be written on the right side of the back of the postcard while the left side was reserved for writing messages. Postcards from this period are most collectible when they do not have writing on their fronts.”2 The emphasis of this history remains with the present-day collector, rather than the historical audience.

A similar de-emphasis of audience has also taken place in the historiography of the Payne-Aldrich tariff’s affect on postcards. Two scholars in particular have looked at the effect of this new tariff, each coming to different but complimentary conclusions. One

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of the primary works in the postcard history genre is Dorothy Ryan’s important 1976

*Picture Postcards in the United States 1893-1918.* Ryan suggests the passage of the tariff
set off a sort of domino effect:

Jobbers [intermediaries between manufacturers and retailers] and importers, however, anticipating the tariff, made a concerted effort to stockpile German cards. Every link in the chain was overloaded: importers overloaded jobbers, jobbers overstocked retailers…Most retailers were faced with a year’s supply of cards. In an effort to move stock, price-cutting began: cards which sold two for five cents became three for five, then a cent each, six for five cents, and even ten for five cents. Without fresh stock, dealers began to lose interest and turn to more profitable lines.3

Ryan’s analysis is an almost verbatim recitation of Orville Walden’s 1950 column “Reminiscences of an Old Timer,” found in his *Post Card Enthusiast* newsletter, and the same narrative can be found repeated in other postcard-related books and essays, such as Bonnie Wilson’s *Minnesota in the Mail*, and Fred Bassett’s “The Golden Age of Postcards.”4 In other words, this interpretation has gone largely unchallenged for more than half-a-century.

Barry Shank, whose *A Token of My Affection: Greeting Cards and the American Business Culture* is one of the few recent histories addressing the postcard industry (and even then it is limited to a few pages of his book), writes that “with this limit on imported cards, many new firms quickly entered the domestic market. Companies in Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska, Missouri and other midwestern states joined the publishers based in

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Philadelphia, New York and Boston to produce souvenir and holiday post cards.”5 While this analysis is somewhat of a diversion for Shank (he even titles this portion of his book “The Post Card Interruption”), it does lead him to one of his major conclusions, namely “…the intense competition that characterized business operations during the post card craze created sufficient anxieties among the early greeting card producers that they formed a national association to stabilize prices and coordinate a national market while maintaining intense competition.” Shank argues that the rough-and-tumble world of postcard manufacturers so alienated a new class of greeting card manufacturers that they “enacted a powerful theory of friendship in business culture.”6

These two works paired together tell a story very much rooted in the business of the fad: a pre-tariff glut, followed by a rush of small American producers engaged in fierce competition, flooded the marketplace. Retailers became uninterested in carrying postcards that were dropping in profitability due to price wars, resulting in a decline in postcard use and the end of the fad.

The actual participants who bought and sent holiday postcards have remained largely absent from the historiography of these two key events. As such, the possibility of seeing the phenomenon from the “bottom up” has gone unfulfilled. Instead, the focus has been placed on modern-day collectors or historical jobbers and businessman. A corrective to this historiography needs to begin by placing the emphasis on understanding why people might have bought (or ceased buying) postcards. By understanding their motivations, desires, and needs, new perspectives on these two chronologically important

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5 Shank, A Token of My Affection, 129.
6 Ibid., 9; 134.
events can emerge. This new focus on the events of 1907 and 1909 not only helps to bring postcard-buying audiences to the fore, but will also demonstrate the importance of postcard images to the overall history.

Prior to 1907, only the address could appear on the back and still be sent for one cent. Senders could either pay an extra cent, or write their message on the front the postcard, usually marring the postcards’ image in the process. “Go ahead and write any message you please on the left half of the address side of the card, and have no fear that you will fall into the clutches of the law,” The New York Tribune announced to its readers the day after the new rule went into effect.  

While the rule was implemented in March, 1907, the announcement that it was imminent emerged in October, 1906 following the May, 1906 Universal Postal Convention in Rome. Postmaster General George Cortelyou attended the conference, a gathering held every six years by the members of the Universal Postal Union (UPU). The fact that postcards had become a large enough worldwide phenomenon to necessitate UPU coordination was not lost on the Tribune:

The United States as a rule is pretty well up with the times on almost everything connected with progress and civilization, but it has been just a

9 Sixth Congress of the Universal Postal Convention, “XVI Cartes Postales/XVI Post Cards,” in Union Postale Universelle/Universal Postal Convention (Rome, 1906). The treaty, of course, was written from the perspective of postal representatives and employees, and refers to the newly divided space as the front of the postcard, while allowing the sender to “dispose of the back and the left hand half of the face.” (pg 63) However, since we today consider the image to be the front and the divided back to be exactly that, I have chosen not to adopt this reversed terminology.
little backward now and then on postal affairs. The great ‘souvenir postal
card craze’ struck Europe and spread all over the Old World before this
country came to the realization of its time saving, money making and
instructive features. After a while the craze appeared here, and apparently
now as bad a case of souvenir-postal-carditis exists as it is possible for one
people to acquire. But the Postoffice Department did not keep up with the
procession of nations in the matter of facilitating the business.10

Indeed, the press in the United States (and presumably their readership) had been
monitoring the postcard phenomenon in Europe for some time. One author wrote in
September 1899 that “it will be known to the historian of nineteenth century fads as the
‘souvenir postal card craze.’”11 Regular reports from London, Vienna, and Berlin
suggested a growing fad. Initially tied to the concept of sending souvenirs to friends and
family, the German postal authorities calculated in 1901 that the daily average of
“pictorial mementoes of travel” had climbed to nearly 1.5 million per day.12 A post office
was established on the Eiffel Tower because “the souvenir post card craze has attained
such proportions that the office pays a handsome profit.”13

Precisely when fascination with the postcard made the leap across the Atlantic is
difficult to pinpoint, but what is clearer is that it originally emerged as an extension of the
fad in Europe, not as a homegrown phenomenon in its own right. While the
aforementioned 1899 article speculated that the fad had not yet extended to the United
States, a later 1901 piece suggested, “Even here in this country there are several large
collections, although mostly among foreigners.”14 Foreign travel also considerably

10 “The Postal Card Boom.”
contributed to the early years of the fad. “The albums for postal cards are conspicuous,” wrote one travel writer. “These have been brought into special prominence by the craze for souvenir postal cards, which has really grown to enormous proportions. One can even send souvenir postal cards from Jerusalem! If you have many friends addicted to the globe-trotting habit, these souvenir post cards gathered together in one of the albums specially devised to receive them make an intensely interesting collection.”\footnote{15} 

Postmaster Cortelyou weighed in on the foreign source of postcard interest in an interview shortly after the Rome UPU conference. When asked if most of the picture postcards in the United States mail system came from abroad he replied: “Yes, we have a large number in the foreign mails. Millions are sent to this country, having been mailed in foreign countries to friends and relatives at home. I have no means of knowing absolutely, but I believe that the quantity of picture post cards which comes into the United States from foreign countries is many times greater than the number of postal cards we use at home.”\footnote{16} In fact, the rule that Cortelyou issued on October 31, 1906 went into effect immediately for this foreign flow of postcards into the United States, while it was delayed until March 1, 1907 for the domestic user.

Here again it is easy to succumb to the assumption that postcards were solely markers of mobility and social rituals tied to travel. As these sources indicate, the genesis of the phenomenon certainly began in the realm of travel-oriented view cards and the contexts of social mobility. The origins of the fad within a larger global (though primarily European) phenomenon helped foster the travel side of the postcard craze more than the

\footnote{15}{“For Those Who Travel In the Heated Season,” *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1903, B7.}
\footnote{16}{“Mr. Cortelyou Knows His Job,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 4, 1906, SM3.}
holiday side, at least initially. Yet while media coverage of postcards and their popularity existed prior to the 1907 divided back, we see news and magazine articles about postcards also increase markedly in the wake of the new rules emerging from the Rome agreement. And in the divided back world, postcards became more diverse. Why might this have been the case?

Although Cortelyou’s directive emerged from an international conference and was directed towards the foreign influx of postcards coming into the United States, its consequence was to open the postcard fad far wider than it had been before, beyond groups with either foreign relations or globe-trotting friends. As the firm Gartner and Bender detailed to the House Ways and Means Committee near the end of the 1908 holiday season, “for the past two seasons we have attempted, in competition with European makers, to manufacture what is known as ‘season’s goods’—that is, Christmas, New Year, valentine and Easter souvenir post cards.”17 For the Chicago manufacturer to pick the two seasons of 1907 and 1908 to begin a holiday postcard line was not mere coincidence.

To understand why the rule change launched the holiday postcard into major circulation, it is useful to again consider the two elements that changed under the directive, and why they would be important to holiday postcard consumers specifically. Prior to 1907 the image on the front of a postcard either had to be designed to accommodate a message or was encroached upon by the sender’s writings. Either way,

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the image’s prominence was compromised—it had to share space with another element of
the card. (Figure 23)

Figure 23: The Undivided Back
The undivided back of a postcard required compromising the image in one way or
another. Either the front’s layout and design had to account for a sender, as this one
does; or the sender simply had to write his or her name over the image, thus marring the
picture. This problem was resolved with the new regulations that went into effect in
March 1907.

Author’s collection

After 1907, holiday imagery could stand alone and uncluttered, and this
emphasized their importance as texts—conveyors of meaning and messaging—in their
own right. In subsequent chapters, exactly how these texts can be read will be more
thoroughly examined, but for now it suffices to say that consumers placed enough
importance on holiday images that they forestalled buying them en-masse until those
images could remain unaltered and intact.

Secondarily, the postcard could finally be sent with personalized holiday
greetings (or any other message) written specifically for the recipient without relying
solely on the generic front greeting or salutation (Merry Christmas, Thanksgiving
Greetings, etc.). In reality, many senders did not bother to avail themselves of this option, thus reinforcing the primacy of the image; however, at least now they had the choice. If holidays are considered cultural moments of connection and reconnection between kin and communities, the opportunity to be able to include this personal message becomes more obvious. Without it, holiday postcards lacked a key ingredient that precluded their rise in popularity before 1907.

The implication of this argument is that users projected new priorities and functions onto the postcard—functions that did not exist or were inadequate prior to the rule change, and became manifest and hierarchically more important in the change’s aftermath. Bjarne Rogan has suggested that postcards functioned within four major categories of use: as an aesthetic piece; a souvenir; a collectible; and as a mode of communication. But as her article’s title suggests, these functions were entangled, with one bleeding into the other. As postcards accelerated in popularity after 1907, their more straightforward functions as souvenirs and collectibles became more complicated. Writes Rogan: “The picture postcard was predominantly a carrier of what has been termed ‘activity-oriented’ communication, the purpose of which is to confirm, mobilize, or strengthen social relationships.” This explains why producers like Gartner and Bender began adding greeting and holiday postcards after 1907. They recognized that the UPU rule had shifted the very definition of postcards for the audiences of their wares, and expanded the nature of the postcard phenomenon in ways that have been somewhat

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19 Ibid., 19.
forgotten today. Postcards received their divided back from an international directive derived from the top down, aimed at pleasing travel card audiences; however, it was new audiences that took advantage of the rule and propelled postcard use into the phenomenon we see in the spike of Figure 22 between 1907 and 1909.

Such a re-emphasis on audience also helps to reframe the events surrounding 1909 and the Payne-Aldrich Tariff. Again, the traditional narrative in the postcard historiography has been one that focuses on the business side of the postcard phenomenon. The impending tariff first triggered a glut of postcards dumped onto the marketplace, and then a stampede of competitive American producers who overwhelmed demand with supply. The distribution and retail chains stopped carrying postcards which were becoming less profitable due to prices being driven down by intense competition. In the opinion of authors like Shank and Ryan, this is what caused the end of the fad. It is an interesting synthesis, and not without merits, but closer examination reveals the need to adjust this historiography in two ways—one as a corrective to the record, and the other as a major revision of postcard history that reasserts the importance of postcard buyers and the consumer decisions they made.

The first is a re-examination of Shank’s assertion that “greeting card manufacturers understood the importance of association,” in a way that their postcard cohorts never did. Although perhaps not meant to be such a black-and-white dichotomy, Shank’s analysis does leave the reader with the impression that postcard manufacturers lacked the cooperative skills and motivations that the subsequent

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20 Shank, A Token of My Affection, 134
generation of greeting card manufacturers demonstrated. In fact, the Payne-Aldrich tariff did spur a level of cooperation and mutual support that challenges this assumption.

As early as July 1908 a Post Card Importers, Publishers and Manufacturers’ Association was incorporated in New York City. Cooperation and collaboration was seen again during a near month-long period between November and December 1908 when the debate over increasing tariffs on postcards took center stage in the House Ways and Means Committee. Representatives from the National Association of Employing Lithographers, as well as heads of several US-based postcard companies, spoke before the committee urging a higher tariff, while more than a dozen other groups and firms sent letters that were read into the record. 21

In March 1909 both postcard company owners and the unions affiliated with the trade came together to support an increase of duties on postcards coming from Germany. This, of course, was a time in American history when such cooperation between management and labor was far from a given. To the postcard industry, less-than-satisfactory tariff schedules were emerging from the House in spite of the month-long arguments in front of the committee. Louis E. Ettlinger, founder and treasurer of the American Lithographic Company in New York (and perhaps somewhat ironically, a German immigrant himself), gave voice to the need for higher tariffs and the underpinnings of cooperation needed to achieve it: “The increase of duty provided under the new tariff bill, it is said, is not enough to make much difference in foreign competition, especially in picture postcards, many millions of which are imported every

year. The unions in the trade have indorsed [sic] the agitation for higher duties.”

Another news report from the same day was quick to point out that, however, that “the cooperation of the unions with the employers in this matter is not one of union recognition.”

By April 1909 the postcard manufacturers and representatives of the Allied Trades’ Protective Association were meeting at the offices of Illustrated Postal Card and Novelty Company in New York City, with representation from New York, Chicago, and assorted other cities. According to news reports of the meeting, they “appointed a committee to present to Congress arguments for a higher duty on postcards than is provided for in the Payne tariff bill.” The account continued: “‘The value of importations’ they say ‘is from $40,000 to $50,000 a day and the home production represents an investment of many millions of capital and the employment of many, thousands of workman. A proper and reasonable duty upon these goods will without doubt materially increase the government’s revenue and will greatly stimulate the home production, thereby again adding to the government revenue through the increase of the sale of stamps.’”

Even President Taft was a target of this organized campaign. William A. Coakley, representing unionized lithographers, showed Taft “a series of picture post cards displaying a portrait of the President and views of the White House and other government

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buildings in Washington, all bearing the printed legend ‘Made in Germany.’ Coakley made sure to press the point home and “…asked the chief magistrate if he would not use his influence to have such a duty placed upon lithographed prints as would encourage the profitable manufacture in this country of millions of souvenir postal cards used in the United States.”25

While orchestrating a top-level lobbying effort, the postcard industry also managed to organize itself in the spring of 1909 to launch an additional old-fashioned grassroots effort. In June, the Washington Post reported that members of Congress were being “deluged with souvenir postal cards urging that the tariff on that article of commerce be increased materially in order that post cards ‘made in Germany’ may be kept out of the American markets.”26 The continued pressure worked. By mid-month the Senate would have the final say on what the new tariff rates would be. There was

… short debate over the committee amendment reclassifying the various kinds of lithograph papers, increasing the duty on cigar bands five cents a pound and decreasing the rates on cigar flaps and labels. By this plan picture postcards are taken from this paragraph and placed in a new one at a rate of 15 cents a pound and 25 percent ad valorem. This increase was made at the request of the lithographers and postcard manufacturers who said they are being forced out of business by importations from Germany.27

Senator Smoot of Utah, a state in which the survey suggests the postcard fad was paltry at best, proclaimed that the increase was necessary “on account of the intense

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German competition which was supplying the domestic market with postcards showing American views.”

Those with a stake in the postcard business thus demonstrated an excellent organizational knack and level of cooperation, and were even able to attract the attention as a western Senator with no real constituent stake in the debate. That level of cooperation continued after 1909, even as Payne-Aldrich opened the doors, in Shank’s words, to anyone with “as little capital as $100 and a shoe box.” Shank, of course, is right to argue that greeting card manufacturers wished to set themselves apart from postcard manufacturers, just as they sought to separate greeting cards from postcards in the marketplace. Still, it would be inaccurate to assume that the postcard interests lacked organization, cooperation, or even a level of “business friendship.” The 1908 Post Card Importers Publishers and Manufacturers’ Protective Association explicitly listed one of its objectives as: “to promote harmony of feeling between the members which will lead them to work together as a unit…” Upon closer examination, the post card industry managed to accomplish quite a bit in a collaborative fashion: corral together management and unions; fight on both executive and legislative fronts; and organize at the both the special interest and grassroots level.

Beyond this clarification, there is a still more significant revision to make to the Shank/Ryan synthesis—the narrative that emphasizes the business community’s role in the decline of postcard popularity. Turning attention to Ryan (and really much further to
Orville Walden’s 1950 column), it is also time for a major revision to the historical narrative of postcards’ demise; we need to debunk the notion that it was retailers that gave up on postcards because of their profit margins. Instead, let us turn to the words of a Midwestern postcard man who in 1911 offered a very different explanation: “…[U.S.] manufacturers apparently could not turn out as good a card as the German manufacturers…We got the increase in tariff at their behest, and the bankruptcy of hundreds of post card manufacturers and firms followed.”31 The story behind this quote is long, but worth telling in full because it reveals much about the true causes of postcards’ decline.

It is true that anyone reading the trade publications of the industry could be entirely convinced of the glut-and-price-war scenario as outlined by Ryan and Walden. As early as April 1908 American Stationer was lamenting that “some unscrupulous post card dealers have ordered cards by the million during the past season, only to declare that they were financially embarrassed and could not pay full price for the goods. The result has been these cards have been thrown on the market at low prices to compete with the higher priced cards.”32 In 1910 when an article in the same trade magazine suggested that the tariff had “stopped 500 presses in Germany and 500 presses have started here,” the news was not as rosy as it sounded. “A great many of these 500 presses that have started work here have been running on post cards, but, it seems, they have not been running

32 “Cut Rate Post Cards,” The American Stationer, April 4, 1908, 28.
profitably.” Predictably, the article went on to blame price wars brought on by crooked jobbers.33

But in those same pages of the trade publication and elsewhere there are hints, and then outright affirmations of other explanations. A “bottom-up,” consumer-driven explanation seems a much more likely candidate for the downfall of postcards, because Payne-Aldrich’s effects were broader than simply glutting the marketplace. Ryan herself offers a good place to start as she alludes to the underlying issues. She writes that in 1908 a survey of postcard firms in National Stationer found that many wanted the higher tariff because “the market is flooded with cards that are not American in style.”34

Prior to the tariff, industry insiders wrestled with this question of the “American style” as postcards soared in popularity. In January, 1908 American Stationer seemed convinced that “the time has passed when all kinds of cards designed by foreign artists, and not suitable at all for American trade, can be sold. The people now prefer on post cards the kind of sketches and pictures to which they are used to in the illustrated magazines and papers, made by American artists…”35 Postcard manufacturers—acutely aware of their audiences’ tastes and desires—were trying to find their path within this spike of postcard demand.

Still, the “American style” was intrinsically and perhaps inseparably tied to the German printing process. Reporting of the phenomenal success of a line of Julius Bien & Co. postcards the publication suggested, “The reason why they have been so successful is

33 “Does the Tariff Protect?,” The American Stationer, November 5, 1910, 28.
34 Ryan, Picture Postcards in the United States, 1893-1918, 27.
because they have sought to combine American subjects and American humor with the highest grade of lithographic work.”36 Julius Bien & Co.’s postcards were printed in Germany.

German postcards, as illustrated in the findings in the survey, were circulating among German immigrants and those of German stock more than any other ethnic group. In the survey, nearly a third of immigrants receiving postcards, and nearly half of those with immigrant parents were German. And while some postcards might have been of the “foreign style” and others of the “American style,” all the most popular cards, it seems, were produced in Germany before the tariff.

German production techniques and the quality of German goods generated wide discourses in the run-up to Payne-Aldrich. In weighing in on the debate over a German postcard tariff, one Germantown, PA constituent wrote to Congressman Payne to say, “I am a large purchaser of postal cards, but owing to the inferior quality in this country I am forced to order all my cards from Germany. If you can find any of the publishers who can furnish as good a product as the foreigners you will do me a favor by placing him in communication with me.”37 Other assessments prior to the tariff hearings were even more revealing. With a headline that read “German Postcards the Best” a reprinted article from the Ohio State Journal opened with this statement from a traveling postcard salesman: “We Americans are so stuck on our own ingenuity that we think we can do almost anything under the sun, but the fact is that we are just infants trying to imitate our papas.”

36 “Popular Post Cards,” The American Stationer, September 28, 1907, 8.
He went on to suggest that American producers were too hurried in their production processes, and lacked the tools, equipment or knack for producing quality postcards. “We do things too much on a hop, skip and jump.”38

The Chicago Daily Tribune offered a glimpse of the differences in March 1909 when agitation was mounting for higher tariffs: “…stores are displaying now highly colored and embossed postcards bearing Easter greeting, a fair example being a picture of B’rer Rabbit shooting Easter eggs out of a golden cannon across a vivid colored field to the acclamations of a brood of chicks, all the figures on which are raised above the general surface of the card. This is the class of work the dealers claim does not come into direct competition with the American made cards, as they are not produced here.”39

Contemporary accounts like this were able to draw a distinction between German-printed and American-printed postcards before the tariff hikes, but afterwards it became a bit more embarrassing, as the juxtaposition in this Boston Globe piece illustrates:

“Americans bestirred themselves and developed plants and processes that enable them to compete in quality and price with anything produced abroad. They captured most of the trade under the old conditions and when the Payne tariff law went into effect it so handicapped the foreign-made cards that the Yankees had a virtual monopoly ever since. However, it is apparent to the men on the inside that the illustrated postcard vogue is waning.”40 In spite of an obvious attempt at boosterism, the author could not skirt the

issue that once “the Yankees had a virtual monopoly” on the industry, demand went down.

“The holiday lines of illustrated postal cards of foreign and domestic manufacture are now on display in local salesrooms,” Dry Goods Economist reported, feeling the need to report on both types in the post-tariff era. The article then continued, “One point of particular interest in connection with postal cards is that the retail trade seem inclined to favor the better quality rather than the cheap cards.” The implication that the difference between quality and cheap cards was also the difference between “foreign and domestic manufacture” lay just below the surface of these comments.

Just one week later, American Stationer seemed equally hard-pressed to characterize the post-tariff problem without seeming anti-American: “If people want post cards, they will certainly insist on having the sorts which take their fancy, and it is the publisher who most correctly gauges public taste who gathers the laurels of success, not the speculative producers, who think that any kind of rubbish, so long as it is ‘cheap’ is bound to sell.” Clearly industry analysts were trying to figure out how to tactfully tell American producers that they needed to stop producing “rubbish” and start producing postcards that looked like those the Germans had printed.

Nowhere was this debate more frank than in the pages of another trade publication: The Novelty News. Neither Ryan’s Picture Postcards nor Shank’s A Token of My Affection list Novelty News in their bibliographies, which is unfortunate because the ink spilled in these pages between 1910 and 1913 tellingly illuminates the fall of

postcards from American popularity. There are, certainly, many traditional arguments about relentless price-cutting, unscrupulous jobbers, the generally shady practices of a few unnamed upstarts, and calls for even more cooperation and organization (a nod to Shank’s assertion).

However, more than other publications, the authors in Novelty News felt empowered to tie those problems to an overarching failing with American postcard production itself, reminiscent of the 1908 Ohio State Journal’s “German Postcards the Best.” H. G. Zimmerman had an opening salvo in February 1910 when he wrote that one of the problems facing postcards was “the public demand for quality cards, and the apparent unwillingness of most manufacturers to supply this demand.” He went on to note, “…demand suddenly ceased, and the low priced post card became a thing of the past as far as the consumer was concerned. Strange that the publisher, the American lithographer, did not recognize this—but the gap between the consumer and the publisher seemed too great for him to span…”43 Adolph Tuck, whose England-based firm Raphael Tuck and Sons Company was among those who advocated against the tariff, was quoted later that year as saying, “The boom in post cards is over, but the business of manufacturing fine cards is firmly established, and those dealers who have not spoiled their reputations by selling a lot of inferior trash will go on indefinitely making a very satisfactory profit from the sale of post cards.”44 Tuck was secure about how an astute and demanding postcard-buying audience would gauge the quality of his cards.

In spite of these early rumbles, it took until September 1911 for the most damning and pointed criticism to be leveled. It came from Ed Deuss, a postcard producer in Sheboygan, WI who wrote: “No one deplores more than I the turn things have taken. Years ago I aimed to get the best possible local-view post cards I could obtain from Stengel and Co., Dr. Treker and other well known firms in Germany to develop a taste for a higher standard. My efforts were frustrated by American manufacturers who turned out the cheapest local-view cards the market had ever seen. The colors were abominably bad. I would have been greatly offended had some one mailed me such a card from some other town.” Mr. Deuss then continued with the damning indictment quoted earlier, now presented in full: “As these manufacturers apparently could not turn out as good a card as the German manufacturers, they probably believed the protective tariff would assist them to overcome the obstacle. We got the increase in tariff at their behest, and the bankruptcy of hundreds of post card manufacturers and firms followed.”

In these passages and others, the industry grappled to assign blame to postcards’ decline in popularity. Obviously it was a difficult proposition to heap lackluster postcard use on peers and colleagues, much less the unpatriotic notion that Americans were inherently inferior to their European competitors. In fact, such a seemingly un-American critique may have stymied this line of inquiry for nearly a century. The failure of American firms to produce anything of quality was precisely the accusation that was

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given an explicit voice in *The Novelty News*, as well as implicit voice in numerous other publications, trade and otherwise.\(^{46}\)

Beyond the pointed commentary of the period and the results of the present-day survey, something else suggests that German-printed postcards were more popular than their American counterparts—the example of the Winsch Publishing Company. John Winsch was an American publisher with his headquarters in New York City. He began issuing his first copyrighted line *after* the Payne-Aldrich tariff rates went into effect; however, still had them printed in Germany. His high-quality cards sold for two for five cents, markedly higher than other lines that sometimes went as low as 10 for five cents.\(^{47}\)

So the fact that they sold, and sold well, flew in the face of dire predictions like the *New York Sun’s* suggestion that “German postcards will be prohibited practically from importation into the United States.”\(^{48}\)

While Orville Walden recalled that by January 1912 “the post card business was fast becoming smaller,” that same issue of his newsletter also noted that “the year 1912 turned out to be the peak of the Winch holiday postcards.”\(^{49}\) Winsch’s success lay in his adherence to the formula that had worked during the run-up in the fad from 1907-1909—the mixture of American artists (notably Samuel Schmucker, an artist on par with

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\(^{46}\) This topic has an interesting parallel within cinematic history. Miriam Hansen notes that in 1910 *The Moving Picture World* debated “What is an American Subject?” and advocated “American made pictures of American subjects.” Hansen offers that the resolution of this debate, as with postcards, also ultimately centered around the types, processes and production styles of American-produced films, as opposed to the content and subject matter. However, unlike the American products of Hansen’s analysis, American postcard production processes did not succeed nor were they considered superior. See Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006), 78-79.

\(^{47}\) Jack Davis and Dorothy Ryan, *Samuel L. Schmucker: The Discovery of His Lost Art* (Bozeman, Mont: Olde America Antiques, 2001), 37.

\(^{48}\) “The Duty on Coal Reduced,” *The Sun (New York, NY)*, June 14, 1909, 2.

Howard Chandler Christy and Charles Dana Gibson) combined with the continued German printing tradition that the prime audience of the postcard fad appreciated.

A list of postcard manufacturers who petitioned the House to keep the tariff at its current level included Raphael Tuck and Sons Co, International Art Publishing Company, Art Lithographic Publishing Company, and Wolf & Co—all firms that used American artists but printed their cards in Germany.\(^{50}\) As any postcard collector can tell you today, these firms together generated the most beautiful, the most popular, and the most collectible postcards of the fad. American postcard manufacturers tried to cast any preference for German-made postcards as either price-driven or a duping of the buying public. When asked during his House Ways and Means testimony if “there are any manufacturers or consumers in this country who buy the foreign article because it is made abroad,” National Association of Employing Lithographers representative George Meyercord shot back “Yes, sir. That is according to the ability of the salesman of the importer to convince him that it is better.”\(^{51}\) However, the evidence suggests otherwise, with the public exercising their preference by buying fewer postcards once they stopped being printed in Germany.

It is a theory also supported by one last source—the fact that the non-illustrated postal card of the Post Office Department did not see a decline in use after 1909. In fact, their use steadily increased or remained level nearly every year between 1904 and 1913,

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., 6148 (emphasis added)
the last year the Post Office Department reported the number sold.\textsuperscript{52} Here we see two types of cards, and two divergent paths. Imageless (or near imageless) postal cards remained fairly consistent in style and design after 1909, and thus also remained consistent in use. Postcards, by contrast underwent a major change after 1909 in how the images were produced, and thus had a corresponding decline in popularity as result of those changes. In other words, people liked the basic form and functionality that the postal card and postcard shared, but they liked their images even more—a feature unique to postcards. When that important feature was changed after 1909—not only changed, but changed for the worse—the public responded accordingly.

This does not \textit{just} provide a major corrective to the traditional narrative of postcards’ decline; it also hints at the vital importance of images. It likewise repositions the actual users of postcards as central to the narrative of postcards’ popularity and decline, a key “bottom-up” element of this entire project. In assuming postcards were signifiers of greater themes, messages, and ideologies to specific audiences, this retelling of the history reaffirms the importance of images and their quality of production. It also addresses the importance of audience in the choosing and evaluation of images and image quality—in fact, these historicized consumers are revealed to be connoisseurs. Finally, the corrective demonstrates how all these facets are intertwined on every level.

In an effort to introduce the New York State Library’s collection of postcards to the public, Senior Librarian of Manuscripts and Special Collections Fred Bassett wrote a

\textsuperscript{52} There is an anomalous dip in 1910 when the Post Office Department changed the paper used in postal cards, only to find they were insufficient for the job and often ended up destroyed in the mailing process. See \textit{Post Office Department Annual Reports}, “Report of the Postmaster-General; Third Assistant” Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1904-1913.
short essay entitled “The Golden Age of Postcards.” In it he became one of the few scholars in over fifty years to tentatively explore this argument. He wrote: “The most noticeable effect of the tariff was the gradual deterioration in aesthetic quality of the pictures and art work. American printers did not possess the advanced technology to match the high quality of German lithography…in general, the standards had clearly declined after the tariff, and as a result, people began to lose interest in postcards.”53 As noted earlier, Bassett’s essay goes on to unfortunately reaffirm the traditional argument about dealers losing interest; however, it is through this almost off-hand comment that Bassett comes closest to the truth. The decline after 1909 was due to an audience that abandoned the cheaper American offerings and the retailers who sold them, not the other way around.

In the survey, rural and small town communities of less than 10,000 people received postcards at rates higher than their corresponding national proportion in 1910. In the case of small towns, the number of postcard recipients was nearly double the national proportion.

Scholars looking at the phenomenon have occasionally suggested tentative connections between the rise of the Rural Free Delivery (RFD) and the rise of the postcard fad. “Rural Free Delivery was established in 1898,” write the authors of Real Photo Postcard Guide: The People’s Photography (although RFD was only an
experiment at this time, and did not become an official post office service until 1902), and

within a few years offered home mail delivery to population centers of fewer than ten thousand. At a time when the telephone was not yet an integral part of the American household, postcards provided both a visual and written link, whether from across town or across the nation…New postal regulations, innovations in mass printing processes, tourism and curiosity about distant places, convenience, a desire for inexpensive communications, marketing and promotion, status, and fashion all helped promote the sending and collecting of postcards.54

In 1994 Susan Brown Nicholson also suggested the RFD played an important part in the rise of the postcard fad in her Encyclopedia of Antique Postcards, as did Hal Morgan and Andreas Brown in their 1981 Prairie Fires and Paper Moons: The American Photographic Postcard, 1900-1920.55

These linkages between postcards and rural audiences are the extent of the historiography for this survey finding. This presents an opportunity to explore the importance of rural and small town audiences more fully using contemporary sources. Yet, even to those living in the midst of the phenomenon, the central importance of the rural audience might have come as a surprise, because so many saw postcards through the eyes of urban commercial success. Columnist Frederic Haskin suggested that the product was “…more at home in shops devoted solely to the sale of post cards. Every city has many of these post-card shops and they are daily increasing in number and popularity.”56

56 Haskin, “Post Cards,” 5.
Others though, using humor, noted a trend beginning: “It is not because the village postmaster cannot read all the picture postal cards which are passing through his hands that he is threatening to forward his resignation to Washington,” wrote one Providence, Rhode Island wag in 1905, “But it has come to pass that under the new order of things, the revolution wrought by the advent of the picture postal card, he has been transformed into a day laborer…For months he has been standing knee deep amid familiar surroundings—lake, mountain, farmhouse, and mill pond—in pronounced colors, stamping and expostulating and expostulating and stamping…”[57] These references to a “village postmaster” who recognized “familiar surroundings” in the lakes, farmhouses, and ponds depicted on postcards suggests that not everyone thought of cities as the central axis of postcard use.

And one person who would not have been surprised in the least about the disproportionate flow of postcards to the more sparsely populated part of the country was Fourth Assistant Postmaster General Peter V. De Graw, who oversaw the rural delivery system. Writing his annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1909 De Graw concluded that the rural free delivery routes had seen a 96% increase in the amount of mail handled, an increase due “especially to letters and postal cards, the latter due to the enormous use of souvenir and picture postcards.”[58]

De Graw had every motivation to see postcards succeed in rural America. The same year of De Graw’s report, the Post Office Department overall reported a deficit of

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around $17 million—a shortfall to which the RFD had significantly contributed. “The deficit is credited to the rural free delivery and the carrying of second class mail matter at ruinous rates,” reported The Independent, continuing, “but there is no sign of a reduction in the rural free delivery service, which is so greatly appreciated.”

But De Graw and others knew there was a significant difference between postcards and the second class mail of periodicals. Postcards, unlike the heavier magazines and newspapers that went second-class, meant profits for a struggling department under the microscope. Frederic Haskin walked his readers through the mathematics: “It requires an average of 120 post cards to weigh a pound, and thus the Postoffice Department receives $1.20 a pound for carrying post cards, as against an average of transportation of 9 or 10 cents a pound. The post card business is very profitable to the postoffice.”

Rural-bound postcards held out the promise of profits in other ways as well. Even as De Graw outlined the increasing flow of postcards into the rural delivery system, his supervisor, Postmaster George Meyer, was trying to turn that fact into more positive news for the overall, deficit-running Post Office Department. Testifying before a House Subcommittee, Meyer pointed out: “it seems that the rural delivery, while not strictly self-sustaining, does add largely to the receipts. In other words, the correspondence comes from the centers to the people in the rural deliveries, and that is credited to the

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60 Haskin, “Post Cards,” 5.
large post-offices.”

The topic came up again in a post office-specific appropriation hearing. First Assistant Postmaster General Granfield told his subcommittee that rural routes had much more incoming mail than outgoing, and that “a postmaster will handle four or five times as much mail with rural-delivery routes…”

Holidays became times when particular attention was paid to the flow of mail going into the RFD system. “The Christmas increase in the volume of mail is fully as great and in many instances greater, in the rural districts than in the city,” noted a 1909 Boston Globe article, which just a few paragraphs earlier had also pointed out, “Now that the Christmas sentiment is conveyed by the picture postcard the holiday avalanche of these souvenirs is most decidedly a force to be reckoned with. Millions upon millions of these cards are transmitted every December…” “Uncle Sam never before reaped as rich a harvest as the result of the post card fad during this Easter season,” reported an earlier piece on the flow of mail into and out from New York City. “Out of town trains have carried here 40 per cent more than the average amount of mail and have taken back even a larger percentage of increase.”

While all this suggests strong support of the survey results, was it possible that postcards were boosting incoming rural mail, but not outgoing? In other words, was the phenomenon actually city-based, radiating out as Postmaster Meyer described, from “the centers to the people in the rural deliveries”? De Graw’s 1909 report showed the exact

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opposite: Between 1905 and 1909 there was a 410% increase of postcards delivered to rural routes. But there was an 846% increase in the number of cards collected along those same routes—more than double the increase of delivered. Of the six categories of mail, it was the only one that showed a larger jump in collected than delivered.\footnote{1909 Report of the Postmaster-General; Fourth Assistant—Rural Delivery,” 352.} Meyer was right about the center-to-rural nature of the RFD—in every case except postcards.

De Graw’s office also developed statistics for a handful of individual states. New Hampshire’s rural routes had seen a 236% jump in postcards delivered through the RFD between 1905 and 1909. But postcards collected along those routes jumped 265%. Connecticut saw a 247% increase in deliveries, but a 307% increase in collections. Even Alabama, whose anemic use of postcards generated even wider percentage swings between 1905 and 1909, saw a jump of 875% in delivered versus 1,955% in collected.\footnote{“Connecticut” (Division of Rural Mail), Entry 184, Number 53, Box 51, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington DC; “New Hampshire” (Division of Rural Mail), Entry 184, Number 53, Box 51, NARA, Washington DC; “Letter to Honorable John L. Burnett,” May 27, 1910, (Division of Rural Mail), Entry 184, Number 53, Box 51, NARA, Washington DC.}

By April 1910, ten months after the fiscal year that De Graw credited postcards as raising the bulk of the RFD, the Fourth Assistant Postmaster was able to bask in the glow of good news. In a speech to a gathering of postmasters in Florida, De Graw announced:

The enormous cut in the so-called postal deficit during the last quarter of the year 1909, as shown by the report of the Auditor just issued, developed a most healthy surplus as well as breaking all records for the largest three months business in the history of the postal service. These results following the harsh and unfounded criticisms which have recently been hurled at the Post Office Department and its personnel by persons endeavoring to divert attention from certain facts in connection with the service and to create an impression that rural delivery is the principle source of expense to the
Department, are, to say the least, proof of the soundness of the old adage: ‘He who laughs last laughs best’ 67

Those referenced three months were the very same that the Boston Globe reported included “millions and millions” of Christmas postcards, not to mention Halloween and Thanksgiving. De Graw did not give credit to postcards for the turnaround. He (not surprisingly) preferred to point to the many cost-saving initiatives that he and his office had spearheaded. Still, the evidential links are there, both in the sources of the time and the survey results: The year postcards reached their zenith of popularity, the Post Office went from deficits to surpluses, all while contemporaries noted the huge flow of mail, and postcards in particular, into and out from rural America. If this conclusion was not fully appreciated during the fad itself, neither was it entirely news. “We have tried for a long time,” huffed one exasperated postcard dealer in Waterloo, IA “to drum it into the heads of the producers of post cards that a majority of the business is done in country towns…”68

This also helps build the chain of evidence backward towards the original decision of this project to focus on holiday postcards. The kinds of cards collected from the homes along these rural routes were likely not view cards from the souvenir side of the fad. If postcards were pushing the post office towards fiscal solvency, and rural postcard users handing off postcards to their RFD mailman were the agents of that

67 Address of Assistant Postmaster General DeGraw to Postmasters of Florida at Ocala, April 13, 1910. (Division of Rural Mail), Entry 184, Number 6, Box 1 NARA, Washington, DC, 2.
change, then it is the postcards most in keeping with their use patterns that seem most representative of the overall fad.

A final note about the importance of the rural audience can be found in the 1911 report from Fourth Assistant Postmaster’s office. In it, the trendlines of postcards delivered and collected between 1909 and 1911 flip positions.\textsuperscript{69} Whereas the 1909 report tracked five years of postcard increase, with percent of increase in rural postcard collection double that of delivery, 1911 can be used to demonstrate the extent of postcard decrease. Not coincidentally, this exactly corresponds with the beginning of the drop-off in the survey results. And this time, the rate of decrease was dropping faster for postcards collected along rural routes than postcards delivered.\textsuperscript{70} It seems that rural audience were again central to the trend as the number of postcards sent throughout the country began their precipitous decline.

**Race and Whiteness**

In the survey of 2,000 cards only eight were sent to people who were non-white. Race as a topic has figured prominently in the study of all the various categories of postcards (photographic view cards, comics, greeting cards, art cards, etc.). *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards* is a compelling collection of essays entirely devoted to the subject. Editors Christraud M. Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb introduce their selections by reminding the reader that “like other photographic formats (in


\textsuperscript{70} This difference is not huge—a 19% drop in collected versus 15% for delivered; however, it is notable for its consistency with all the other evidence gathered.
particular, *cartes de visite*, cabinet cards and stereographs), postcards construct, disseminate, and perpetuate stereotypical images of non-Western people...Many historical postcards became part of racist, sexist and colonial discourses.”71 Brook Baldwin suggests in a 1988 essay that “the sheer number, variety and graphic power of the images on racial cards attest to how firmly entrenched racism was in the popular arts of early twentieth century America.”72 Malek Alloula offers some of the harshest critique: “The postcard is everywhere, covering all the colonial space, immediately available to the tourist, the soldier, the colonist. It is at once their poetry and their glory captured for the ages; it is also their pseudo knowledge of the colony. It produces stereotypes in the manner of great seabirds producing guano. It is the fertilizer of the colonial vision.”73 Other essays and books offer similar conclusions, emphasizing that the ubiquity, public nature, and strong visual element of postcards all contributed to the shaping and reinforcement of racial perception and Otherness.

Also consistent in the literature is the assumption that all postcard genres dealing with race or ethnicity—be they artist-drawn, photograph, or a color lithograph view—were consumed by whites. This seems a fairly common-sense assumption, as the racialized, stereotypical depictions of postcards, particularly blacks, certainly would not have appealed to the people being depicted. Beyond this basic assumption, though, is there a way to verify the survey findings that blacks mostly sat out using holiday postcards (most of which were not racial), and perhaps the entire phenomenon itself? Or

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to ask the flip side of the question: Is there a way to confirm the survey’s suggestion that
the fad was a white audience-driven phenomenon? There is a strong, four-part
circumstantial case to support the hypotheses.

First, within the survey itself there is an interesting coincidence. The “heat map”
of postcard use from Chapter One (Figure 21) correlates inversely to the distribution of
African-Americans at the height of the fad. There is an almost one-to-one correlation
between states with the highest proportion of African-Americans in their population, and
the lowest incident of postcard use relative to that population. South Carolina and
Mississippi had the two lowest proportional representations of postcard use in the South,
and, according to the 1910 census, had the two highest percentages of African-Americans
within their populations. The number three position in both charts misses a match by only
a sliver: Alabama was #3 for lowest postcard use, but #4 for African-Americans as a
percentage of population, only slightly behind Louisiana.74

Second, holiday postcards did feature a small but visible sub-genre of racially
stereotyped cards. The most complete compendium of postcards featuring African-
American imagery is J. L. Mashburn’s *Black Postcard Price Guide*. The nearly 400-page
tome details hundreds of depictions of African-Americans across all genres and types of
postcards, and a survey of his results reveals black stereotyped postcards for all six of our
holidays, with the exception of Easter.75 Blacks may have chosen to ignore all holiday

74 Department of Commerce, *Report on Population* Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the
Year 1910, 135.
analysis of these images can be found in Chapter Six.
cards as a result of such stereotypes. These themes will be taken up in further detail in Chapter Six.

Third, it is important to remember that holiday postcards were part of a larger process of commercialization and commodification, aimed directly at white middle-class (and aspiring middle class) consumers. As Historian Leigh Eric Schmidt puts it, “commercial institutions helped lift up and standardize a set of national holiday symbols out of the welter of local, regional, and ethnic traditions.”76 Beyond images that simply placed a stereotyped black person into a white holiday role, African-Americans were consistently and consciously excluded from the “traditional” visual narratives that predominated holiday culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Instead, they were given a completely different and alternate script for how their holidays were supposed to be enacted.

A small case study of African-American depictions in Thanksgiving postcards is illustrative of this trend. As opposed to whites who purchased their turkeys at market or from butchers, blacks were shown as chasing, capturing, killing and plucking their own turkeys (or going without a turkey at all in favor of a chicken or worse.) The depiction of whites as active participants in the consumer marketplace reaffirmed their place in a mass-consumerist holiday tradition. The removal of blacks from this narrative simultaneously reinforced the presumed traits that made them unfit for the consumer marketplace altogether—a lack of manners and gentility; violence; and an inability to defer gratification. This particular alternate narrative that whites constructed about blacks

76 Schmidt, Consumer Rites, 13.
had a significant history stretching back long before the postcard fad took hold—a visual
cultural tradition that deployed distinctions between blacks and whites. In a series of
*Leslie’s Illustrated Weekly* Thanksgiving covers between 1898 and 1900, the magazine
showed blacks in rural settings, with a captured live or recently killed turkey or chicken.
Captions read “This Thanksgiving Dinner is Surely Safe,” (1898) “The Thanksgiving
Dinner Assured,” (1899) and “Thanksgivin’ Dinnah Fo’ Shuah” (1900).77

This distinction also provided fodder for much racist humor at the expense of
blacks. An 1882 cartoon in *Leslie’s* shows an African-American man scratching his chin
in consternation as he looks into an empty coop, an ax hanging unused in his hand. “Gret
Scott! Whar am de bird?” reads the caption as the turkey hides just on the other side of
the fence.78 That the turkey is smarter than the black man is one joke that rested on
society’s assumptions, but the comic’s humor was also dependent upon recognizing why
the black man was in the yard with an ax in the first place. Unfit for the experience of
purchasing a turkey for Thanksgiving, he must go find and kill one for himself.

Similar cartoons throughout the period offered variations on the theme, as was the
case with an 1887 *Harper’s Weekly* showing two black boys who have stolen a turkey
and replaced it with a facsimile made from a pumpkin, sticks and a carrot. As the black
patriarch approaches the “turkey” with his ax, he drops it in surprise and shouts to his
wife behind him “Didn’t I tole yer all ‘long you dun feed dat turkey too much veg’table
diet?”79 (See Figure 25) In all similar visual permutations, the joke was built on the

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77 “Cover,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Weekly*, November 29, 1898; November 25, 1899; November 24,
1900.
78 “Thanksgiving Day in Old Virginia,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, December 2, 1882, 238.
understanding that whites shopped from grocers and markets, while blacks fended for themselves for a Thanksgiving dinner.

Figure 25: Thanksgiving Morning in the “Johnsing Family”
Prior to the postcard phenomenon, contemporary visual culture reinforced dichotomous holiday traditions for blacks and whites. In depictions of Thanksgiving, for example, blacks were shown as having to secure the main course by hand and manual labor, such as heading out to the farmyard with an ax. Whites, by contrast, secured their turkeys (and they were always turkeys) through the marketplace and the butcher. Only nostalgically-imagined Pilgrims secured their Thanksgiving meals through hard work, i.e. hunting.


When postcards entered the popular consumer marketplace, they were simply another extrapolation of a similar and long-standing theme. A quartet of postcards is particularly illuminating. In the first, an African-American boy chases a chicken through a snowy farmyard, tripping and falling with only a handful of tail-feathers in his hand.
The caption reads “Lost by a Tail.” The image plays off a long tradition of casting blacks as chicken thieves; however, the linkage to the Thanksgiving holiday adds another layer to the intended meaning. Because the child pursues a chicken at Thanksgiving, rather than a turkey, the image further emphasizes that his attempted prize has a place within a tiered hierarchy of appropriate Thanksgiving consumption. His chicken—had he caught it—would have still been an inferior meal to a traditional turkey dinner.

The second and third cards show an African-American woman plucking a turkey of its feathers (a tremendous amount of labor), while a white woman is shown doing the same task only if she were first historicized as a mythic Puritan maiden. The African-American, on the other hand, is shown simply as a contemporary, poor black woman. The implication was clear—whites had evolved past their historic colonial roots, blacks had not; one plucked their own turkey in yesteryear, the other still does so today, thus displaying a presumed primitiveness.

Finally, “Thanksgiving Day in the South 1912” shows a white woman carrying a basket of purchased goods. There are boxes wrapped and tied with ribbon, a labeled and corked bottle, and assorted containers poking out from the edges. The turkey is already completely plucked and dressed. All these cues indicate a trip to the market, where products are packaged and sold to the consumer. In contrast, the African-Americans who surround her stand outside of the marketplace. A black child next to her holds a dead raccoon. Not only is the implication that the blacks will eat a poor substitute to the white woman’s turkey, but that they obtained it themselves. We are left to assume that their
dinner is inferior both because it is not a turkey AND because the raccoon was likely hunted (or scavenged in a particularly noxious reading of the visual text). (Figures 26-29)
Although turkeys were ubiquitous on Thanksgiving postcards, when blacks were featured, the bird often shifted to a chicken, a presumably inferior choice. Also, blacks had to chase or catch their Thanksgiving meal instead of shopping.

Figure 28: Black Woman Plucking a Turkey

Unlike a historicized figure of the Puritan white woman, this African-American woman is presented as ambiguously poor. She could be historic or contemporary. But as a poor black woman, she must undertake the labor of plucking a turkey that her white sisters have left behind. Whites instead were now shopping at markets where such work was already completed.

Figure 29: Thanksgiving Day in the South 1912

This image brings together multiple themes. The white woman is shown with her shopping basket, and her products are carefully packaged and wrapped by the store. The blacks on the other hand are not signified as market consumers. Instead, the child holds a raccoon, an obvious reference to an inferior and degraded Thanksgiving meal that the blacks will enjoy, as opposed to the white woman and her store-bought turkey.
The important point to remember here is that postcards did not just create an atmosphere of exclusion or difference for African-Americans through stereotype, as noted earlier. They also reinforced a consistent and constant message, spread across all cultural outposts of the day, that holiday traditions were a white entitlement exclusive of black participation. So if blacks did not participate in one of the largest consumer-driven expressions of holidays in the early twentieth century (i.e. the postcard fad), it was because they had long-since been told they stood outside and separate from that consumer-driven holiday experience.

The fourth link in this evidentiary chain stems from the launch of the NAACP anti-lynching campaign. It might surprise many that this noble and venerable campaign against racially-based crime (and lasting more than 40 years) originated with postcards, but that is precisely the case made in 1912 when the anti-lynching campaign was launched at the fourth annual convention of the NAACP.

During the Chicago conference, leaders announced: “Postal cards printed in Germany which reproduce in horrible detail lynchings in the South, are circulating in the United States. They are for sale in Southern towns, and are sent about as one sends a souvenir of a cathedral or a landscape...these pictures show the small regard in which America holds a Negro’s life”\(^80\) Like stereotyped imagery in holiday postcards, this other line of postcards may have been so revolting that it poisoned the entire African-American community against postcard use in general. But pulling the above statement apart a bit

\(^80\) “Post Cards Show Lynching,” *The Washington Post*, April 10, 1912, 3 and William L. Chenery, “Race to Profit by Annual Conference,” *The Chicago Defender*, April 13, 1912, 1. A copy of the actual speech and who gave it is not in the NAACP archives now housed at the Library of Congress; however, both papers produced the cited quote verbatim.
more, it can also be seen as evidence that African-Americans saw mass-produced postcards as a white institution of which they wanted no part. This suggestion is given credence by the fact that the above statement was almost assuredly wrong.

Certainly lynching postcards existed and were mailed. The powerful and disturbing collection of postcards in the 2000 book and exhibition *Without Sanctuary* leaves no doubt of that. However, the statement that such postcards were printed in Germany for sale in the United States is erroneous when placed against contemporary accounts of lynching postcards.

When Leander Shaw was lynched on July 29, 1908 in downtown Pensacola, it only took five days for the U.S. District Attorney to announce he would prosecute “all persons mailing photographs taken of Leander Shaw…”81 The *Washington Post* reported in 1906 that “a quantity of souvenir postal cards bearing the photograph of the Gillespie and Dillingham negroes lynched here last week have been mailed in the Salisbury [NC] post-office.”82 Another article’s timeline also shows the considerable speed with which postcards followed the event: “Postmaster Breathitt was officially informed,” reported the *Chicago Tribune* on August 18, 1908, “that post cards mailed out of Hopkinsville [KY] and other towns recently showing the four bodies of negroes lynched at Russellville Aug 1 should not have been allowed to pass through Uncle Sam’s hands.”83 The chronology is 17 days between the lynching and postcards in the mail.

81 “Can't Mail Photo of Lynched Negro,” *Washington Times*, August 2, 1908, 8.
In all these instances, there was no time for photographs to be shipped to
Germany, printed up as postcards, shipped back, and then to have worked their way
through the system of wholesalers and jobbers to retail outlets. And since the Payne-
Aldrich tariff severely curtailed the flow of postcards coming from Germany after 1909,
those described in 1912 by the NAACP were even less likely.

Also, it is unlikely postcard printing factories would have gone to the expense of
producing a plate to create such a postcard, when the audience for these cards was
relatively small. As the owner of a postcard company explained in 1909 to the House
Subcommittee: “There is an initial cost of from $300 to $500 for drawing and making the
original plate. If we print 1 card or 1,000,000 this initial cost of preparation is the same. If
we print a smaller quantity the proportion of cost is larger than if we print a large
quantity.” Howard Woody’s research into postcard history suggests that as early as
1907 German postcard printers would not produce a run of less than 3,000 postcards. Especially after August 1908 when the Post Office Department ruled that lynching
postcards could not be sent through the mail, the prospects of a profitable run for a
German printing house were small.

A far more likely scenario for postcard production is what survives in a few
contemporary accounts: “Hundreds of kodaks clicked all morning at the scene of the
lynching. People in automobiles and carriages came from miles around to view the corpse
dangling from the end of a rope…Picture card photographers installed a portable printing

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84 *Tariff Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means of the House of Representatives. Sixtieth
plant at the bridge and reaped a harvest in selling postcards showing a photograph of the lynched Negro.”

And this: “After the lynching of the Negro and his bullet-riddled body had been removed a local photographer took a photograph of the body and made a large number of photographs, which were sent through the mails as post cards by various parties.”

Rather than being printed in Germany, lynching postcards were printed locally and often on-the-spot through portable printing presses and by local photographers with printing equipment.

Still, blacks were not ignorant about postcards. When Katie Glass Brothers visited Montgomery, AL she brought with her postcards given to her by the editor of the black weekly newspaper *Chicago Defender*—postcards that were “photographed by the colored artist, Mr. Jones, of some of the colored enterprises.”

Others relied on real photo postcards where they could control the imagery. “The post-card picture gallery did a thriving business yesterday,” wrote the *Charlotte Daily Observer* in 1906. “Many of the negroes who were in the city for circus went around to the tent on North Tryon street in front of Little-Long’s and had their picture taken…the films were developed and pasted upon post cards, and created much merriment when delivered.”

In fact, the NAACP itself created postcards for distribution as part of their anti-lynching campaign. In 1912, the same year of the speech’s claim, the organization created a postcard with a grisly

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87 “Can't Mail Photo of Lynched Negro,” 8.
front image in what historian Leigh Renee Raiford has described as “one of their first propaganda efforts to foreground lynching images.”

So how should we read the words of the speech? In spite of experiences with postcards, the assertion of German printing could have been an honest mistake. However, it seems more likely that the words of the speech were purposefully chosen to make lynching postcards seem more part of the mainstream business of postcards than was necessarily accurate. In this scenario it was a conscious and deliberate attempt by NAACP leaders to link lynching postcards with the wider cultural craze in order to advance their cause.

Beyond this, the speech also reveals certain assumptions about white postcard use. Present-day scholars looking at lynching postcards have suggested that they were used by Southern whites in particular to legitimize and ritualize violence against blacks.\textsuperscript{91} The images produced solidarities between specific networks of whites eager to reaffirm their own status and cultural constructs—a pattern of use strikingly similar to what will be described of holiday postcards in the next chapter. NAACP leaders understood this function of postcards, and so also worked to link lynching postcards with the uniquely white institution of the mass postcard industry. White people produced and sent lynching postcards, and they produced and sent mass-generated greeting postcards cards from Germany. Conflating the two in the NAACP speech reinforced what may have been

\textsuperscript{90} Leigh Renee Raiford, "Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare": History, Memory, and the Photography of Twentieth Century African American Social Movements. (Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 2003), 95
\textsuperscript{91} See Amy Louise Wood, Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Allen, Without Sanctuary
taken as common knowledge at the time—postcard use was disproportionately a white persons’ fad.

**Women and Children**

![Graph showing gender and age distribution of postcards compared to 1910 census](image)

Figure 30: Postcards Survey vs. 1910 Census, Gender and Age

In the survey, nearly 90% of the postcards were sent to women and children. Within the literature on postcards, gender has also been discussed in ways that are consistent with this finding; however, the information has been written by two entirely different groups of writers with very different motivations. And as yet, no linkage between the two groups has been formed.

The first body of literature comes from the collectors’ guides and pricing books. With their focus on artists as a basis for collection and valuation, such works have frequently noted the fact that women were the primary producers of holiday postcard artwork. Often authors of such guidebooks link these artists to the success of the
company, as when Sally Carver writes of Frances Brundage: “regardless of the holiday or the general subject matter she was a master craftsman. Her expertise is proof of the fact that Raphael Tuck is so widely known as the ‘Aristocrat’ of Publishers.”92 Meanwhile, Dorothy Ryan suggests Ellen Clapsaddle “was, without a doubt, the pride of International Art, for they exercised particular care in the printing of her cards, and the execution of design, color and embossing on the best of her cards is unsurpassed.”93 Ryan also goes on to document an impressive list of other female artists who filled the ranks of illustrators for postcard companies: Bertha Corbett, Rose O’Neill, Grace Wiederman Drayton, Maud Humphrey, Katherine Gassaway, Amy Millicent Sowerby, Bessie Pease Gutmann, Bertha Blodgett, and Margaret Evans Price.94 Even popular male artists of holiday images have been documented as having strong female influences, such as Samuel Schmucker who was heavily influenced by fashion artist Katherine Vaughan Holden.95

At the same time, a smaller body of literature has discussed gender through the lens of postcard collecting. Commentators on European postcards noted a gendering of postcard use. Frank Staff’s history of the English postcard quotes journalist James Douglas’s 1907 piece that claimed: “The Postcard has always been a feminine vice. Men do not write Postcards to each other. When a woman has time to waste, she writes a letter; when she has no time to waste, she writes a Postcard.”96 Naomi Schor expands on this in her essay “Cartes Postales: Representing Paris 1900,” by building off the work of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin suggested that collecting—all types of collecting—was a

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93 Ryan, Picture Postcards in the United States, 1893-1918, 199.
94 Ibid., 196-205.
95 Davis and Ryan, Samuel L. Schmucker, 156.
96 Staff, The Picture Postcard & Its Origins, 81.
male pursuit. Thus postcard collecting, which Schor argues was a pastime constructed around the feminine, represents an exception to Benjamin’s theories. “If, as we saw earlier, collection is generally theorized as a masculine activity, the postcard constitutes an interesting exception to these laws of gendering; it is the very example of the feminine collectible.” Bjarne Rogan also takes up this question of whether postcards were collected primarily by men or women, and finds something of an undefinitive mixture of the two. Rogan argues that both sexes were postcard collectors, with differences between the genders emerging from what they collected and how they organized them.

But within these two fields of the historiography, no linkage has yet been made between female artists on the one hand and female audiences on the other. Yet the evidence from the period—and the results from the survey—suggests this very thing. Every time a postcard arrived in a person’s mailbox, it heralded a long series of choices up and down the capitalist economy. Catalogs, sample mailings, showrooms, and salesman displays all brought postcards from manufacturers to the outlets of the retail marketplace. Choices made by both retail merchants and their customers all stemmed from the production of a postcard printing company, which of course had to choose which postcards to print and market. And the choice of which postcards to print was also a choice of artist, artwork, and aesthetics—all informed by who would finally buy and receive the card. The survey results are reinforced by these two separate but complimentary groups of writings in the historiography. Taken together, they create a

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circle of production and consumption that started and ended with women and their children. It is worth teasing that circle out more fully using contemporary accounts.

Those wishing to comment on the fad often noted the gendered skew of the phenomenon. “A tremendous tide of post cards ebbed and flowed through our post office and homes during the holiday season just closed,” offered one report from Monroe, WI. “Most of the women and not a few of the men have mantels and desks covered with this spoil.”99 “In some manufacturing establishments it has been found necessary to prohibit the delivery of the mail of employees to the plant,” went another account. “This is in places where a great many girls are employed. It is stated that as many as 1500 post cards are received in some establishments in a single day. These are passed along for the girls to examine and so much time is lost in that manner that it has become a nuisance.”100 Such news stories reflected and reinforced an understanding of postcard audiences as a gendered audience with “a great many girls” and “most of the women.”

The knowledge that postcards were firmly entrenched in the domestic and socially-constructed feminine sphere leads backwards from producer to the artist. “There are now some twelve or fifteen girls in the designing room,” explained the owner of a Worcester, MA postcard factory, “and this department is where all the ideas originate.”101 As noted by postcard collectors today, some of the most prolific artists of holiday postcards were women, with two in particular as the reigning queens of holiday postcard imagery: Ellen Clapsaddle and Frances Brundage, each producing thousands of images.

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Contemporary accounts of the fad also paid special attention to the female artist. “During the Christmas holidays 5,000,000 postcards were sent through the mails bearing the replica of one girl,” wrote the Chicago Daily Tribune about artist Margaret Ries, “all reproductions of that girl’s sister’s drawings…the enormous sale of her cards is sufficient token that her work has been appreciated by the omnivorous, ever ravenous genus of strange and unusual tastes—the postcard fiend.” 102 Jessie Roberts told readers of her “What Girls May Do” column to consider making postcard illustrations as a way to break into the art world. “One young woman has proved that there is a road to success that is by no means so difficult and that gives a very wide scope to talent. She makes postcards…Every girl with the same talent can do the same work.” 103

There is a vast body of literature examining the role of women in the history of holidays, but Matthew Dennis offers perhaps the best and most succinct synopsis of the points relevant to postcards: “Women would come to dominate the calendar...especially through their buying of the holiday-related goods that ever larger numbers of capitalists sought to sell American consumers.” 104 Capitalist producers sought to connect with the goods-buying female audience, and used female artists to bridge that gap. Both Clapsaddle and Brundage were cut from the same demographic cloth—that of the prototypical postcard user. Both were born in upstate New York. Both were born into

104 Dennis, Red, White, and Blue Letter Days, 89-90.
native-born families. Clapsaddle grew up on farm while Brundage’s Newburgh, NY was a midsize city. Both were white.\footnote{Most accounts of Frances Brundage erroneously suggest she was born in Newark, New Jersey; however, the 1860 census lists her as born in New York state, and living with her parents Rembrandt and Sarah Lockwood in Newburgh, NY. 1860 Census: “Fanny Lockwood.” Newburgh, Orange County, New York. Clapsaddle--1870 Census: Ellen H Clapsaddle. Columbia, Herkimer County, New York.}

Postcard images—often generated by women—became texts for the viewing pleasure of women, and that pleasure was rewarded with more sales and greater profits back to the capitalist producers. Certainly this is not to ignore that those capitalists producers were the men who ultimately ran the main postcard companies. Raphael Tuck, John Winsch, and the Wolf Brothers were all postcard company presidents who did not check their period-specific gender assumptions and biases at the door. But they were also men who needed to strike a balance between evoking feminine pleasure in consumption and the role that consumption played in constructing women’s other values, needs, and priorities. The commercial success of holiday postcards was largely based on a domestic, female-oriented vision of holidays, one that fit comfortably in the socially ascribed norms of the day’s feminine sphere.

So it was also notable that when those boundaries were transgressed, the anger that was projected back was palpable. Nowhere is this more evident than in the hostility towards the “comic postcard.” Although most frequently discussed as a new version of the older comic valentine, comic postcards expanded to all holidays and other times for greetings and salutations. (See Figure 31) However, just because their scope was expanding did not mean that these new forms were always welcome. “There isn’t anything much more of a misnomer than a comic postcard,” sniffed the \textit{Fall River Line}
Journal in 1912. 106 “Maiden ladies of Maine are said to be hypersensitive upon the subject of age,” reported the Washington Post, “But that one who sued a Vermont beau for $5,000 because he sent her a comic post-card treating of the humors of spinsterhood, deserves the people’s thanks.”107

Figure 31: Comic Postcard
Comic postcards, particularly those associated with Valentine’s Day, raised the ire of many writers and commentators who wanted them banned, especially to protect impressionable children. Such outcries not only attempted to purge charivari from the holiday, they also reminded readers that postcards (and postcard images) never left the public eye.

Author’s collection

106 Untitled. Fall River Line Journal 34, no. 13 (June 24, 1912): 32.
Of course, it was also often a small leap from comical and funny to outright obscene, as the *Chicago Tribune* fully acknowledged: “The line between the comic and the vulgar is not always easy to draw. Even a casual examination of the cards, which are displayed in a show window will convince any one that a good proportion of them come close to this line. A double meaning is suggested. The step from that to the positively vile is not a long one.”¹⁰⁸ *The Tribune* had earlier hedged it bets on where that line actually stood when it suggested, “When the Chicago postoffice shuffles its 280,000 picture post cards every week, about 140,000 of them are illustrated for a more or less personal affronting of the recipient.” It went on to contend: “the valentine of comic intent and purpose long ago was outdone by the designer of the personal picture postal card and specimens of these cards that are to be found in shops in Chicago might warrant an Anthony Comstock’s raid upon these dealing in them, to say nothing of a person’s attempting to send them through the United States mails.”¹⁰⁹ *Town and Country* evoked anti-vice crusader Anthony Comstock’s name as well, offering: “there is yet much room for Mr. Comstock to sweep down and confiscate a stock of these at some of the smaller shops or from some of the sidewalk dealers.”¹¹⁰

All of this returns us to another common theme surrounding discussions of holidays: the movement away from the carnivalesque, the street, and the rowdiness of men (especially young men) to a celebration focused on the interior, domestic spaces overseen by women and focused on children. It is a progression—both in actual practice

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and in the images depicting holidays—noted by historians and cultural commentators across the holiday calendar.\textsuperscript{111} It is no accident that Mrs. Nellie Florence Lee, president of the Woman’s Auxiliary of the National Association of Retail Druggists, was the one to head up the Association’s campaign against “the suggestive post card.”\textsuperscript{112} With holiday postcards as an extension of women’s prominent place at the intersection between holidays and consumption, woman had a vested interest in protecting the messages that had been carefully cultivated for decades.\textsuperscript{113}

Lisa Sigel, whose examination of pornographic postcards brought her in contact with the most ribald and extreme of comic cards, writes that “building on the older, libertine tradition, ‘comic’ postcards merged sexuality, scatology, and critique in ways that devalued the bourgeois seriousness of sexuality.”\textsuperscript{114} Still, one need not view postcards bordering on pornography to see roughly the same point. Even milder comics—both specific to holidays but also tangentially connected to them such as Leap Years, birthdays, and general greetings—harkened back to earlier and now (through woman-led efforts) suppressed expressions that exalted the bawdy, the profane, and quite often, the sexually charged.

The vitriol heaped on comic postcards in contemporary magazines and newspapers might not have necessarily always dripped from a woman’s pen, but it was certainly informed by a gendered understanding of what suitable for both adults and


\textsuperscript{112} “Waging Fight Against All-Night Drug Store,” \textit{The Atlanta Constitution}, September 8, 1909, 3.

\textsuperscript{113} Though as we will see in Chapter Five it would be incorrect to assume that women did not use holidays’ carnivalesque potential towards their own goals and agendas.

children within the popular use of postcards. “I can keep my granddaughter from reading Shaw and from attending physical culture exhibitions,” lamented “A Grandmother” to the New York Times, “but I cannot prevent her seeing these disgusting and offensive post cards, even when she walks with me in a supposedly respectable shopping district…is there no law in New York for the protection of young girls against such sights.”

“A Grandmother’s” commentary reminds us that within the survey, postcards went to children more than any other age group. Children who were between six and fourteen years old received nearly a third of all the postcards mailed in the survey, and just like adults they could take equal turns as both recipients and senders. As early as 1905, children’s publications and pages of newspapers began promoting postcard exchanges. When the Art Manufacturing Co sent out batches of sample postcards to vendors it proudly proclaimed, “Children will buy them in quantities on account of the attractive subjects and the fact that they are within their means.” Women and children were likewise discussed in one trade publication just below the heading “Humor the Whims of Customers.”

Links between postcards and users also emerged through postcard imagery. “Post cards picturing children are always popular with the general public,” Dry Goods

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116 “Boys and Girls” Boston Globe, began running semi-regular announcements in the summer of 1905 and by October had transitioned to nearly every week; Christine Terhune Herrick’s “Each and All Society” in the Los Angeles Times started a Correspondence and Postcard Exchange in August, 1905. St. Nicholas magazine featured notices for “Souvenir Post Card” exchanges in September, 1905.
117 Art Manufacturing Co, Amelia, OH. Sample No. 7074 “Gold Edged Valentine.” Author’s collection.
It only takes the most casual glance through eBay.com or assorted postcard guides or collections to realize that thousands upon thousands of holiday postcards featured children as their subjects. These images of children were presented both in the age-appropriate activities of childhood, as well as superimposed into the roles of adults—hunting, cooking, driving, courting, etc. Commonly depicted as somewhere around age 6 or 7, this legion of miniaturized adults were frequently joined by the infantilized cupid figure, who also undertook all the tasks normally associated with grownups. Ellen Gruber Garvey discusses similar images to these in the earlier genre of advertising trade cards in the 1880s and 1890s. Like postcards, trade cards likewise found audiences among children precisely because they inverted norms, such as what children could do and what were meant to be adult activities: “Advertising entered the home as a seemingly well-behaved visitor, and then delighted the children by demonstrating new ways to make rude noises.”

Garvey’s analysis is useful in another way, for she also suggests that trade cards were a gendered medium, with use heavily geared towards girls. Those same girls from the 80s and 90s, twenty-some years later were quite often themselves mothers, and found themselves in the midst of a fad that resembled many of the physical characteristics of a fad from their own childhood—the brightly lithographed colors, the dominate image, the collectability and serialization, the approximate size and shape. If children were encouraged to actively engage in the exchange of postcards, at least part of that

119 “Post Cards of Children,” Dry Goods Economist, February 23, 1907, 211.
121 Ibid., 26.
encouragement came from mothers who themselves had been collectors of similarly-crafted products in their own childhood.

But as Garvey’s “rude noises” comment suggests, there were tensions below the surface of tacitly encouraging children to engage in postcard use. Brooke Baldwin’s 1988 “On the Verso” focuses on the messages written on the backs of postcards, and the interplay between those messages and the stereotyped images on the front. In this endeavor she emphasizes the importance of children within the postcard fad. “Black cards thus served several functions for socializing children into a racist society: the cards helped children to recognize stereotypes, to understand and appreciate racial humor; to know how to relate ‘appropriately’ to blacks, and to learn about those limited aspects of actual black life which did not contradict a stereotypical portrayal.”

While Baldwin’s comments are specific to race-based socialization, they can also be more broadly applicable. Holiday postcards sent to children were meant to reinforce messages that women had deemed appropriate as holiday expressions with images that emphasized sentimentality and tradition over ribald and “vinegar” humor. All of the women listed earlier as postcard artists drew children as subject matter, sometimes to the point of near-exclusivity as in the case of Clapsaddle and Brundage. From women’s pens and paintbrushes sprang such icons as the Campbell’s Soup children and the Kewpies. And when matching postcard recipients to census records, as was done for the survey, it is notable how many times the image on the postcard mirrored a general description of

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122 Brooke Baldwin. “On the Verso: Postcard Images as a Key to Popular Prejudices.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 22, no 3 (Winter, 1988). 15. Baldwin’s article also deserves credit as one of the few works in the historiography to recognize a central tenant of this dissertation: “For all the invaluable information the images on the front of the cards can yield, they do not tell the whole story. Postcards are two-sided artifacts, and the most unique information they have to offer is on the verso.” (19)
the recipient. Cards depicting little girls were sent to little girls. Cards with babies were sent to babies. Boys to boys. Within the chain of capitalist consumption it is obvious that a conscious process of identification between image and recipient was taking place at the point of purchase. Children were meant to see themselves in postcard imagery—it is the most basic link between the largest group to receive postcards (children aged 6-14) and one of the largest categories of holiday images (drawings of children aged 6-14).

All of which returns back to explain the hostile reaction to comic postcards—the reaction itself helps to historically situate the importance of child audiences within the larger phenomenon. The far-ranging collection of anti-comic card articles and letters in the mainstream press emerged precisely because of women and children’s overarching, understood involvement in the craze. Children who saw themselves in the comic postcard risked absorbing the “wrong” messages. It was a concern explicitly revealed in one 1908 story in the *San Francisco Call*. In it a 4-year-old listens as the ladies of the household read aloud comic postcards, including one called “The Old Maid’s Prayer,” which featured the line “O, Lord, please give me a husband, and if he dies, give me another one, and if he dies give me another one,” etc. The story goes on: “When little Frances said her prayers that night she astonished her mother by adding: ‘An’ Lord, p’ease b’ess my papa, an’ if he dies give me ‘nother one, an’ if he dies give me ‘nother one, and if he dies give me ‘nother one. Amen.” Importantly, the title of this little anecdote was “Little Maiden’s Twisted Prayer.”123 Comic postcards had the power to twist and undermine the process of

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identification, acculturation, and socialization that postcards, holiday postcards perhaps most of all, were meant to achieve.

**Native, German, and Anglo-Saxon Stock**

![Figure 32: Postcards Survey vs. 1910 Census, HOH Nativity and Parentage](chart)

Figure 32: Postcards Survey vs. 1910 Census, HOH Nativity and Parentage
Figure 33: Postcards Survey vs. 1910 Census, HOH Nativity and Parentage Countries of Origin

The survey showed that postcard recipients were almost perfectly proportional to the national breakdown of those born in the United States and those born elsewhere. It
also showed similar results for those whose parents were born in the U.S. or abroad. However, when those actual countries of origin were parsed out, they ceased to be proportional or representative of American demographics. Instead, a constellation of Anglo-Saxon and German countries emerged as having higher-than-proportion representation within the sample, while the period’s “new immigrants” from Southern and Eastern Europe were significantly under-represented, to the point of near-exclusion.

These findings are almost completely missing in the current historiography, with one exception. Collector guides and some general histories of the fad have paid attention to the many ties postcards had to Germany. Most of those connections have already been mentioned: postcards were exported from Germany, first as entirely German creations and later as hybrids of American artistry and German lithography; the postcard fad carried over from Europe, especially Germany, before taking root here; and American manufacturers of postcards, even those lobbying for the tariff, were often German immigrants themselves.

Apart from these observations, the question of ethnicity within the postcard audience is entirely new territory. Yet while it is new to us today, businessmen with a stake in the postcard fad seemed to understand how ethnicity played an important role in determining their primary postcard audiences. As the Payne-Aldrich tariff was being debated in the autumn of 1908, the arguments against German printing and lithography could have easily crossed over from denigration of the situation to denigration of the people. Yet reading the texts of dozens of letters and many days of testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, one is stuck how the arguments focused almost
exclusively on the disparity of work hours and pay, but never crossed the line into German-bashing.

Only one letter seemed to take aim at the German himself. Frank Gehring, general president of a union group under the banner of The Lithographers’ International Protective and Beneficial Association of the United States and Canada, claimed: “Today we find our country flooded with foreign lithographs, which is not due to any overcharges or monopoly of the American lithographer, but which is due to the difference in the methods of living between the American and German wage-earner. His wants are fewer, and consequently his earnings satisfy his wants. Have him make America his home, and his wants increase. He looks to be better clothed, his home brightened…”

The implication by a representative of the American working class that German wage earners were sitting in dim homes wearing bad clothes was about as nasty and personal as the argument got.

And if the industry was more focused on the flow of postcards from Germany than the flow of postcards into rural America, that trend did not entirely escape its notice either. *American Stationer* reported in April 1910, “The little postoffice of Middlebury, Ind., reports 900 souvenir postcards mailed at that office in one day prior to Christmas. More than 140 were collected by the rural route collector. The same proportion probably holds in all rural offices throughout the central territory. They are as popular as ever.”

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125 Gehring himself was the son of German immigrants, which could also help explain the restrained tone. See 1900 Census Record: “Frank Gehring” Glen Falls, Warren County, NY; and 1910 Census Record: “Frank A. Gehring” Galveston, TX.
Where these two seemingly disparate points intersect—the kid-gloves treatment of Germans by industry and the disproportionate use of postcards by rural audiences—is an important one. And one need only look as far as the 1910 census results to see that intersection: Within rural America, among those born to foreign-born parents, 30% came from German stock, while Germans made up 22% of rural inhabitants who were born outside of the US. No other country even comes close to contributing such a large ethnic group to the rural population—the Irish at 8% held the #2 position among those born in the US but with foreign-born parents, while Austrians at 9% held the #2 slot for immigrants in rural America born on foreign soil. Manufacturers of postcards were conscious of their American audiences and worked not to exclude them, even as they were working against the importation of cards from overseas.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that Germans (whether foreign-born or foreign-stock, the U.S. government did not draw much of a difference) held a secure privileged position in the early twentieth century. Quite the opposite. Their heritage, their values, their influence and their importance in America were frequently discussed, debated, and contested. William Z. Ripley’s influential *The Races of Europe* put Germans right on the teetering point between the “best” class of Europeans, the Teutonics, and the somewhat middling class, the Alpines, with Ripley writing:

In Germany, on the northern slopes of the main European watershed we are confronted with a great nation, whose constituent parts are equally divergent in physical origin...Briefly stated, the situation is this: Northwestern Germany—Hanover, Schleswig-Holstein, Westphalia—is

127 Department of Commerce, "Report on Population" Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, 822 and 903. It might be interesting to note if this trend carried to small towns as well; however, census reports only documented this breakdown among rural communities, or in cities of 25,000 or more. We do not know how small towns with populations 2,500-10,000 split ethnically.
distinctly allied to the physical type of the Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes. All the remainder of the Empire—no not even excluding Prussia, east of the Elbe—is less Teutonic in type; until finally in the essentially Alpine broad-headed populations of Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria in the south The Teutonic race passes from view.\textsuperscript{128}

John Higham’s history of nativism in the U.S., \textit{Strangers in the Land}, is filled with examples of the shifting sands under Germans’ feet as either “in” or “out” of an acceptable group of Americans. He writes that Ripley’s analysis in particular was “a powerful weapon for nativists bent on distinguishing absolutely between old and new immigrations…”\textsuperscript{129}

Although never at risk of being lumped in with the Slavs and Italians of Ripley’s lowest category, the Mediterraneans, Germans still had a vaguely precarious, somewhat suspect position between fully acceptable and acceptable with caveats. It was a position that could be shored up in two ways: 1) Influence the larger cultural landscape of America, thus ingratiating German customs and ways safely into the American fabric and 2) align with the more solidly Anglo-Saxon ranks to achieve a safe position at the top of the pyramid.

The first category was accomplished up and down the cultural spectrum, from the introduction of kindergartens into public school systems to the popularity of German-style lagers in saloons and bars across the country. Even the tradition of a child’s birthday

party has its origins in the German *kinderfeste*.\(^{130}\) And the one area in which Germans excelled in the integration of values and rituals came with holidays.

Leigh Eric Schmidt suggests that we owe our national primacy of Christmas over its rival New Years to the Germans: “This domestic appeal was evident in the growing fascination with the German observance of Christmas, which by mid-century rivaled the French celebration of New Year’s for charm and enchantment in the pages of middle-class periodicals.”\(^{131}\) And Easter was equally shaped by German folk beliefs such as that of the Easter Hare, with Schmidt adding “The confectioner’s mold, the greeting card, and the toy shop gave shape, standardization, and scope to the holiday’s symbols: Rabbits became popular, nearly ubiquitous emblems of the festival in turn-of-the-century America through this symbiosis of folklore and commerce.”\(^{132}\)

By starting with a German-originated cultural form—the postcard—and by embellishing them with a host of holiday and festive images, German postcard manufacturers created their own symbiosis of folklore and commerce. Even scenes of non-German-specific holidays such as Halloween or Thanksgiving often featured vaguely Teutonic backgrounds including windmills, onion-domed church steeples, and children in lederhosen. (Figure 34)

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\(^{130}\) Pleck, *Celebrating the Family*, 144.
\(^{131}\) Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, 124.
\(^{132}\) Ibid., 222.
Particularly in the early years of the fad, cards that were printed in Germany often featured scenic landscapes that were decidedly Teutonic in their tonal quality. Although there is nothing to definitively say this is a German country church, it has more German qualities than, say, the trope of the straight, white steeple of a New England church.

Author’s collection

The debate among manufacturers about the “American style” and the use of American artists reflected the cultural achievement that the Germans were seeking. At issue was not the cultural form of the postcard itself, but how to make it the most accessible cultural form to the widest American audience. The key was synthesis, integration and symbiosis. “In the case of the cards printed by German makers,” American Stationer explained, “the sketches are sent abroad and rough samples submitted in the course of several weeks to the house on this side ordering them to be made. These rough samples are often criticized as in the first instance, and suggestions for a change in the color scheme made to the foreign lithographers. Thus after months of work the cards are finally ready for the American market.”

133 “Holiday Post Cards,” The American Stationer, November 14, 1908, 22.
This process of collaboration between the American and German sides of the Atlantic reveals not only basic capitalist principles of maximizing a product’s appeal, but a move towards adding another piece in the mosaic of German contributions to American holidays and American culture. “Certain idealized practices, symbols and objects had come to represent this vision of bourgeois domesticity,” writes historian Nancy Reagin of the many other contributions that made up this strategy. She continues:

Among them were the celebration of ‘German Christmas’; ‘snow white’ linens and curtains, the Sunday cake and roast; and orderly household accounts and the Kuchenzettel, which documented household thrift. All these symbols were outgrowths of the practices dominant among the Wilhelmine bourgeoisie. But what was merely bourgeois at home became German abroad, when such practices were placed into a comparative context. And such everyday objects and approaches to household management would become key symbols in discussion of German national character.134

Postcards were yet another contribution thoroughly consistent with other pieces of the mosaic the Germans had already laid down, pieces that focused on domestic/interior contributions to American culture.

Certainly in the era of mass communication, mass consumption, and mass entertainments brought on by modernity, postcards were not the only mediums of cultural currency available to an ethnic group. So it is also notable just how consistent postcards were within patterns of ethnic Germans’ other choices of cultural output. Ben Singer helps illustrate how these contributions were different from others that could have been made in the same period, writing “Germans were not at all inclined towards nickelodeon

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entrepreneurship,” unlike, say, their Jewish entrepreneurial counterparts. As a pairing of Reagin and Singer suggests, Germans were particularly interested in cultural forms that contributed to the sphere of domesticity, not the public sphere. We should not be surprised then that postcards emerged as part of that strategy, when their domestic use was so ideally suited to the tried-and-true German model that advanced “Wilhelmine bourgeoisie” and fastidiously avoided public-sphere entrepreneurship such as nickelodeons.

This widening of the postcard’s appeal also played into the second cultural strategy employed by Germans to shore up any lingering doubts about their ethnic fitness—building a coalition into a single Anglo-Saxon/Teutonic bloc. It was a construction commonly used through much of American history. In 1858 abolitionist Theodore Parker suggested that Germany was “a great Teutonic people,” England was a “great Saxon-Teutonic people,” and the United States was “a great English-Saxon-Teutonic people.”

By 1910 even the federal government was advancing the construction. In its report on “mother tongues,” the U.S. Census Bureau suggested that such languages could “be grouped as is common in discussion of immigration statistics, namely, into those of northwestern Europe and those of southern and eastern Europe, the former will include the English and Celtic, the Germanic, and the Scandinavian.” There are few starker

artifacts of this coalition than the Census Bureau tables that read “Teutonic and Celtic” and “All Other.”  

As postcards fanned out across the country, they were designed to appeal to other members of this coalition—English, Canadians, Scandinavians and Irish in particular. Bound together by holiday images and mutual patterns of consumption, Anglo-Saxons, Teutonics, and of course, native-stock Americans were participating in imagined communities of shared holiday traditions. Central to that vision was the rural landscape. A future chapter will more fully examine the ruralness of holiday images as advanced by postcards, but here it is enough to say that all of the groups within this coalition could point to significant roots within the rural communities of America. Although no other ethnic group could come close to the Germans in terms of numeric superiority among foreign white stock (native-born with foreign parentage), the next closest contenders were all the ethnic groups shown by the survey as primary postcard users—English (7.6%), Irish (8.2%), Norwegians (6.3%) and Swedes (5.8%).

Held outside of this tradition were the immigrants of southern and eastern Europe. Even though the postcard craze in Europe had extended to portions of the Continent like Russia and Italy, that did not necessarily translate into postcard use by those ethnic groups in this country. One clear barrier: immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were often among the poorest groups in their home countries and when they arrived here they had little disposable income for unnecessary luxuries like postcards. Issues of

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138 Ibid., 903.
literacy and familiarity with postcard customs also quickly spring to mind when thinking about why the proportional use was so skewed. But a less-obvious argument can also be made that “new immigrants” simply lacked United States recipients for postcards.

All those newspaper accounts of trains rolling out of New York and Boston laden with postcards—and bound for the rural communities—were made possible because of earlier immigration patterns. Enough time had passed from previous waves of migration from northern and western Europe to establish kinship networks of Germans, Swedes, English, and Norwegians in both communities—rural and urban alike.

The census report made a similar argument when it said, “In general, the immigrants from the countries of southern and eastern Europe representing a more recent immigration are found in cities to a greater extent than the immigrants from northwestern Europe who have been in the United States a longer time, on the average.” That same section of the report also went on to note another interesting tidbit about the urban and rural dispersal patterns: “It may be noted, moreover, that the percentage urban for the natives of northwestern Europe would be appreciably lower were it not for the fact that the Irish have very largely settled in urban communities.” And therein lay the problems with coalitions—there are always those that do not quite fit in.

While Germans were advancing a cultural form designed to appeal particularly to rural audiences and the ethnic groups that shared rural experiences in America, the Irish stood in a slightly precarious position of not quite fitting into that mold. Certainly they had rural roots too, in fact more than any other northwestern European group. As the

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139 Ibid., 817.
census report suggests, however, their standing came with a caveat: there were just so many of them in the cities. And these cracks in the façade became pronounced in the years 1909-1911 over nothing less than holiday postcards. St. Patrick’s Day postcards were to become a significant battlefield in the period’s culture wars. In truth, the producers of postcards seemed entirely caught off guard by a St. Patrick’s Day postcard uproar, even though there had been warning rumbles in 1907 and 1908. In spite of the warning signs, in a February 20, 1909 issue of *American Stationer*, it was proudly announced that the American News Company had issued their new 1909 line for the St. Patrick’s Day holiday, and that “the sketches have been carefully designed and are up to date. The quality of workmanship is of the best and the cardboard is superior in quality.” Meanwhile over at the New York News Company, the St. Patrick’s Day cards were “…very pretty. In one a girl holds a shamrock over which a pig jumps like a hurdler.”

Just a few weeks later the fervor started, with the trade publication reporting that “a correspondent of the *New York World* takes exception to the comic Irish post cards in use so many years on St. Patrick’s Day.” And he was not alone. In Pittsburgh a mass rally was held to protest caricatures on postcards, while in Chicago a resolution was passed by the Irish-American Union calling for a boycott of stores selling the cards. They

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140 For an excellent history of this holiday, which has been celebrated in the U.S. since colonial times, see Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair, *The Wearing of the Green: A History of St. Patrick's Day* (London: Routledge, 2002)
even took the step of asking that “the attention of the chief of police be directed to the matter to the end that said pictures be confiscated and the dealers prosecuted under the ordinance for the prevention of indecent literature.”144 (Figures 35-36)

Figures 35 & 36: Irish Stereotypes
These images show examples of the iconography that inspired Irish-Americans protest movements during the peak years of the fad. In fact, one of the organizations that took the lead in such protests, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, is given a button in the lapel of one of the men.

Author’s collection

In 1910 the controversy erupted again, with the editor of the National Hibernian stating that it was against the law to “use the mails in defamation of private or public characters” and that the “Ancient Order of Hibernians would invoke the aid of the Government ‘to abolish this nefarious practice.’”145 Editors at the Washington Post

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144 “Pith of News from the Middle West,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1909, 12; “Irish Urge Fight on Caricatures,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 8, 1909, 7
concurred: “we are in hearty accord with the movement for the abolition of the frankly malignant or would-be humorous post card, in which Irish men and women are held up to ridicule or contempt.” The story got one more round of coverage during the 1911 season, and then disappeared. The trajectory of the rise and fall of the phenomenon found in the survey is matched by the disappearance of the Irish issue from press—the postcard fad was no longer in fashion, and thus no longer a culturally-relevant form to contest.

The entire story is revealing because unlike African-Americans, the Irish consumer did not stand outside of the white holiday tradition, and felt entitled to participate in this new cultural expression of it. On the other hand, the Irish could not tolerate the stereotyped imagery that was emerging from the very holiday most closely associated with their ethnic heritage. As groups jockeyed for position at the top of the race pyramid even small things like postcards could take on significant importance.

In the response to the backlash over Irish images, one commentator pointedly asked, “Will the Irishman become over-sensitive so that when people of other ancestry join in celebrating his gala occasion good naturally he will feel that they are stepping on his soft corns?” By reminding the “over-sensitive” Irish that they were already in the club, and that other ancestries were giving them equal status, the author hoped to diffuse the situation and, of course, continue selling Irish-themed postcards.

While Germans used postcards to stake their cultural claim to the Teutonic and Celtic group (and not the dreaded “All Others”), the Irish used postcards to demand respect for their cultural contributions. Both groups of postcard-consuming audiences had

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something to gain from the other, and something to prove to the rest of the exclusive Anglo-Saxon-Teutonic club. Germans wanted to extend their cultural reach in order to put to rest any concerns about ties to less-than-inadequate “Alpine” stock, and the Irish wanted to confirm their rightful place in a Northwestern European cultural expression, even if their concentrations in urban areas looked suspiciously like the “new immigrants” from southern and eastern Europe. The fact that postcards became vehicles for both audiences further underscores their importance as cultural artifacts, and the need to fully understand postcard audiences in order to appreciate their cultural significance.
Figure 37: Distribution of Postcard Survey by state relative to national distribution of population, 1910

Postcards in the survey were disproportionally concentrated in the northern half of the United States, with exceptional densities in New England. By contrast, the southern half of the U.S. was nearly devoid of representative samples. Of all the survey findings, the heat map of proportional postcard use relative to population is the most difficult to validate using either the historiography or historical documents. To begin, no one has written about postcards in quite this way, and even using what has been written, there is no single explanation for the entire map. However, breaking the map down into
more quantifiable pieces, patterns do start to make sense, particularly in light of many of the other findings already discussed.

Taking the South as a starting point, there are at least two factors that help explain the relative absence of postcards flowing below the Mason-Dixon Line. First, knowing the importance of postcard use along the RFD routes as outlined in Peter De Graw’s 1909 report, it becomes important to examine these routes in the South, as Wayne Fuller did in his essay “The South and the Rural Free Delivery of Mail.” Fuller contends that politics not surprisingly played an important role in the establishment of rural routes, and so:

…Republicans had an inside track on obtaining rural routes. As long as the administration of rural delivery remained in Republican hands, which it did through the years when most of the rural routes were built, Republican senators and congressmen facing Democrats in crucial elections could put their hurried pleas for routes before the Department on the basis of political necessity. But in the South the farmers suffered from the one party system. Here, where Democrats faced Democrats in elections, rural routes could be built with less haste and in closer conformity with regulations. 148

Extrapolating from Fuller’s findings, one can conclude that without rural routes to collect and deliver postcards, the fad never got the foothold in the South that it did elsewhere in the country. Still, this is not a perfect explanation. In 1907 when the postcard fad accelerated, Georgia had nearly as many rural routes as Minnesota, Tennessee had only three less than Wisconsin, and Texas was only a little shy of

Kansas.\textsuperscript{149} While it was true that some of the lowest proportional use of postcards was in states with relatively few rural routes, including Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina, this cannot be applied to the entirety of “cold” states on the map.

When RFD routes are coupled with higher populations of African-Americans, however, it does start to more fully explain the southern portion of the map. As already discussed, outside of a small cottage industry of self-produced cards, African-Americans were not likely mainstream fad participants and might have actively shunned the craze. Their relatively higher percentage in overall southern populations could have suppressed overall postcard consumption in those states. Remember that South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama all featured high African-American populations that inversely correlated to low postcard use.

Moreover, this trend plays out in some of the Border States as well. Missouri’s number of postcard recipients in the survey did not climb to a point relative to the population of the state, but that population was nearly 5% African-American. Kansas just next door was only .2% African-American, but was exactly proportional in postcard use. Delaware was 15% African-American and cool on the fad, while neighboring New Jersey was actually above proportion with only 3.2% of the population made up by blacks. West Virginia was cooler than Ohio to its west, but also had twice the black population of its neighbor.\textsuperscript{150}

Meanwhile the red-hot use of postcards in New England defies easy explanations as well. If one expected to find rural Germans—the ideal, prototypical audience for postcard users—they were in short supply in this corner of the Union. Not only were the “hottest” states of Connecticut and Vermont filled with cities that ate up the geographic space that could be accurately described as rural, they along with Maine and New Hampshire had relatively few German-born or German-stock inhabitants. So why were postcards so popular in these states? Chapter Six takes up this question in earnest by revealing the connection between demographic rural trends seen especially in New England, and discursive responses to those trends, to which postcards were an important component.\(^{151}\)

Julia Rosenbaum also offers an additional, insightful suggestion in her *Visions of Belonging: New England Art and the Making of American Identity*. She writes that “turn-of-the-century social critics increasingly juxtaposed the congestion, frenzy and corruption associated with cities with rural space, quietude, and purity,” and that visualization of these places “not only reinforced rural ideals but also helped to associate them specifically with the region of southern New England.”\(^{152}\) Postcards, as one of the early twentieth-century’s largest cultural expressions of rural ideals, would have naturally appealed to New Englanders who had taken the mantle of rural visual expression for

\(^{151}\) Although the evolution of holidays into national traditions based on mass-produced (and consumed) products is a well-discussed subject in the historiography, the scholarship has yet to question if these shared, mass-consumer holiday traditions penetrated all parts of the country equally by the early twentieth century. Certainly some holiday practices, such as Thanksgiving, had longer and more well-established traditions in Northern states, particularly New England. Whether these regional roots were trumped by shared mass consumerism across the nation by the twentieth century remains a topic for future study.

themselves. Rosenbaum argues, “Civic leaders—many claiming New England descent—sought to use art not only to influence public morality but also to mold a robust and homogeneous national cultural identity.” Such instincts, however, would not have been limited to the “high art” of civic leaders and their galleries and public buildings. The everyday and constant repetition of rural images on postcards would have also seemed logical expressions of the rural ideal of New England, thus fueling their popularity in the very states assumed to be depicted.

The flip side of this argument also helps explain the lack of use in the South among whites, who of course also wanted to be counted in the Anglo-Saxon/Teutonic alliance. Looking at thousands upon thousands of these cards, one cannot help but be struck by how northern they all appear. At least among holiday cards, there are no cotton farms, no antebellum mansions, no Spanish moss hanging from trees, no palms or Georgia pines, no heat waves, and no swamps or bayous. Christmas is always snowy; Halloweens are filled with the multi-colored hues of sugar maples; there are snowmen at New Years, and nary a magnolia or azalea is in sight to celebrate Easter. And if the New England ideal did not quite carry the entire New England contingent by turning all those states red on our map, then Massachusetts’ and Connecticut’s high Irish populations might have had something to do with it.

Moving past the German-dominated block of the Midwest, postcard use again drops off as one roams up and down the Rocky Mountain and desert Southwest corridor, as well as in the Dakotas. This was in spite of populations of white rural inhabitants and

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153 Ibid., 7.
ethnic Germans specifically. Sparse populations and a lack of access to a flush consumer marketplace filled with postcards seem to have exerted influence here. In 1907 Arizona had just one rural route, as did Nevada. Wyoming had just six, Idaho four. And in states with more rural routes for postcards to travel along, such as North Dakota with 283 and South Dakota at 424, such frills may have just been harder to come by.\(^\text{154}\)

Although entrepreneurs in western states used transportation networks, telegraph lines and other modern conveniences to develop models of capitalist consumption that mirrored the Midwest and East, sites of consumer activity such as the small western department store still suffered from the realities of geographic isolation. Henry Klassen writes that one Montana chain, Power & Bros., still had "difficulties in adjusting stocks of merchandise to consumer demand, the economic downturns, the transportation problems, and the uncertainties connected with the supervision of distant branches..."\(^\text{155}\)

This kind of scarcity breeds expense, a fact that Elizabeth Corey, a teacher in Fort Pierre, SD perhaps eludes to when she wrote in a letter, "P.S. Have cut out sending post cards its too expensive."\(^\text{156}\)

Finally, the jump in use in the Far West after a lull across the Rocky Mountain states requires explanation as well. In Oregon, Washington, and California we do again find our ideal postcard user, with access to markets fed by ships docking San Francisco, Astoria, Seattle, and Tacoma as well as plentiful train routes terminating up and down the

\(^{154}\) "1907 Report of the Postmaster-General; Fourth Assistant—Rural Delivery ,” 4-5.


Pacific states. Those born in Germany were the highest proportion of foreign-born inhabitants of rural Oregon and Washington, in numbers not seen across the West until one arrives in the German heartland in the Dakotas and Nebraska. California had a rural population of German-born inhabitants to rival Kansas and Missouri. And those of German stock numerically exceeded any other ethnic group in all three states.157

German descent, of course, does not entirely account for dispersal patterns in the Far West any more than rural delivery routes can solely explain the South. But many of the core conclusions of the survey—rural concentration, ethnic dispersal, racial makeup—can be seen as reflected back in the map of “hot” and “cold” postcard use. When we go looking for patterns that help explain the distribution map, the answers prove to be remarkably consistent with all the other data gleaned across all six of the survey results.

Conclusion

Most contemporaries agreed by the beginning of WWI that the postcard fad was over. “A thing that has been at the same time a fad, a convenience, a popular common carrier and a common popular pest,” eulogized one writer in 1914, “is now about to take its place with the bicycle as a thing that may be used with discretion but never again made a mania of.”158 The war itself quickly scattered whatever remnants remained. German printing factories were wiped out, while American producers were too crippled

158 “Picture Postcard is Passing,” Kansas City Star, April 10, 1914, 4.
by half-a-decade of decreasing demand to even take advantage of the void. Further, American producers faced wartime shortages of paper and ink, and no longer tried to copy their German competitors. Postcards copyrighted particularly after 1912 began to employ more and more whitespace in their designs, often with small amounts of imagery floating in a sea of white. (Figure 38) Eventually American card manufacturers would begin putting white borders around the image of view cards to save even more money on inks, ushering in what collectors call the “White Border Era.” By the end of the war most postcard companies were out of business, and the golden age was over.  

Figure 38: White Space on Postcards
By around 1912 most postcards had adopted a style that emphasized white space. This was not only an aesthetic choice. American printers had struggled since 1909 to duplicate the German quality of lithography with limited success and dwindling audiences. Sparse scenes such as this one were easier to produce and required less inks.

Author’s collection

Tom Phillips argues in *The Postcard Century* that the “golden age” construction is a myth fostered by collectors, and that “somewhere along the line nostalgia conditions

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the market…” While this may be true at some level, the postcard fad cannot be dismissed as a nostalgic construction. It was a unique outpouring of cultural messages specific to both a time and a people.

All of the evidence explored in this chapter has been available for consolidation and unified consideration, but has lacked an over-arching narrative to do so. It was the survey results that encouraged forays into each of these areas, which in turn offered their bounty of supporting evidence. From Fourth Assistant Postmaster General Peter V. De Graw’s reports of rural postcard use, to The Woman’s Auxiliary of the National Association of Retail Druggists’ campaign for “appropriate” postcards, each survey finding is corroborated across a spectrum of primary and secondary literature. And this is not just the case for holiday postcards. The evidence touches on all the other genres as well, and indeed, the entire phenomenon. Although we may never know for sure the exact percentages that divided the various genres of postcards within the larger fad, the evidence clearly shows that greeting cards (and holiday cards specifically) were more than just peripheral or anomalous types. This was a genre that was crucial to the overall phenomenon, and must be accounted for as such.

In exploring both the history and the historiography, postcards’ national and international importance also becomes more pronounced, perhaps in surprising ways. They fostered weeks of debate in the halls of Congress, they mobilized protests among large groups of Americans, and they helped make an entire federal agency financially solvent. But most importantly, the results of this chapter firmly reposition postcard

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history with actual users and audiences as the central agents of the fad. Certainly “top-down” mechanisms like the Payne-Aldrich tariff had an impact; however, it was audience behavior and motivation that started and ended the fad. It was everyday people en-masse who impacted each attendant portion of the phenomenon.

By understanding postcards’ history and confirming the survey’s information we can now turn our attention more fully to the other questions: Just how, exactly, did these postcards work as cultural messengers for these specific groups of people? What can we glean from their role in cultural construction, and how can we place them in the prevailing cultural theories guiding historical inquiry today? With the information presented thus far, it is time to dig deeper still into how postcards culturally functioned, and especially, what their visual images signified to senders and recipients.
3: Tidings of Comfort and Joy:  
The Functions and Uses of Postcards

So what are we to make of these cardboard rectangles that became so popular that people often wrote of the fad in medical terms, calling it a mania, an infection, and postal carditus? Several authors, particularly those looking at postcards connected to travel, have viewed this phraseology as evidence of anxiety over foreign and immigrant “contagion,” with postcards seen as part of a larger societal infection. The most frequently cited evidence of this is an *American Illustrated Magazine* piece with the opening line: “Postal Carditis and allied collecting manias are working havoc among the inhabitants of the United States. The germs of these maladies, brought to this country in the baggage of tourists and immigrants, escaped quarantine regulations, and were propagating with amazing rapidity.”

Although John Walker Harrington’s 1906 article might have coined the term “postal carditis,” the image of postcards as disease had been around for years, as the *Chicago Tribune* offered in 1900: “The collection of pictorial post cards has developed into a mania quite as infectious as that of postage stamps and autographs. Thus far the

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mania appears to rage most furiously in Europe.”

Certainly with such an obvious nativist slant, and the “new immigrant” versus “old immigrant” divide of ethnic postcard users already discussed, this interpretation is clearly useful. However, the emphasis on the spread of postcard use can carry other meanings, particularly for holiday postcards. The contagion metaphor requires contact. As postal carditus spread it was spread by the act of sending postcards to others, who then caught the “fever” and began sending and collecting cards themselves, thus infecting still more.

In spite of obvious prejoritives, the contagion metaphor still emphasized the web of connection that postcards built. In binding others into a reciprocal arrangement of give and get, the image of a spreading condition is another way of emphasizing the communities (real and imagined) being built through postcards. The past two chapters helped to reconstruct who made up those communities—the audiences of rural and small town Americans; of women and the children under their care and supervision; of families with German and Anglo-Saxon heritages or those who considered themselves original Yankee stock.

This chapter will investigate how the postcard functioned in that community-building project. It will argue that such a project was occurring across multiple levels through a variety of elements contained within the postcard genre. At their root postcards were building blocks used by specific communities in the construction and reaffirmation of identities. They were able to accomplish this task because of a variety of features unique (at the time) to the postcard format—their ability to convey thoughts quickly, to

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3 “The Postal Card Fad,” Chicago Daily Tribune, October 7, 1900, 40.
make communication simple, to collapse distances. But the most important feature of the postcard was the image. The telephone would eventually subsume the postcard as a vehicle of conversation for these very same audiences, as live connection trumped even the power of images. However, the fact that the overlay of audiences between the two mediums is so precise suggests that they functioned in similar ways. Postcards were conversations—image-based conversations above all else—between networks of people who shared similar cultural values and identities. For a few years in the early twentieth century, the medium of the postcard was the message, and that message was a powerful one of cultural validation in a rapidly-changing world.

**Connections of Community and Kin—A Review of the Historiography**

In some ways the suggestion of postcards as building blocks of socially constructed identity and consciousness is not a major revision of the historiography. The editors of *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards* see “symbolic and material connections, they [postcards] represent an important element in a fabric of social relationships.”4 Bjarne Rogan writes “they served mainly as a sign of life and a reminder of social relationships.”5 Barry Shank’s *A Token of My Affection* likewise thinks that the exchange of greeting cards (and thus too the cards of his “post card interruption”) were part of network construction. Building on Micaela Di Leonardo’s notion of “kinwork,” i.e. unpaid labor involved in maintaining kinship networks, Shank suggests that “the

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networks constructed through kinwork were stitched together according to the demands of a society structured by large-scale business organization.”

Shank goes on to say that greeting card exchanges helped people reorder and restructure their network beyond nuclear families. As the family blew apart spatially and socially in the business economy of the twentieth century, those feeling isolated and buffeted by those forces then reached within that same business economy for mass-produced lifelines. Cards were “the ephemeral token of an even more temporary event, a felt connection between people in a society structured by business.”

Shank is useful to a degree, but in his analysis all roads lead back to the capitalist system. This makes the argument too hermetically sealed, perhaps quite literally given his choice of metaphor to describe cards: “They were an organic hybrid bred from the conflicting demands of the social and the economic, nurtured in a hydroponic environment in which the traditional forms of kinship and stable status were absent, but flourishing in the hothouse atmosphere of a status competition fired by the erratic flares of large-scale business.” If the only conflict of the early twentieth century had been the maelstrom produced by capitalism, then this thesis might be sufficient.

Others have argued that theoretical frameworks for postcards can be tied to a variety of fields beyond capitalism, including colonialism, racism, and feminism. Robert Rydell sees world’s fair postcards as outgrowths of Western colonial ambitions; Brooke Baldwin sees black images on postcards as products of a racist society; Katherine Parkin

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7 Ibid., 246.
8 Ibid., 245.
sees Leap Year postcards as a humor-based safety valve for normative courtship behavior. Yet these arguments are necessarily narrow in scope, with only small sub-genres of postcards examined within these specific sub-disciplines of historical inquiry. Thus the more focused studies have shown us that postcards are capable of operating within cultural contestations, but the most recent work on the broader field of holiday greetings is too confining in its focus on just a single arena of those contestations—capitalism.

This is where the historiography requires a major revision. Capitalism was not the only stress point in the opening decade of the twentieth century, and communities reacting to other forces, changes, opportunities, and fears used postcards as part of their own social agendas. The fact that the act of sending these postcards was so closely tied to the rituals and customs specific to holidays just underscores this point. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz notes, “Of course, all cultural performances are not religious performances, and the line between those that are and artistic, or even political, ones is often not so easy to draw in practice, for, like social forms, symbolic forms can serve multiple purposes.”

Nowhere is this clearer than Ellen Smith’s “Greetings from Faith: Early-Twentieth Century American Jewish New Year Postcards.” In this insightful essay Smith argues: “If there was confusion and conflict and tension in the daily lives of immigrants, the cards suggested that all might coexist in a neatly ordered numbered series of images

for that year. As a consumer of the cards, one could choose images reassuring to the recipient, but also reassuring to oneself. The cards are thus less about tradition or the past than about ordering a disordered universe. Such order could be created by both the cards’ producers and the cards’ consumers.”¹¹ On the surface this sounds like Shank’s arguments that people reached into a “society structured by business” for their reassuring messages in a disordered world (a world made disordered in the first place by the forces of capitalism); however, Smith asserts that more is going on here. Jewish New Year postcards “…reinforce the ability—even, perhaps, the right—of the viewers to construct new realities, new places of meaning, of their own.”¹²

Smith’s essay provides excellent groundwork; however, her study only helps to a point because her subject matter existed outside of the larger mass-market mechanisms of the postcard phenomenon. “Unlike postcards produced by commercial firms to sell to mass audiences,” she writes, “Jewish New Year cards were produced internally to the Jewish community.”¹³ So while others have made claims about postcards and greeting cards forming networks and communities, we need to find a way at getting at the larger phenomenon that did indeed exist in a capitalist, business-oriented world of mass production and consumption as Shank suggests, but without allowing the argument to become monodirectional and reductionist in a formula that ties it solely to capitalism.

To arrive at this broader range of understanding, we need to undertake two tasks. First, we need to rediscover the postcard from the perspective of the actual user and

¹² Ibid., 237.
¹³ Ibid., 227.
examine how they understood the object to function. Second, armed with that knowledge, we can explore what was not explicitly said about postcards, but becomes clearer through historical hindsight. And at the end of that process we will have a framework for studying the communities and community-building processes associated with postcards. It is this framework that can then carry us forward into the second half of this dissertation, in which postcards’ versatile, multivalent nature is explored across several fields of inquiry.

The Nature of Postcards: Front and Back

The postcard is a biplanal artifact, with each side functioning in unique and discreet ways, while simultaneously operating as a single instrument of communication. Contemporaries also noted the duality of the postcards’ nature, and arguments about postcards could be centered on either side. For example, one of the most common words used in describing postcards was “convenience,” an idea particularly rooted in the message side of the card. The Boston Globe reported of picture view cards that a traveler, “will send a post card to every relative, business associate and chum he can think of, this being his most convenient method of letting them know where he is, has been and is going.” Columnist Frederic Haskin suggested that “now they are used for a thousand different purposes, the chief one of which is as a time saver. It is but the matter of a moment to write a half dozen words on a post card, and anybody is glad to get it. A letter must have a half dozen pages, or it may seem curt and thereby give offence. The post

14 “Picture Postal Card,” SM12.
card is the greatest time saver on earth in that respect.” Commentator Nixon Waterman echoed that sentiment. “Perhaps one of the charms of the post card is the fact that the little space it affords for communication is nearly always written full. It seems to indicate that more would have been said if there had been more room. This is most gratifying. No matter how many written pages a letter may contain, if it still includes a whole or half page of blank paper the thought is aroused that the writer had said all there was to say.”

All of these writers emphasized how postcards were simpler, quicker, and more convenient than letters.

It was also possible to flip the card over and talk about the convenience of the images. One article complained that it was inherently unfair for view cards of places to be sold anywhere other than that place specifically, with the author elaborating: “All the zest in collecting, as an evidence of the traveller’s research, is lost when out-of-the-way corners of the globe can be reached for post-card purposes on Broadway.” It is a revealing observation, suggesting that something experiential—such as travel to a remote destination—could be substituted (perhaps even improved upon) by simply collecting an image of that place instead. And since images from all over the world were available on a street like Broadway, a trip to the local postcard shop to collect images/experiences was much more convenient that visiting the places in person.

The same could likewise be said of holiday images. Retailers were constantly linking holidays to consumption and the need to acquire things in order to properly

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15 Haskin, “Post Cards,” 5.
17 “Souvenir Post Cards are Very Profitable,” Macon Telegraph, September 8, 1905, 4.
celebrate these days. And while postcards were yet another thing, there was something special and unique about them—because of their imagery they were things that could substitute for other things, just as view postcards could substitute for travel experiences.

In one particularly revelatory 1907 story entitled “The Postcard Party” a young girl is prevented from attending a Halloween party because of a broken leg. Instead, “a whole armful of mail” sent by the girl’s friends is brought to her bed by her aunt. “‘Why, here are the lots and lots of the very nicest Halloween postal cards!’ cried Nellie, ‘with witches and cats and brooms and pumpkin heads and false faces and oh everything…’”

In lieu of a party presumably filled with decorations, equipment for games, invitations, name cards, party clothes or perhaps costumes, etc., Nellie experiences the entire Halloween marketplace simply by their postcard substitutes.

Of course, the consumer-driven marketplace still ruled—in the story Nellie was only given this optional substitute because she was first forced to suffer by being bedridden with a broken leg. However, it was an option that non-fictional, non-bedridden consumers could experience as well, especially rural and small town Americans with limited access to the cities’ emporiums of holiday paraphernalia. Through postcards, homes too could be filled with witches, cats, pumpkins and so on. Such substitutions could be made without the market-mandated suffering of Nellie to go with it.

The convenience of jotting off a holiday message, the convenience of fulfilling a quota of holiday imagery across the calendar, and even the convenience of substituting an experiential visit with a card-based substitute all lead back to the overall work involved in

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holidays. As Shank recognizes, Micaela Di Leonardo provides scholars with the useful notion of kinwork. Di Leonardo’s list of kinwork surrounding holidays touches on all these themes: “visits, letters, telephone calls, presents and cards to kin; the organization of holiday gatherings; the creation and maintenance of quasi-kin relations, decision to neglect or to intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these activities; and the creation and communication of altering images of family and kin vis-à-vis the images of others, both folk and mass media.”

The convenience of postcards emerged as kinwork-saving devices. Commentators from the period—Haskin’s and Waterman’s quotes from above among others—were quick to point very specifically to one of the more onerous chores involved in holiday kinwork from that long list Di Leonardo provides: letter-writing. The message-sided convenience of postcards freed women from the chore of writing letters, particularly after the March 1907 regulations went into effect providing a divided postcard back.

However, not everyone at the time was ready to jump on the postcard-over-letter-writing bandwagon. “Sometimes one looks back with a sense of longing to the fat letters read in former days with so much pleasure by the family, when John or Susie or father were off on a vacation,” suggested a Macon, Georgia newspaper at the height of the fad. Another observer wrote that those “who believed in letter writing as an art bemoans the introduction of the post card. No one writes letters now. The correspondent

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deems his duty well performed if he sends a brace of cards. But the cards are here and letter writing is a lost art; you can’t do away with the cards.”21

Even Nixon Waterman, who seemed to find value in the convenience of postcards, could not help but get a little melancholy about letters: “The art of letter-writing is becoming well nigh lost in these later days when so many people find it convenient to say all they have time to say on half of the front side of a post card, on the reverse of which is a picture of a landscape or a street or a work of art. Though a post card message may seem almost impertinent in its brevity, it is satisfying to the recipient in most cases. It is not only easy to write, but to read, as well.”22 Waterman recognized the satisfactions offered by postcards, but clearly did not consider such writing “an art” as he did letters.

Letter writing had long been regarded as an art of refined culture. It was a tradition that stretched back to the beginnings of the American experiment. “These writers knew that they were practicing a genteel art,” historian Richard Bushman explains in his analysis of America’s refinement evolution, “although they had no expectations of publication. The gracefully turned phrases, the high sentiments, the touches of wit were contrived to confirm the writers’ sense of themselves as ladies and gentlemen.”23

When postcards rose as a dominant form of communication, the blowback against them revealed that “writers’ sense of themselves” were not just artifacts of the 18th century, but had been fully carried into the twentieth century as well. From the beginning

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21 “Can the Horrid Postcard Be Reformed?,” G8.
of the fad some commentators raised their hackles against the postcard. “The superior person despises the picture postcard,” opened one 1904 piece that made the rounds to such periodicals as The Living Age and Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature. 24 “One asks for a well-bred response to a cordial and detailed letter,” raged the Congregationalist and Christian World, “and he receives a nicely printed picture of the sphinx or the stony pyramid. He wants a few lines from his friend and he is forced to accept a chilly reproduction of Gibraltar.” 25 Under the headline “Postcard Etiquette,” one paper icily advised: “Socially it is only to be employed for rather impersonal communications, such as announcing the meetings of a committee or society or forwarding an address.” 26

Should we dismiss these social commentators? After all, there are always the predictable few that bemoan fads, be they chromolithographs or social networking websites, as shallow and a degradation of the “good old days.” It is tempting at first, but one of the underpinnings of these anxieties reveals an important clue about how we should consider postcards. The author of “Postcard Etiquette” offers a glimpse in writing, “All personal messages should be omitted as well as the intimate termination that is proper in a sealed letter.” 27 “What could be more absurd,” queried Chamber’s Journal to its British audience, “than writing private information on an open piece of cardboard that might be read by half a dozen people before it reaches its destination?” 28 These commentators point us to the next area we should examine to truly understand postcards’ function—their public nature. They were not just concerned about the tradition of letter-

26 “Postcard Etiquette,” The Evening News (San Jose), March 20, 1911, 2.
27 Ibid.
writing; concern was specifically couched in anxiety that the move from letter-writing to postcards heralded a shift from the discrete and private to the public.  

The public nature of postcards was discussed in both explicit and veiled ways. And just as analysis of postcard convenience was biplanal, so too were conversations about their place in the public sphere. First the image side: Newspapers and periodicals were filled with stories about raids, trials, crackdowns and complaints revolving around “lewd,” “obscene,” and “rude” postcards.

The prevalence of concern about these postcards in stores and window displays shows that all postcards began their lives in the public sphere, on display. There were special racks created and patented just for postcards to be exhibited. The ubiquitous revolving steel rack used today to display everything from magazines to sheet music began in 1908 as a postcard-display invention. But postcards were different from items like stationary or greeting cards that were mailed inside envelopes because postcards never left the public display. The Washington Post editorialized on this by writing, “The comic valentine in post card form is worse than the old kind, because few mail carriers can deliver them without feeling ashamed of themselves.”

Readers were constantly reminded that obscene postcards were confiscated and destroyed by postal officials as they went through the postal system—a process that only

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29 Naomi Schor argues, building on the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida, that distinctions between letters as private and postcards as public are false. As Derrida posits: “letters are always post cards: neither legible nor illegible, open and radically unintelligible.” My argument obviously runs counter to that theory, in part because my framework is positioned in the historicized perceptions of early twentieth century postcard users. While Schor and Derrida might have a relevant theoretical point, in actual practice during the fad commentators saw the distinction. See Schor, ““Cartes Postales”,” 210, note 30


could take place when officials saw the offending image. This had nothing to do with what was written on them, but with what was pictured. And thus postcard users were also reminded that every postcard, not just the racy ones, were also seen up and down the distribution chain of the mail, from postal clerks to carriers, and most importantly, to neighbors and friends who might happen to see what else is was in the carrier’s hand or bag that day.

At the same time, the stakes were doubly high with postcards because the public nature of cards also revolved around how postcard messages could be read by anyone. This anxiety was often dealt with through humor, with a number of jokes about mailmen reading postcards. One typical joke centered on a woman who was expecting a postcard from her aunt, one that would tell her when the aunt was arriving for a visit. The postmaster calls to his wife in the back of the post office asking if she sees a postcard for the woman from her aunt, to which the wife replies, “Yes. She’s coming on Thursday.”

In another joke a man returns to his hometown and visits the barbershop to learn about everything that has changed in his absence. When he asks about the post office he is told, “Not much changed, but Joe Gimp isn’t postmaster any more. This postcard craze drove him blind trying to keep up with his reading.” But the concern was not always a laughing matter. An anonymous patron on an Amsbury, Pennsylvania rural route complained to the head of the RFD in Washington DC that their carrier loitered on his

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33 “How the Place has Changed,” *Kansas City Times*, July 19, 1914, 1.
route and stopped in houses to exhibit the mail he was carrying. One wonders if postcards, with their inherent public nature, were the items of mail being exhibited.34

Here then were the lines being drawn by commentators: an argument that favored a form of expression that remained entirely in the private and largely domestic sphere (i.e. letter-writing) versus an argument that favored a form of expression that was public in nature (postcards). If the argument sounds suspiciously familiar, it should—it was exactly the same tension being played out at the same time over holidays themselves.

As Roy Rosenzweig discovered in Worcester, MA: “Those members of the middle and upper classes who remained within the city limits on the Fourth also sought out exclusivity, privacy and refinement, rather than public commemoration.”35 Stephen Nissenbaum notes the same drama being played out over Christmas, as does Karen Sue Hybertsen with Halloween adding, “Halloween gatherings also intensified and emphasized the focal role of women in preserving the tensions between the home and world outside as well as mediating between them.”36 Rosenzweig suggests these hierarchical impulses also carried forward into the twentieth century, an idea supported by the debate over whether letter-writing should remain an exclusive, private, refined holiday tradition, or whether the more convenient and kinwork-reducing holiday postcard could become yet another facet of holiday commemoration.

35 Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will, 67.
36 Nissenbaum, The Battle for Christmas; Karen Sue Hybertsen, “‘The return of chaos’: The uses and interpretations of Halloween in the United States from the Victorian era to the present” (Doctoral Dissertation, Drew University, 1993), 51
All of this runs counter to the traditional narrative that domestic, refined, and home-centered holiday expressions prevailed through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Why were women in particular willing to embrace en-masse such a public expression of the holidays, when so many other expressions of the holidays (gift giving, parties, meals, home decorations) were becoming more and more private and interior affairs? Although the easy answer to that question would be that anything that reduced kinwork was worth embracing, it is an insufficient one. After all, if it were simply about the convenience of the device, imageless postal cards produced by the Post Office Department would have sufficed. There would not have been a need for this other outlet.

The Primacy of the Image

At this point we have evaluated each side of the card, and have found each side to be largely equal to the other in the functions they provided to their senders and recipients. But here we reach a tipping point, when we need to recognize the primacy of one side over the other—both sides were convenient, both sides were public, but only one had meaning that existed in the larger cultural arena, and that was the image.

It was the image that was the convenient two-dimensional substitute for three-dimensional holiday accoutrements. They legitimized a community’s particular symbols and icons for holidays, and ignored others. Postcard users then took this choice of image, this blessing by the consumer of what was “right” within a holiday, and elevated it higher still by the public act of sending postcards. Postcards sent were not just links from one

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37 Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, 298-299.
person to another; they were also public affirmations of certain holiday tropes. Postcards were mutually reassuring messengers between a network or community looking to make larger claims that their vision, their beliefs, and their values were supreme. The level of confidence in the “rightness” of their image choices was strong enough to withstand the scrutiny of the public world, be it a shop keeper, a mail carrier, or a nosy neighbor. And of course, finally and ultimately, these were not only convenient, public conversations between just anyone. As has been so painstakingly outlined in the past two chapters, these were image-, sign- and symbol-based conversations between some very specific groups of people: rural audiences, women, and an ethnic-specific coalition of whites. To ask the question from before: Why were postcards popular in a way that ran counter to so many other holiday traditions? In a word: empowerment.

The empowering features of postcards lay in three overlapping layers, two of which have already been noted: the image itself was a source of power (with its privileged place in the hierarchy of iconographic choices), as was the act of sending that image publicly. Each of these was then reinforced by a third condition, the absolute enormity of the fad. The frenzy of postcard giving and receiving reached a crescendo sometime around 1909-1910, by which time staggering numbers of holiday postcards, literally billions, were clogging the mails. There is an almost desperate quality to the volume, in both senses of that word: the volume (number) of cards raised the volume (noise) of messaging, as each card built upon the previous one.
As Lawrence Levine reminds, “It is important to remember that not all mass culture was popular.” Thus what I call the “volume of volume” is critical to thinking not only about popular culture, but also about those moments when popular culture transcends itself to move into a fad, a craze, or a phenomenon. If not all mass culture was popular, and not all popular culture was a phenomenon, then those moments and mediums that do make that leap from what was simply mass-produced to what was consumed en-masse carries a particular cultural signature. The volume of volume for postcards suggests a specific cultural currency accessed by the billions of cards consumed.

The metaphor behind the volume of volume also reinforces another important element—the idea of conversation. Postcards were convenient and public conversations between networks of kin, families, and friends that grew louder and louder as the volume of postcards became thousands then millions then billions. And yet looking at postcards today we know the conversations generally were not on the message side. Almost every scholar of postcards notes the banal or non-existent messages written on them, a reality also highlighted by the period’s bemoaning of the lost art of correspondence. Postcards “seldom carried a substantial linear message—i.e., new information—from the sender to the addressee,” writes Bjarne Rogan. Where and what were the conversations on blank

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39 Rogan, “An Entangled Object: The Picture Postcard as Souvenir and Collectible, Exchange and Ritual Communication,” 19. Many of these points are also embellished into a larger theoretical discussion of “postcards as discourse” by the University of Helsinki’s Jan-Ola Ostman. See Jan-Ola Ostman, “The Postcard as Media,” Text 24, no. 3 (2004): 423-442
postcards or those with a mere “To Aunt Clara” scribbled on them? We have only one place left to look for these conversations—the images themselves.

A snow-covered country house for Christmas; a moon-drenched field of haystacks at Halloween; a meadow of flowers come Easter—the symbols of holidays seem so natural to us today we can forget both the historical processes that create such connotations, as well as the fact that the system of codes in operation at any particular time actually changes depending on the circumstances of the historical moment. Lessons from a variety of visual cultural tools remind us to try and position postcards relative to their viewers. In doing so we discover how they would have been seen from a variety of viewing positions.

However, the relay of visual information was not just from the postcard object to the viewer’s culturally positioned eye. This was only part of the process. Postcards also served as a bridge between the sender and the receiver, in effect relaying not only the visual text of the image, but reminding the viewer that the text came from someone with their own connotative referents—their ruralness, their womanhood, their whiteness. Postcards served as sites of production away from the industrial production of the cards themselves. In this cultural production they were constructed, built, and employed as visual text communicators between specific people for specific purposes.

Speech and linguistic theorists use the term “perlocutionary acts; i.e. forms of communication designed to produce a primarily emotional or psychological affect on the recipient of the spoken or written communication.” But in the case of postcards, the

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perlocutionary acts were not the words written, but the images themselves that strove to affect these very specific audiences—audiences that, not coincidentally, found themselves in times and circumstances in the early twentieth century where perlocutionary acts offering solace or reassurance or affirmation were needed and thus important.

If the idea of postcards as image-based conversations is not entirely intuitive or self-evident, there is contemporary evidence that helps frame this very notion.

Conversations occur in a variety of contexts and ways. One such vehicle for conversations—then and now—was the telephone. And several writers from the period recognized the evolution from postcards to the telephone:

Formerly many engagements and social affairs were transacted on postal cards between persons living in the same city, but of late the telephone has captured a large percentage of the business, and such affairs as appointments, friendly chats, the ordering of groceries and provisions, dealing with mercantile firms, physicians, etc. can be so much more quickly and easily done by telephone that the postal card has suffered severely from the loss of public favor.41

Writing this in 1905, the author was a bit premature in his pronouncement; however, the linkage between the convenience of the postcard and the convenience of the telephone is notable. From London the *Times* suggested in 1913, “Undoubtedly a most formidable enemy of the post card is the telephone,” an article that was reprinted in the *Chicago Tribune*.42 A later piece from Indianapolis made the rounds to the *Washington Post*, an article that linked several themes: “There has been much lamentation of late years over

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the lost art of letter writing. The blame has been pretty evenly divided between the innocent post card and the useful telephone.” Interestingly, the article went on to suggest that letter writing was better left in the past after all. “Life is too short to waste any of it on unnecessary letter writing…”43

This cache of articles linking postcard use and telephone use is helpful because it reminds us to be mindful of the participants who employed these vehicles for their conversations. That one vehicle for conversation flowed into the other invites questions about the two modes’ primary audiences: was the ease of the transition made possible because these two mediums’ audiences were similar (or even one and the same) in the early twentieth century? To answer that question, we turn to Claude Fisher’s America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940, an excellent guide to the telephone’s early history. And when reading Fisher’s research, a sense of revelation is almost inevitable, because the patterns of use are so strikingly similar that one could swap the words “telephone” for “postcard,” and the reader would be just as informed.

First, there is the rural connection, with Fisher demonstrating that by 1912 “more farm than nonfarm households had telephones. That advantage persisted up to 1920…”44 Next, there is the confirmation that telephone use was largely driven by women: “The higher the proportion of adult women in the household, the higher the chances were that it had a telephone…bits of evidence even suggest that men were shy of the telephone, that wives commonly made calls for their husbands.”45 Telephone subscriptions were

44 Claude S Fischer, America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 93.
especially sparse in the South and West, and were instead concentrated in the North and Midwest—entirely reminiscent of our own survey map.

It is worth pausing to assess the value of Fisher’s research. From a survey which reveals that postcards circulated primarily among rural white women of the North and Midwest, we move to a number of articles that linked a migration of use from postcards to telephones, and finally arrive at more research that confirms telephone use was concentrated primarily among rural white women of the North and Midwest. Like DeGraw’s RFD reports, this provides some of the strongest supporting evidence to the survey’s assertion that rural audiences were key to the postcard phenomenon.

Fisher goes on to show that other aspects of telephone use were also similar to postcards. Just as with postcards, there was also concern over the public nature of telephone conversations on party lines, and the ability of telephone operators to eavesdrop, not unlike rural letter carriers who were accused of reading mail. However, perhaps most important is the way telephone use is described as building social networks. “The most dramatic and consistent testimony in the first few decades of the twentieth century,” writes Fisher, “indicated that rural people, especially farm women, depended heavily on the telephone for sociability, at least until they owned automobiles.” Social connection was key to the telephone’s popularity.

If telephones replaced the postcard in a way that almost perfectly replicates the audiences, core constituencies, the geographical distribution, and the patterns of use, then it is fairly safe to assume that their larger social or cultural functions also operated in

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46 Ibid., 226.
similar, perhaps nearly identical ways. Both were convenient, both were public, but most importantly, both were mediums of conversations. The facilitation of these conversations created acts of reassurance and reaffirmation that reached enormous volumes of quantity and noise by 1909 and 1910. However, this evidence linking postcards and telephones also suggests that the volume of noise generated from the volume of postcards did not just disappear after the aesthetics of the medium changed—it migrated into the larger and larger network of telephone lines stretching across America. The switch from one to the other could happen because the two mediums operated in such similar ways among such similar audiences.

Obviously images and vocal speech have marked differences. The telephone remained a mute medium until someone talked into it, while postcards were medium and message rolled into one. Still, it is the notion of conversation that serves as the pivot between the two. Just as telephones offered reassuring vocal conversations, so too were postcards image-based conversations between specific groups of people, offering the reassurance of connection and kinship and all the cultural validation those words imply—heterogeneity, normative reaffirmation, traditionalism, imagined communities, and a comfortable bastion against Others. Postcards were the visual equivalent of an advertising message developed by telephone marketers decades later—“Reach out and touch someone.” Live conversation eventually superceded the power of the postcards, but for a few years before the rise of the telephone, it was the postcard’s power of cultural conveyance—an ability that hinged on images—that carried the day.
This is not meant to imply that the theoretical construct of the Culture Industry is at work here, pulling the strings of audiences in a way that generated false consciousnesses. The use of postcards as described here is a remarkable act of cultural appropriation. Far from being kitsch in a process of dumbing down, postcards became texts generated from the bottom up, appropriating the apparatuses and cycles of supply and demand within the capitalist economy. Certain images gained cultural currency and ascendancy precisely because they were of actual, textual use to specific audiences, even if those uses remained at the sub- or unconscious level. Lawrence Levine perhaps put it best when he wrote, “What people can do and do do is to refashion the objects created for them to fit their own values, needs, and expectations.”

With this, then, we have the questions that will shape the rest of this project: what kinds of convenient, public, image-based conversations were rural inhabitants, women, and ethnically concerned whites having amongst themselves? Why were they having these conversations at this particular historical moment? What were the historical conditions that required cultural solace or reassurance or affirmation? And how did the particularly popular holiday images of the postcard fad serve as the foundation of those conversations?

Conclusion

Writing in 1870, an author for the *Prairie Farmer* noted with near-prophetic accuracy the conveniences of a new Austrian invention called the “post card”: “While

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47 Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society,” 1373
riding in cars one may with a pencil write a few lines and drop the m’ssive into the letter box on the train or deposit it at the station…Even the farmer at his plow, or the mechanic in his shop, can write a business letter on one of these cards without leaving his work.”

Yet the writer failed to anticipate the public nature of postcards: “The correspondence between women, always of a confidential character, will as of yore be protected by a wrapper and made double secure by sealing wax.”

Forty years later, with postcards at their peak, women and other groups had cast off some of the confidentiality and security of letter-writing in favor of a public medium that offered conveniences well beyond the business applications the author envisioned. The reason for such an act, unthinkable in 1870, rested in something else the *Prairie Farmer* correspondent failed to anticipate—the power and importance of the images that would soon come to define the postcard format. Until they were altered by inferior printing processes and replaced by an even more powerful connector in the form of the telephone, these images would become key building blocks of identity and cultural assertion in the early years of the twentieth century. When making his prophecies, the writer hoped that Congress would allow “this means of conveying information” to flourish. He just had no idea the kinds of information postcards would end up conveying.

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49 Ibid.
4: Field and Fountain, Moor and Mountain: The Rural Landscape of the American Postcard Fad

The isolation which existed in many parts of the country has been overcome; the people are in daily communication with their friends in the rest of the world; the daily papers and magazines come to the door of every farmhouse on the rural routes, and enlightenment and information are being spread throughout the land. Medical men have said that already the establishment of the rural service is having its effect upon the mentality of our country patrons, and that because of it insanity is on the decrease.¹

--Postmaster General George von L. Meyer, 1907

As Postmaster General Meyer’s comments indicate, Progressive-era bureaucrats and reformers saw the mail flowing to the rural stretches of America as part of a larger solution to “the rural problem,” of which insanity was only the tip of the iceberg.²

Another commentator put it this way: “The rural public is isolated, lonely, and wishes the social pleasures of printed matter, pictures and the like frequently renewed. Each postal-card arrival is a surprise, a little mystery, a change from routine.”³

Postcards arriving in rural mailboxes were in fact much, much more than little breaks in the routine. While at first blush there may seem to be nothing unusual to the lexicon of symbols and signs lithographed, embossed, and tinseled onto holiday

¹ “Address of Mr. Meyer, Postmaster-General, at the banquet of the New England Post-Masters’ Association, Boston, MA October 12, 1907.” (Division of Rural Mail), Entry 184, Number 6, Box 1 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC, 6.
² As Ronald Kline points out, the assumption that farm women in particular went insane more than urban counterparts went largely unchallenged until a 1913 USDA report. Ronald R. Kline, Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 90.
postcards, they are rich with meanings, just as they were a hundred years ago. This chapter argues that holidays, as presented visually on postcards, were almost exclusively imagined as idealized versions of an agrarian existence. More importantly, the rise and fall of the postcard fad precisely coincided with one of America’s most public, most discussed and discoursed, most contentious debates over the meaning of ruralness and the country life: The Country Life Movement.

Consider Figure 39:

Figure 39: Hearty Thanksgiving Greetings (front and back)
Author’s Collection

Here a family gathers in the kitchen to prepare for Thanksgiving. The kitchen is huge, with enough room for five people, a cat, heaps of produce, and still plenty of floor space to spare. Dressed in crisp, well-made clothing the family, particularly the women, could be mistaken for urban middle-class ladies, but the signifiers of their surroundings place this house and its inhabitants firmly on the farm: The barn outside the door, the freshly killed turkey being brought in (rather than a plucked and dressed one from market), the produce in baskets rather than cans or jars, suggesting it was just harvested.
The scene speaks to the family’s well being, with good clothes, a large house, and proper indications of middle-class taste such as wallpaper, a clock, and a vase of flowers. The food itself also signifies prosperity—the piles of corn and pumpkins are greater than the five could ever eat in a single meal, while the turkey is nearly as big as his executioner. The man’s hand rests on the food, indicating that the bounty is *his* property and the product of *his* labor. The message for a “hearty” Thanksgiving further emphasizes the role of food as central to the day—food that comes from this most important of men: the farmer.

As for the card’s recipient, she is exactly the type of person the survey (and the subsequent supporting research outlined in Chapters Two and Three) suggests would be part of the postcard fad. Edith Imhoff of Clarion County, Pennsylvania was 13 when she received this card in 1909. She lived on her widowed mother’s farm with her brother and two other sisters—a household of four women in all. White, and native to Pennsylvania, Edith’s heritage was German, with both her maternal grandparents born in Germany.4 The card was sent from a cousin, part of an image-based conversation circulating among kin and community. The rural character of the image reflected the rural character of the network within which it was sent, and vice-versa. Understanding postcards from the viewing position of Edith Imhoff, and her real and imagined community of rural inhabitants across the northern United States, is central to understanding not just why there was a postcard phenomenon at all, but why there was one that specifically grew by

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4 “Edith V. Imhoff” 1910 United States Federal Census, Highland District 10, Clarion County, PA
leaps and bounds between 1907 and 1909. And that piece of the puzzle centers on the Country Life Movement.

**Discourse, Debate, And Reactions to the Country Life Movement**

The Country Life Movement grew from an assortment of reformers, government officials, urban elites (both business and cultural), and educators who saw a variety of issues plaguing rural America. These forces’ greatest platform began to coalesce in late 1907 and eventually became President Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission. The Commission was to study the problems of rural America and to recommend solutions. When the Commission delivered its report in 1909, the recommendations broadly centered around three institutions—the school, the church, and cooperative associations (or lack thereof). Each of these has been examined in a rich historiography. David Danbom, for example, noted that farmers did not willingly or quietly accede to the Commission’s so-called “solutions,” as argued in his tellingly titled, *The Resisted Revolution*.  

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On the surface the Commission and its report seemed to be speaking solely about farmers and how “life on the farm occupies as good a position in dignity, desirability, and business results as the farmers might easily give it if they chose.”\(^7\) However the report (and other Country Life mouthpieces of the period) employed phrasing and narratives not relegated solely to actual agricultural workers. Beyond the institutional arguments surrounding schools and churches, the same years of 1907-1909 also saw debate swirl around how to characterize and visualize the rural home and the rural landscape. It was within this debate—about what was the rural home, the rural inhabitant, and the very nature of rural America—that the true scope of Country Life Movement’s impact can be seen, particularly considering the conditions it created relevant to postcard use.

The wider, popular idea of the rural settings—quite literally the “Country Life” and all of its multiple manifestations—was in fact the subject of all this scrutiny, not just farms, farmers, and farming. “One of the chief difficulties is the failure of country life, as it exists at present, to satisfy the higher social and intellectual aspirations of country people,” suggested the authors of the Report.\(^8\) Although such comments typecast “country people” as farmers, this farmer figure took on symbolic and metaphorical connotations that stretched beyond the activities of tilling land and raising livestock. “Country Life” became broader than just farmers, to include small towns, hamlets, and villages. Even the Country Life Commission, which tended to describe the farmer as isolated from other groups, saw that the “country town in particular has similar interests

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\(^8\) Ibid.
with the open country about it.”9 Importantly, those interests centered on something that the farmer and his small town peers shared—the core “crisis” of rural flight to more populated centers.

Commentators depicted a rural world, farm and village both, as a cultural and geographical space in freefall, and in the process, psychically linked the two. “In spite of high rents, high rates, dirt, disease, congestion of traffic, ugliness, squalor, and sooty air,” offered one author, “the large towns continue to gain at an increasing rate, while the small towns diminish, and the country villages are threatened with extinction.”10 “In a typical Middle West township the other day,” wrote another commentator, “was taken a count of changes in five years. The six miles square had been settled in homestead times and the families were on the closest terms of friendliness...Yet in a half decade 80 per cent of the land has changed hands and nearly half the families have gone to other localities...”11

In describing the “Decrease in Rural Population,” an author from the Census Bureau noted that the outflow trend in New York was consistent for communities of 10,000 or less, linking together “country districts, villages, towns and small cities.”12 “The object of this volume,” wrote the evangelist Josiah Strong in his introduction to Wilbert Anderson’s 1906 The Country Town (in language that would ring reminiscent only three years later in the Commission’s report) “is to excite interest in the problem of

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9 Ibid., 61.
the necessary social reconstruction, the improve environment, of the country town.”¹³ In establishing a conflated, singular crisis of rural flight for farm-based and small town Americans alike (again communities of 10,000 or less), the Country Life Movement’s rhetoric spilled over into other Progressive-Era narratives reaching into everything from infant mortality rates to views on prohibition.¹⁴ 

Through the words chosen, and the way they were deployed, a discursive and textual imagination and counter re-imagination of the rural world began to emerge. One crafted the notion of a rural America plagued with problems; the other resisted and challenged those assumptions. Even when this debate chose the farmer as its central figure, seemingly farm-centric arguments about soil depletion took on larger metaphorical contexts for all rural Americans about such notions as vitality, relevance, importance, moral productivity, and cultural standing. And importantly, this textual battle did not stand alone, but coincided with a timely explosion of images on postcards, postcards that we know circulated primarily outside of cities.

Although the drawings and illustrations that graced postcards were familiar and traditional, with long lineages to similar popular iconography that had been in the American consciousness for decades, in this new environment of discourse and debate a certain call-and-response/claim-and-counterclaim logic emerged that was unique to the historical moment. Standardized and abstracted types answered specific charges and recriminations by the Country Life Movement, with each motif having a counterpart in

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the discourse. Ultimately this project is most interested in the visual responses that emerged on postcards within this antagonistic atmosphere; however, the point and counterpoint that defined these years for the rural inhabitant is perhaps easier to see in the printed mediums, so let us begin there.

“Having available the best meats, the freshest vegetables and fruits, the most wholesome milk, eggs, butter and poultry, he yet has the poorest table in the world,” wrote one T.J. Norton to President Roosevelt in a letter reprinted in *Outlook*, “With the everlasting fresh air, which we in the city take hard journeys to enjoy, he usually sleeps in a small room with practically no ventilation…” “No attention” claimed another widely-circulated letter, was “paid to the sanitary conditions of the home.” Building on negative characterizations such as these, understanding and mapping the contours, shape, and visual elements of the rural home became central to the Commission’s purpose.

Quite often the descriptions of these homes were gendered. “There is no more important person, measured in influence upon the life of the nation, than the farmer's wife, no more important home than the country home,” Roosevelt told his Commission members in his appointment letter. One of the questions asked by the Commission was “Are the farm homes in your neighborhood as good as they should be under existing conditions,” to which at least one respondent answered that “the great need seemed to be a better knowledge of how to make home life attractive. Many of the women are well

15 Certainly earlier reform campaigns such as agitation for food regulation and the temperance movements included negative discussion and characterization of rural Americans; however, the sheer number of such discourses is what increased in these years, presenting a unique situation that is particular to 1907-1909.
18 Report of the Commission on Country Life, 44.
educated, she said, but lack the knowledge of home making.” 19 Ronald Kline’s “Defining Modernity in the Home” chapter of Consumers in the Country argues that, “The issue of the overworked farm woman, which had come to the fore in the nineteenth century, gained a new sense of urgency when the Country Life Commission brought the topic to national attention in 1909.”20

Farmers and their advocates did not take such characterizations lightly, and presented their own vision of the rural home. In another letter to Outlook, in response to T.J. Norton’s reprinted correspondence, a New York couple suggested that President Roosevelt and Mr. Norton visit their farm. “We can give them a bath before dinner,” they wrote, adding that the bath was a feature of their indoor plumbing, not a tub in the barn. They continued, “I doubt if the White House caterer can furnish as fresh or better ‘vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs, butter or poultry’ than we habitually serve on our table, though our guests certainly may miss some the ‘sacred ceremonial’ to which they are accustomed. Nor will there be caviare [sic].”21 “The hardscrabble farmer with a shack, a wife in calico, five children, seven dogs and a mortgage is vanishing,” suggested a reprinted piece from the San Francisco Chronicle. The author went on to suggest that in place of this outdated stereotype stood an active consumer, building and rebuilding the contours of his rural landscape in the modern era: “Among other things he got a buggy for the boys and a piano for the girls and gave the youngsters good schooling; and as things kept looking up he refurnished the old homestead, built out some verandas, put

20 Kline, Consumers in the Country, 88.
electrical power in the barns, and then bought an automobile…If the Roosevelt commission wants something to do, let it reorganize and try to ameliorate city life.”

The debate over how to accurately describe the rural homestead was not confined to newspaper and general interest journals. Even the pages of farmer-oriented publications were awash in conflicting enumerations of the farmer’s circumstances. Much of 1909 saw an ongoing dialogue about just how to describe the farmer and his property in *The Country Gentleman*, a venerable farmers’ publication based out of Albany aimed primarily at the New York and New England rural audience.

What started the controversy was a December 17, 1908 article provocatively titled “What is the Matter with Agriculture? President Roosevelt’s Uplift Commission.[sic] Can it Accomplish Anything?” In it author F.S. Peer made a case against “Government-Made Farmers,” i.e. farmers in Western states who were offered cheap Homestead Act land and were now (in Peer’s opinion) saturating the market with overproduction. In making his case, Peer turned several colorful phrases at the expense of the Eastern farmer he was supposedly writing for, calling them poorly fed and clothed. The farmer, he said, “has become the laughing stock of the store clerks, peanut vendors and bootblacks,” and that the farmer’s wife was in “such a bondage of unremitting toil as few women of the colored race ever experienced in the days of slavery.” Peer wrote very little that painted a picture of the farm itself, other than to say that the issues could not be

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22 “Lo, the Poor City Man,” *The Washington Post*, August 15, 1910, 6
resolved by getting “a hired girl for Madam Farmer, pianos for the daughters and dancing lessons for the sons.”

Yet while Peer did not spend much time visualizing the Eastern farm, his respondents used the verbiage of modern consumerism, and depictions of their homes and farms, to express their counterpoints. “Our land is becoming better,” reported a Miami County, Indiana farmer, “our farmers’ wives and daughters do less drudgery every day. The farm-house which does not contain a piano or organ is a curiosity.”

“I think Mr. Peer would be surprised,” wrote a Pennsylvania farmer, “if he should visit the farming communities of eastern Pennsylvania and see how the farmers are living; if he then says they are the ‘poorest fed’ and ‘poorest clothed’ of any class, we should be thankful that our country has no need of witnessing any real want.”

A farmer from Connecticut chimed in that “the man who builds up-to-date, modern buildings” would have no hard times, while an Oneida County man noted the hallmarks of the typical farm in his region included electric bulbs, newspapers, journals, and store-bought cloth instead of homespun.

Even into March, people were still writing: “There are farmers in all parts of our country who are making a success of farming, who are improving their farms year after year, who live in handsome houses with all the luxuries of the city.”

In each example the vocabulary employed in defending the farmer was inextricably tied to imagining his domestic circumstances and participation in the

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consumer marketplace. This applied too to all his rural brethren, whether agriculturally employed or not, for whom the farmer stood as a central metaphor. His buildings were well built, his family well fed and well clothed, his home filled with reading materials and musical instruments. And the Country Life Commission obviously heard similar messages from the farmers they interviewed. Their report noted: “Very many farm homes in all parts of the country are provided with books and periodicals, musical instruments, and all the necessary amenities. There are good gardens and attractive premises, and a sympathetic love of nature and of farm life on the part of the entire family.”

Indeed, historian David Danbom points out that even as reformers were wringing their hands over the farmer, the farmer was enjoying something of a Golden Age, benefiting from higher prices for their produce and rising land values. Danbom writes, “Other important indications of the relative prosperity of the golden age included improvements in the farm home. Rural people purchased more furnishings, kitchen devices, specialty food items, and other goods they believed would make their lives richer, easier, and more modern.”

Rural Americans obviously felt obliged to defend themselves and the outward representations of self found in their farmhouses, barns, buildings, fences, and fields. As we have seen, they did this discursively through letters, articles, and testimony to the

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29 Danbom, Born in the Country, 164. Others have argued that rural farmers were not enjoying consumer goods at a rate that would suggest a golden age. See Mary C. Neth, Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). However, the letters of farmers themselves, even if mediated by the process of an editor selecting it for publication (see John J. Fry, ““Good Farming-Clear Thinking-Right Living”: Midwestern Farm Newspapers, Social Reform, and Rural Readers in the Early Twentieth Century,” Agricultural History 78, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 34-49), indicate a desire to present themselves as consumers more in keeping with Danbom’s analysis.
Commission, and in this context they held out examples of their modernity. As Ronald Kline, another historian of rural America notes, farmers tended to agree with their urban counterparts’ privileging of the modernity concept, but “defined modernity on their own terms and exerted a fair amount of control over this process.” At the same time, a separate reaction to the reformers’ condescension emerged through the image-based symbols found on postcards.

That the core years of the Commission’s project and the peak years of the postcard fad were both 1907-1909 was no mere historical coincidence. As postcards flooded the marketplace, their images of rural settings gave visual life to another set of signs for county inhabitants to describe themselves and their surroundings. Rather than reaching forward to modernity, however, these images reached backwards into the nostalgic past. With an emphasis on the natural, the organic, and the non-manufactured, this group of images collectively spoke to all that was superior to the rural landscape, even if not modernized. And through the marketplace, the images became a self-perpetuating cycle. Images that appealed to rural and small town Americans saw increased consumption, thus encouraging more pictures of idealized rural landscapes to be produced.

If we consider the survey results, postcards circulated between rural Americans more than any other group, and amongst small town Americans at rates twice as high as their proportion of the population. Analysis of the Rural Free Delivery’s records (and even the parallels between postcards and telephones) suggests still greater rural

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30 Kline, Consumers in the Country, 88.
importance. Rural tastes and buying decisions had disproportionate impacts on what was generated for the mass marketplace. The Commission fully understood the power of images, chastising a press that “still delights in archaic cartoons of the farmer,” and suggesting, “the country ideals while derived largely from the country itself, should not be exclusive.”

Of course, nostalgia for a particular vision of rural life was not new. “To justify their choice to themselves and to others, and to mask the hard realities of farm life, rural people often embraced a series of sentimental half-truths, symbols, and myths about themselves,” writes Danbom in *The Resisted Revolution*. Historian Bryan Le Beau shows that visually, the rural idealized types and motifs in American culture began in earnest in the 1830s, and were carried through the nineteenth century by popular prints such as Currier and Ives'. Elspeth Brown in turn suggests that early twentieth century illustrators, such as those for advertisements and postcards, inherently and instinctively drew from this inherited collection of “ideal representations of American types.” Building on the work of Michael Schudson she notes that popular visual culture in this period was “a pictorial universe peopled by abstract types…individual idiosyncrasies of specific grandmothers (e.g., standing, yelling nonwhite grandmothers) are smoothed over into an abstracted “type” (seated, knitting, smiling white grandmothers) that consumers recognize instantaneously, thereby expediting the sales message or product

association.”  

However, if the overall types and representations of the rural ideal were largely similar to older forms of visual culture such as prints and chromolithographs, it was the context and conditions for these images’ reception between 1907 and 1909 that changed, particularly in light of what the Commission represented. As Danbom remarks: “The County Life Movement was most significant for what its existence indicated about the evolving position of rural America in the nation…Now farmers had become peculiar. They were objects of concern…Whatever its intentions and accomplishments, the Country Life Movement represented the diminished status and growing peripheralization of rural America.”  

By being understood to share both the characteristics and fate of farmers, small town Americans also risked becoming peculiar and peripheral.

To return to Brown’s formulation: what happens to the reception of all those benign, smiling, knitting grandmothers if suddenly the government, the press, the academy, and even the church start articulating the troubles and problems with grandmothers, and how grandmothers are in desperate need of “fixing”? More to the point, what happens to the consumption and reception of all those grandmotherly images when they are consumed and received by the very grandmothers being discussed? What are we to make of grandmothers’ viewing positions of these seemingly naturalized, idealized types in this new context?

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35 Danbom, Born in the Country, 175.
For “country people,” part of that answer lay in their participation in the consumer marketplace. Just as farmers emphasized their modernity by purchasing electric lightbulbs, store-bought cloth, and organs, so too did postcards serve as a vehicle for asserting their commercial, mass-market credentials. “Americans, particularly in the twentieth century, expressed beliefs about the role that consumerism played in their lives that were distinctive to their perceived group status,” writes historian David Blanke in *Sowing the American Dream*. Yet postcards were the best of both worlds. They were a widely reported phenomenon of the period, born out of the mechanisms of mass culture, and distributed around the world. Postcard use demonstrated a rural family’s ability to keep up with fads and fashions. However, unlike other items like lightbulbs or bicycles or wristwatches, postcards communicated both a modern sensibility and an anti-modern agenda. The rural landscape depicted in postcards was nostalgic, not progressive; sentimental, not modern.

Finally, the intersection between these two ideals—the imagined rural landscape as rural Americans wanted and wished it to be, and the participation in the consumer society—could be found in the crossroads of the holidays themselves. As cultural historian Jack Santino reminds us in his book about holidays and popular culture,

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37 Those familiar with holiday postcards will note that many postcards did feature a variety of modern inventions and technologies. Postcards frequently depicted telephones, automobiles, cameras, and aircrafts. These might seem to belie the nostalgia-building images described here; however, look closer and these modern technologies are frequently re-purposed in ways a rural viewer could understand and appreciate. Automobiles roam almost exclusively through the countryside; cameras snap shots in barnyards and fields; telephone users look out onto the rural landscape from their windows. Plus these images were given fantastic alterations that emphasized natural, rural connections—cars made from flowers; hot air balloons from clovers. Just as the mythic, nostalgic ideal of rural life could be appropriated onto a hallmark of modernity like postcards, so too did this other genre of technology images demonstrate a capacity to mix nostalgia and modernity; technology and tradition; innovation and appropriation.
“holidays are realized only through their manifestations,”38 and those who exert influence over those popular and visual manifestations (i.e. postcards) then activate an important piece of cultural discourse.

By participating heavily in one of the most prominent contemporary expressions of commercial holiday celebrations, rural Americans were staking claims over the depictions and visualization of those holidays. By making holidays rural affairs, rural Americans were demonstrating they were not peripheral at all. Postcards became the visual expression of the sentiments voiced in 1909 by one letter-writer: “The wife of the farmer whose day is spent in the care of her home, though it be hard and confining, is much better off living her simple life than a majority of her city sisters who appear to have all that they require to make life easy.”39

Touring the Postcard Countryside

Having seen the printed debate surrounding the rural home and landscape, we can now turn to the visual culture that emerged simultaneously and functioned in similar ways to the printed discourse. Examining these strains of visual culture can also take on the trappings of a tour in our mind’s eye, in large part because defined physical spaces and objects served as the focal point on postcard images.

Thus taking into account the fullest range of consistently repeated tropes in postcards, we see not only fields and farms, but forests too. If this is a surprise today, it

39 “President Roosevelt,” Morning Olympian, January 21, 1909, 2.
would not have seemed unusual at a time when rural inhabitants—farmers and villagers alike—would have viewed the forest as a logical extension of their mise-en-scène for holidays. One of the members of the Country Life Commission was Gifford Pinchot, first head of the newly formed National Forest Service and a longtime advocate for what we might today call the sustainable use of forests. His presence on the Commission reflected an understanding that ruralness and wilderness could often merge. The Commission’s report reflected a belief that forests often related to farms: “The conservation of forests and brush on watershed areas is important to the farmer along the full length of streams regardless of the distance between the farm and these areas.”

More than their practical application, forests were psychically linked as an extension of the mystique of the rural. In writing about Arbor Day, historian Leigh Eric Schmidt suggests, “Elements not only of conservation but also of community and the continuity of generations found expression in trees…Trees came to represent not only a love of nature, but a ‘love of home.’” Contemporary accounts, such as Raphael Zon’s essay on the communal forests of Europe published in 1908, offered readers the opportunity to imagine forests as extensions of their own idealized home, “Besides these financial advantages, the communal forests in Europe exercise—and there is no reason why they should not exercise also in this country—a most beneficial moral influence on

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40 Report of the Commission on Country Life, 73.
the members of communities, by creating in them a feeling of local attachment, and by adding fresh charm to rural life.”42

Forests thus embodied the liminal spaces between the outlying edge of the American population and wilderness, but into which rural audiences could project a justifiable claim. Raphael Tuck and Son’s Oilette series particularly captured this notion. Designed to reproduce real oil paintings, down to visual brushstrokes and occasional frames, the Oilette postcards were collectible substitutes for an artist’s work, the original of which would have served as a marker of respectability and bourgeois success if hung in a home.43 In these faux oil paintings sturdy, plump horses tromp through bucolic wooded hills in offerings of A Merry Christmas. A male buck deer in full rack strolls through a snow-covered glade with New Years Greetings, or a group of deer suggests Christmas Greetings. The forests of these images and others are vibrant and healthy and teeming with wildlife, far cries from the Commission on County Life’s assertion that “forests have been exploited for private gain until not only has the timber been seriously reduced, but until streams have been ruined…Probably there has never occurred a more reckless destruction of property that of right should belong to all the people.”44 (Figure 40)

43 Notes Saloni Mathur, “The close relationship between postcards and painting was an important factor in the collectability of cards, transforming what was cheap and widespread into something perceived as an original product. For only a few pennies it was possible for anyone to create a gallery of their own oilettes.” Saloni Mathur, “Collecting Colonial Postcards of India,” in Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities, ed. Antoinette M. Burton (London: Routledge, 1999), 104
Art historian Julia Rosenbaum demonstrates the larger American/national shift in the early twentieth century to exactly this kind of motif, writing “Eastern audiences and critics responded to the small over the expansive, the intimate over the panoramic,” and that woodland scenes such as these grew in favor because of their “implied proximity to human habitation and settlement.” In postcards men take their draft horse and sledge into the forest to harvest Christmas flora. Shepherds guide their flock through the trees.

In one reading, these images were just an extension of the larger cultural movement Rosenbaum describes, and would have included urbanites and city dwellers who idealized the countryside. To the audiences already residing in that countryside, however, such images had the potential to make more precise claims. Far from viewing the forests as belonging to “all the people,” these were spaces being reimagined in ways that privileged rural audiences. While Eastern—and more importantly urban—critics like John Van Dyke promoted and idealized paintings that created intimate country and wooded scenes, the Oilette images (and the myriad of other lines from other firms) literally took the genre out of urban elite hands and transplanted them into the rural home. Certainly the style of the cards, with their imitation of oil paintings, helped advance rural claims to middle-class respectability. But the content of the cards went further still, with postcard images extending the reach of rural inhabitants into the forest, in effect annexing it as a part of rural property. From there such images also gave claim to rural families over the contents of the forest, like the two gathering Christmas decorations onto their

45 Rosenbaum, Visions of Belonging, 90.
sledge. The sledge suggests that they have come from nearby—a rural farm or village being in obvious proximity to the woods. (Figure 41)

Images of hunting and hunters are another expression of rural annexation, a trope that emerged most consistently around Thanksgiving, but also other times during the year. Still the violence of the hunt (i.e. the violence against the forest) was rarely shown. Instead, it was diffused by either comic depictions of children hunting; the nostalgic portrayal of a historic, pilgrim hunter victorious only after the act of killing has already taken place; or by placing the hunter en-route to his hunt or in some other benign, non-aggressive stance. Stylistically these cards could often resemble a comic or cartoon, further emphasizing their humorous and non-threatening portrayals of violence. (Figure 42)

The forest offered up its bounty in other ways as well. In this idealized landscape men entered the forest in order to hunt while women entered it in order to gather items of interest and beauty. Martha Foote Crow’s 1915 treatise *The American Country Girl* is filled with descriptions evoking such scenes: “Trees, birds, ferns, wild flowers and garden flowers, are all beloved. She has a scientific spirit as well as artistic. She has made collections of pressed wild flowers…” and “She will go to the woods and bring ferns and put them into pots to set about the house. She will bring wild flowers and carry them with all sorts of dainties to neighboring houses where there is illness.”46 Hilda Richmond

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reminded her readers in *Country Gentleman*, “Dame Nature’s pretty things,” such as evergreen, berries and grasses, cost the country gift-giver nothing come Christmastime.47

Literary descriptions like these lent themselves easily to postcards’ visual iconography—particularly that of Easter, when blond rural girls wearing attractive, middle-class hats and coats could engage in picking handfuls of flowers in the wild. While the action privileges the rural experience, the type of girl (white complexion, long blond hair, florally decorated hat, bright pink dress) privileges a certain ethnic and racial configuration that emphasizes socially constructed respectability and a commitment to good bourgeois markers of taste and refinement. (Figure 43)

![Figure 40: Oilette Christmas Greetings](image1)
![Figure 41: Sledge in the Forest](image2)

Figure 40: Oilette Christmas Greetings
The uninhabited forest was the first stop within the idealized rural landscape. Unlike the charges of reformers, these forests were healthy and filled with wildlife.

Author’s collection

Figure 41: Sledge in the Forest
Forests became logical extensions of the rural landholder’s space, and were places that provided additional bounty to the rural home at the holidays.

Author’s collection

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Hunting was another way that the rural man could lay claim to the bounty of the forest; however, the violence of the hunt was rarely shown. This card employs several strategies to imagine the rural claim to the forest, without depicting the act of killing. First, the card uses comedy, with the rabbit pleading with the hunter while a turkey sneaks past behind him. The card also distances us from the violence of hunting by making it an anachronistic hunter, equipped in colonial clothing and carrying a musket. Finally, by making the hunter a child instead of an adult, the hunt is also made more innocent.

In all of these, actual rural consumers of mass-marketed postcards could visualize themselves as perfect rural consumers of the naturally made bounty offered by the forest. Historians Sarah Bonnemaison and Christine Macy argue that late nineteenth and early twentieth century conservation movements, such as the Boone and Crockett Club, sought to marginalize the farmer as the central figure of the mythic wilderness.\textsuperscript{48} Attempting to

remove the farmer from narratives about wilderness and the forest would have been seen by the rural inhabitant as yet another form of attack, similar to the others from the period. By taking the viewing position of the farmer or country villager—those participating so heavily in a fad that melded wilderness mythologies with holiday traditions—we can see how these audiences sought to regain that central place in the narrative, highlighting their claims to and glorification of the forest.

The forest could give to the country denizen in other ways. Consider Santa. Historian William Leach argues that during this period, it was the department store and urban commercial centers that began to appropriate the image of Santa Claus. “Before the mid-1890s,” he writes, “Santa Claus seems to have been an icon unattached to any single institution except the private bourgeois home and hearth…but when the large department stores first began to overshadow retail districts, Santa Claus’s status also started to metamorphose. The big merchants laid claim to him and to the imagery of the Christmas holiday.”

Postcards worked against this trend. The traditional mythology of Santa Claus distributing presents to children in their homes was common to postcards, but a large number of images relocated the site of this ritual to the forest. In this reimagining of the tradition, the forest again becomes a place of bounty, and distribution of goods to consumers. Unlike a shot turkey or bouquet of picked flowers, however, the forest is made even more efficient to the modern consumer’s needs by its ability to produce

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manufactured items for consumption. Santa’s pack may be in the forest, but it brims with mass-produced toys.

In these images a central dilemma for farmers is resolved—how to demonstrate participation in the consumer culture without privileging cities, department stores, and urban markets as necessary for consumption. In real life this dilemma was resolved by mail order catalogs and parcel post delivery on rural mail routes, both of which were heavily discussed in the context of the County Life Movement. Santa in the forest gave a mythological answer to the same problem, in essence becoming the personification of the Montgomery Ward or Sears Roebuck catalog and the Western Union delivery all rolled into one rural-centric, holiday-based ideal.50

Moreover, this trope also reasserted the supremacy of the rural child over his city cousin. Whereas the narrative of Santa going to every home for his Christmas deliveries is a very inclusive one, transferring that location to the forest was a powerful act of exclusion. Obviously only those with access to the forest, i.e. children who live on farms and villages at the forests’ periphery, could then enjoy the bounty of Santa’s gifts. In many images, Santa is simply en-route through the forest on foot, but even these images have larger implications. Where is Santa traveling too? Only homes that are walking distance from the forest, again homes of the countryside, are within his reach. (Figure 44)

In our mind’s eye tour, from forests one next entered the meadow, field, and outskirts of the farmer’s land. Fences became symbols of this shifting position, a visual reminder of the farmer’s handiwork and labor. Fences were also metaphors that could be employed by reformers against the farmer. “Until the farmer can learn to look over his own fence to the world outside…he must continue to occupy an inferior position,” noted a work from 1918, while a 1911 tract to rural ministers urged them to “mow the weeds, repair the fence, set out shade trees…” as evidence of their value and leadership to the community.51 When Cornell University developed a scorecard to rate farms on a 1-100 scale, fences ranked as important as “Timber, Vineyards, Orchards, etc.” and the size and shape of fields.52 Like other aspects of the rural landscape, fences and the portions of land they surrounded were not neutral ground.

Fences prefigured in all holidays, providing a perch for jack-o-lanterns or cupids, but their psychic resonance lay in communicating the beginning of the rural, thoroughly abundant farm. The girl who sits on the fence holding a bright green Easter egg is also sitting at the end of her family’s property. The foregrounded fence thus signifies ownership of all behind it—and of course, all behind it is idealized as a lush green piece of real estate with red roofed buildings and a winding lane to the house. At Thanksgiving a blond puritan girl stands before a moonlit field with tall sheaves of wheat, the space cordoned off by a sturdy fence. The prosperity of the farm literally bursts past the fence, as fat pumpkins roll out to the young woman’s feet. (See Figures 45-46 )

51 Howard Thompson Lewis, *The Rural School and the Community* (Boston: R.G. Badger, 1918), 15 and “Address by Mr. Holden,” in *Proceedings of the Third National Conservation Congress at Kansas City, Missouri* (Kansas City, MO: National Conservation Congress, 1912), 76
Figure 44: Santa in the Forest

Santa in the forest emphasized the rural connection to the consumer marketplace. Santa’s bounty of toys and goods reaches the hinterlands just as easily as the big city, thanks to real-life inventions like the mail order catalog, Rural Free Delivery, and telephones by which to place orders. In fact, this Santa actually privileges the rural, by emphasizing the type of place he has chosen to stop. With him on foot, no flying sleigh in sight, he has chosen to focus on a rural village, not the city.

Author’s collection

Figure 45: Girl on Fence

The well-constructed fence served as a reminder of the family’s personal accomplishment and status as a virtuous farmer. With the farmhouses far in the distance, the fence signals material wealth—all the lands behind the fence are marked as the family’s, a symbol of their prosperity.

Author’s Collection

Fences were also typically shown in good repair, indicative of good values. The Senate’s 1910 volume on *Recent Immigrants in Agriculture* for the Committee on Immigration (the famed Dillingham Commission) consistently linked fences with the “lower orders” of immigrants such as Jewish and Polish farmers: “In general, the Hebrew does not give as much attention to repairs on buildings and fences, or care of his tools, as does his neighbor,” the report found, repeating later “…the Hebrew is not born a farmer and can not be made an agriculturist. Another noticeable fact that tends to confirm this opinion is the carelessness of the average Hebrew about the appearance of his house, barnyard, and
buildings…The yard fences are seldom neat, well built, or in good repair.” Lest they be accused not only of poor farming but also of poor ethnic heritage, the images of the idealized farm kept fences sturdy and well maintained.

Figure 46: Fences and Bounty
Here the fence is used to show that the bounty of the farmer is so vast, that even his well-constructed fence cannot contain it. Pumpkins spill out while tall sheaves of wheat stand in the field beyond.

Figure 47: Healthy Meadows
Fields and meadows in postcards showed prosperity brought on by rich, healthy soil. As transitional zones from the forest to the farm, they too reflected abundance and vitality—far cries from the charges of the Country Life Movement.

While fences in the foreground usually signaled the beginning of the flourishing farm, a fence in the background typically translated into a final grassy transition zone from field to farm. Bright, green meadows could be filled with frolicking rabbits or broods of chicks at Easter, and then switch into golden plains for turkeys come Thanksgiving. In either case, the underlying message was the same: the meadow’s health

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and abundance carried up to the fence and then beyond into the farmer’s cultivated lands. By projecting images of vitality across the tops of meadows and fields, farmers were visually communicating that the soil beneath was also healthy. (Figure 47) While perhaps this seems odd at first, one has to realize how much healthy soil was a major preoccupation of Country Life reformers, and another topic where farmers could feel under attack.

In their chapter on “Soil Depletion and its Effects” the Commission informed the reader: “The social condition of any agricultural community is closely related to the available fertility of the soil. ‘Poor land, poor people’ and ‘rough land, rough people,’ have long since passed into proverbs.”54 Farmers were frequently accused of exhausting their lands, often by adhering to outdated modes of farming. Successful Farming, an Iowa-based periodical that tended to provide a voice for Country Life Movement ideals, explicitly linked the worth of the farmer with the vitality of his land: “The successful farmer does have a better farm than his unsuccessful neighbor, but it is not the lay of the land that is responsible…On a level stretch of prairie with only a wire fence between, one farm will improve and the other decline in productiveness and value. It is the individuality of the two farmers that accounts for the difference.” Naturally for Successful Farming, the good Progressive farmer with excellent soil and productivity maintained it by adhering to Progressive-era prescriptions. He was “conspicuous at the institute and grange. He has his say at the school meeting and everywhere.”55 Just as worn down fences could indicate moral turpitude, so too was worn-out soil an indication of a bad

54 Report of the Commission on Country Life, 84.
55 “Individuality in Farming,” Successful Farming, May 1909, 3.
farmer—both in practice and in virtue. And as noted earlier, such metaphors and symbols carried meanings beyond actual tillage and crop rotation. The entire moral character of the countryside, embodied within soil, was under scrutiny.

Farmers undoubtedly resented this implication as much as any of the others. Many had been working for some time to improve their soil’s vitality. As Stephenson Whitcomb Fletcher pointed out in his nearly 450-page volume on soil in 1907: “During the last quarter of the nineteenth [sic] century emphasis was placed most emphatically on tillage—‘good tillage,’ ‘thorough tillage,’ ‘better tillage,’ and similar captions were the subjects for more articles in farm papers and more talks at farmers’ institutes than any other operation of farming.” It was a sentiment shared by a letter writer in Texas who argued, “The people generally have been engaged for several years in doing most everything that the President’s commission urges them to commence.”

As historian Steven Stoll illustrates, the conflation of soil health and morality was nothing new. He writes that in the 1850s, “…the editors of Soil of the South had nothing good to say,” and “came down hard on the Anglo-American occupation of Alabama, Mississippi, and other states of the Old Southwest.” Northerners, and especially New England farmers, were not going to risk being compared to the slave-holding, soil-depleting Old South, and in their pushback to reformers, the transitional zones of meadow and forests stood in for signs of overall health of the land, and thus the moral health of region. “D” in New Haven, CT chastised those who sought to reinvent farming

57 “Twenty Minutes Late,” Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 26, 1909, 6.
when things were working just fine: “The innovation of new inventions has cast adrift the population that once lived on the farm, who, with the instructors of modern life, have forgotten the ways of the fathers. A few things remind us of perpetual truths—the forest, the stream, and the meadow are the same.”

While meadows and glens spoke to the overall vitality of the entire idyllic rural landscape (including its soil, air, and water), the real heart of the country landscape lay in farmers’ fields. These too became symbols that spoke to rural postcard users by reaffirming their own mythologies. This was a time that university professors and government administrators were insisting that farms were under-producing. These were not casual or incidental observations. Report after report from 1907-1911 (we are reminded yet again of the near perfect synchronicity to the postcard fad) insisted with growing alarm that productivity per acre had remained static or gone down. The topic of underproduction became what David Danbom calls “one of the most talked-about economic issues” of the period.

And yet, the rural fantasy world of postcards, abundance was never better. The process might begin in spring with Easter postcards, portraying the beginning of the agricultural cycle. A card with Jesus walking along a freshly tilled tract transforms him from merely the Good Shepherd to a surrogate of the Good Farmer. (Figure 48) The real payoff came at Halloween and Thanksgiving, harvest festivals that lent themselves perfectly to visions of bounty on the farm. “May the fruit of honest labor; bring joy to you and your neighbor” was a popular couplet that was paired with images of harvest,

60 Danbom, The Resisted Revolution, 36.
emphasizing both the farmer’s hard work and the huge bounty provided by that “honest labor.” Fields could figuratively be turned over to the ubiquitous cornucopia, the horn of plenty that spewed forth the riches of the land. And postcard artists and their voracious country audiences could go further still, unbounded by the conventions of reality.

Gigantism related to images of farm-produced food ran rampant in postcards—giant eggs emerged at Easter, giant pumpkins at Halloween and Thanksgiving, as well as giant turkeys for the latter.  

61 Again, many of these visual traditions existed prior to 1907. See T. J. Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America (New York: Basic Books, 1994). However, it is
Figure 50: The Fruit of Honest Labor
If abundance was a hallmark of Thanksgiving postcards, a popular couplet explicitly linked that abundance to the farmer’s “honest labor.” In an increasingly industrial society, the emphasis on “honest labor” as a synonym for “rural” also implied that non-rural labor was less than honest, or at the very least an inferior kind of labor.

Figure 51: Giant Turkey
Gigantism was another way of visually demonstrating the bounty of the rural landscape. It was an artistic way through fantasy to counter arguments that farmers were under-producing, and not achieving the yields they could if only they followed County Lifer prescriptions.

The tour could continue with an analysis of images of barnyards, barns, ponds, coops, and other rural sites, but the results are invariably the same—every point within the farmer’s typography was an opportunity for criticism by Progressives and their ilk, and every point was in turn reimagined more beautiful, more scenic, more idyllic on postcards. Purchased by the millions (perhaps even billions), these were the images that rural households were handing off to their rural delivery carriers to send out to the world. Yet, in some ways, these exterior scenes of postcards are the low-hanging fruit, easily

both the context of the Country Life Movement paired with the empirical evidence of audience that compels us to see this as a unique question of reception specific to the historical moment and circumstances.
plucked and analyzed. We can clearly see the unabashedly rural depictions of holidays in them. However, interior scenes also existed as a major postcard type, and those are perhaps not as easily categorized as definitively rural. As we have seen, farmers were eager to assert their credentials of purchased luxury goods and popular items of taste in order to make themselves indistinguishable (both textually and visually) from their urban brethren.

**Moving Inside: Reading the Interior Spaces of Postcards**

Perhaps one way to examine the question of whether interior scenes can also be considered rural scenes is to peek through the windows, as so many postcard inhabitants did. Windows were a frequent location for interaction—children peering out to view witches on Halloween or witches peeking in to watch the children engaged in holiday rituals. Santa or angels could be placed in similar positions, sometimes looking in unnoticed and unknown, other times fully engaged through the windowpane or across the windowsill. Images of windows become useful to us today because they help us position the house’s location relative to its surroundings. As we peek through windows to see homogenized interiors of middle class consumerism, we can simultaneously look outside to see where those middle class consumer families might reside. And more often than not, their position was rural.\(^{62}\)

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\(^{62}\) Barry Shank also notes the use of windows as a motif in greeting cards, but divorces it from a rural audience and instead describes the idealization as “the enunciation of modern sentiment.” See Shank, *A Token of My Affection*, 177
In one popular Raphael Tuck and Sons card, two girls look outside their window to spy a witch flying by. The interior view speaks to bourgeois respectability. A heavy red velvet curtain is pulled back with a gold tasseled sash. Rich red carpet can be found on the floor. Large books are scattered throughout, suggesting that well-bred and educated young women reside in this house. But through the window we see a rural landscape, filled with moonlit trees. There are no clear buildings except a solitary steepled church. In another image, a mother reads to her two children at Christmastime, again emphasizing books and learning in the household. She sits on a plush window bench, framed by an ornate arched window with an intricate frame. Heavy gold curtains, also held by decorative tiebacks, complete the scene of respectability, yet through the window snowy hills stretch to the horizon, broken only by a line of trees at the end. Again, there are no other buildings, no hint of an urban existence. Instead, these fantastical windows—hardly practical within rural architectural norms—endow the rural landscape with almost mythic or storybook idealizations (emphasized by the placement of books). (Figures 52-53)
Figure 52: Tuck Halloween
These children look out a window that could be part of any urban, middle class home. The furnishings, the books, the fabrics all indicate a bourgeois interior. However, through the window we see they are in the rural landscape, with a single steepled church and perhaps a solitary house in the distance. Such rural interiors were a far cry from the pictures painted by Country Life reformers.

Figure 53: Rural Christmas
Rich fabrics on the window seat and curtains, as well as the mother’s dress, also denote middle class respectability and material comfort. However, through the window we see that this is clearly a rural family, not a city one, living in that imagined material comfort. In this image in particular, the fantasy of an idealized rural landscape becomes intertwined with elements of storybook imagination and bedtime stories. The window not only opens up onto snowy rural hills, but is itself a storybook creation, more befitting a chateaux than a farmhouse. For rural audiences, the conversation of images could readily embrace such fantasies of idealization, especially as an antidote to Country Life narratives.

Pushing further into the interior spaces depicted on postcards, we encounter another group of cards with no exterior or outdoor element that mark them as rural. Away from the doors and windows, as viewers we are positioned entirely within interior holiday spaces. Without a window to peer out these could be read as either rural or urban. At last we seem to have run out of tropes that privilege the rural experience and level the
playfield in a general nod to generic middle-class consumer kinship. It is possible to look closer, though, particularly from a recreated viewing position within a rural network of exchange, communication, and conversation. Within that understood rural-based conversation even these spaces seem coded after all, with subtle hints at which rooms are in rural homes and which ones are in cities.

Four postcards, representative of many more in the genre, have been selected to help parse out the differences. (Figures 54-57) In all four we have interior images of festivities. The participants are dressed up for the occasion, the rooms are appropriately decorated, and the faces are all happy. In the country scenes, both of which are for Thanksgiving, the families have large tables onto which they can spread out and display the bounty of the day. By contrast, in what can be read as city scenes, the Christmas family (a family that is itself smaller than the other two) must work with a cramped, circular table that is crowded the decorations, crystal, cutlery, and a massive orange lamp—but very little food. Only the Christmas ham can be seen. The New Year’s Eve couple sits at a similarly cramped table, interestingly enough with almost exactly the same lamp, and in a similarly cramped room. They might even be celebrating their holiday in a restaurant. In both city scenes there is almost no noticeable foreground, while the rural scenes seem to have plenty of space in the dining room. As for the city dwellers themselves—the New Years couple’s clothing is much more elaborate, especially hers, in marked contrast to the crisp, white aprons of the Thanksgiving rural matrons. In the Thanksgiving scene where the family is arriving into the room, other rural hints exist
such as rag rugs on the floor and a needlework “Home Sweet Home” hanging above the fireplace.

One should not overreach in this analysis, but having established the importance of rural audiences to the postcard phenomenon’s success, it is possible to delineate some value judgments attached to these images from the rural perspective. Two small but important points emerge. First, the first two postcards do reveal a tonal favoritism for the rural experience through their signifiers—larger families, more food, and more space—that would have been translated and decoded, particularly by rural and small town audiences, as more wholesome and appropriate to the way holidays should be celebrated. This can partially be explained as the difference between Thanksgiving versus the Christmas and New Year’s Eve holidays, but the impression left on the viewer is one that registers “rural” for two images and “city” for the others, and cannot help but rank them hierarchically because of how they are coded and inscribed.
Figure 54: Country Interior I
Here a large family gathers around an equally large table. A complete spread of food, with more arriving from one of the women, speaks to the bounty of the rural home. The room is spacious and everyone has plenty of elbowroom. Although rural, these inhabitants are well dressed, attractive, and live in comfortable surroundings.

Author’s collection

Figure 55: Country Interior II
Again, this shows a rural interior that is respectable and comfortable, and filled with food and family. The space is more decidedly country, with rag rugs on the floor, cane seated chairs, and a “home sweet home” above the fireplace. The dining room is made to look enormous, in opposition to tight, urban scenes.

Author’s collection

Figure 56: Urban Interior, Christmas
Although these urbanites appear happy, their holiday experience does show deficiencies. Their cramped interior space is cluttered and crowded. There is hardly any food on the table to celebrate the holiday, just the ham. And they are a small family—their celebration relegated to just the three of them, not the larger groupings of families that rural celebrants have.

Author’s Collection

Figure 57: Urban Interior, New Years
Like the Christmas family, these two also operate within confining space. Their wealth and opulence, especially hers, are also marked contrasts to the matronly and maternal rural depictions of women. If read as set in a restaurant, it further removes them from the familial hearth of a country home.

Author’s Collection
Additionally, the cards (and others that are similar in theme) hint not only at a rural/urban dichotomy, but the presence of class as a register along this same scale. It is the opulence of the “city” scenes that helps create the cramped spaces in the first place. The oversized lampshade, the woman’s extraordinary dress and hat, the more elaborate chairs, an imagined restaurant scene with even more cramped people perhaps lurking beyond the edges—all of these contribute to the visual claustrophobia of the urban scenes. The implication is that the presumed wealth required to stage the interiors of the city homes is itself part of the problem—urban inhabitants went overboard in their consumption. By contrast consider again the two country interiors as well as the two window scenes of Figures 52 and 53. In these images simplicity contributes to the cleaner lines and wider spaces of the country interiors. These homes are not devoid of the markers of middle class respectability. They and other interior images from postcards reveal good furniture, nice rugs, and other expensive indications of prosperity like grandfather clocks or pianos. But they are not over-done, over-staged, or over-sized in a style that conflates urbanity with upper class, conspicuous consumption. (Figure 58)
Figure 58: Rural and Middle Class Interiors

Postcards like this one emphasized space within the home, but not at the expense of middle-class markers of respectability, such as the grandfather clock. If we presume that this is a rural interior, rather than a city one, the attractive furnishings and decorations emphasize middle class values that would have been shared across rural and urban lines. But unlike city interiors, the restraint shown here to resist clutter and overconsumption also emphasizes a superior vision of how the rural middle class lived (at least as created by a conversation of images circulating among rural Americans).

Author’s Collection

Finally, the quartet invites us to seek some sort of equivalency between rural and urban images. We know, of course, urban inhabitants bought postcards and celebrated holidays. And through these postcards we can see interiors in which both rural families and urban families function in the execution of holiday traditions. In other words, there is a pivot point here, where we can turn from rural to urban, retrace our steps, and presumably discover similar results. In the same way we approached the rural house through the woods, the meadows, the fields, the fences, and the yard we should see equivalencies for the urban dweller. Backing out of those cramped, interior scenes with
orange lamps, we should be able to emerge into scenes with streets, trolleys, multistory buildings, parks, department stores, and holiday parades. And yet, even amid thousands and thousands of holiday postcard images, such settings are almost entirely absent.63

Visualizing Urban Holidays

Ironically during this same period, cities were the subject of discursive critique and complaints that rivaled those of the Country Life Movement. Progressives railed against a multitude of perceived urban problems, and as historian Steven Diner notes, “simultaneously put forward a host of proposals aimed at the cities’ social ills” attacking everything from housing to education, living conditions to participation in the consumer society.64 In other words, complaints about the failures of urban life were often variations on the very same arguments that sought to transform rural inhabitants into problems to be studied and solved.

And yet, even though nearly a third of the nation’s population in 1910 lived in the 229 cities of 25,000 or more, there was no equivalent within the postcard fad to try and assert an urban-based vision of holidays as a bastion against these attacks.65 Why did urbanites cede the biggest visual phenomenon of the period to rurals, who wholeheartedly

63 It is worth remembering that at the individual level, these postcards could be indicative of any number of personalized, intimate, and entirely unique conversations between specific individuals that would be impossible to recreate. Of the thousands or millions of copies of a single printed postcard, the images of Figures 56 and 57 could represent individualized contexts, such as a little girl who was the only child in a family, or a newlywed couple spending a New Year’s Eve honeymoon in the city. These individualized readings are beyond the scope of this project. Rather, using the historical evidence of mass audiences, we must look at these cards from a more “macro” level, recreating the larger cultural conversation of images represented by the totality of the phenomenon.
poured their ideals, their fantasies, and their visions of perfection into postcard signifiers? Why were urban postcard users willing to accept this entirely rural visualization of the same holidays that they were celebrating too?66

On the surface there are several obvious answers these questions. First, cities had long relinquished the mantle of myth building, hyperbole, metaphor and symbolism to their rural counterparts. As Richard Hofstadter notes in the opening chapter of The Age of Reform, “Out of the beliefs nourished by the agrarian myth there had arisen the notion that the city was a parasitical growth on the country. [William Jennings] Bryan spoke for a people raised for generations on the idea that the farmer was a very special creature, blessed by God, and that in a country consisting largely of farmers the voice of the farmer was the voice of democracy and of virtue itself.”67 Unlike country people who were now being problemitized in a significant way for the first time in the early twentieth century, city dwellers had endured such scrutiny for decades and generations—one might argue they simply had thicker skin that did not need the assuaging comfort of visual validation.

Also, urban dwellers often embraced the myths of the rural ideal as readily as farmers. Danbom writes that among urban people there were many who were “sentimentalists and nostalgics whose praise of the countryside was a species of symbolic homage paid to a life which they understood imperfectly.”68 There was a strong Back-to-the-Land element within the larger Country Life Movement, urbanites who urged their

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66 Particularly postcard collectors with access to thousands of images could undoubtedly find a few that can be argued as “urban” in nature; however, this characterization is based on my own perception of the overall proportions of rural images, having reviewed tens (perhaps even hundreds) of thousands over the past few years.
68 Danbom, The Resisted Revolution, 3625
fellow city dwellers to buy farms and move to the country, as well as an aesthetic of “rustic simplicity” among urban purveyors of taste and design.\textsuperscript{69} Plus within the many postcard genres, urbanites did see their streets, buildings (including markers of modernity like the skyscraper), and homes memorialized in the plethora of photographic view cards sold. With a visual outlet all their own (some view cards depicted rural environments, but non-urban views were primarily scenic wonders), urban consumers may have been happy to enjoy a mix of urban view cards and sentimental rural holiday cards.

However, these answers are not entirely satisfactory. As Jackson Lears suggests, the visual iconography of other media during the period had been moving towards city-based motifs. He writes that for advertising in the late nineteenth century a new visual vocabulary formed “with the rise of industrial production and the emergence of a powerful new icon of abundance: the factory.”\textsuperscript{70} Between 1900 and 1920, images of mechanization, “the deus ex machina” of the factory system, and the emblems of technological wonders were in ascendancy until, as Lears writes, “By the 1920s, science was reified and venerated as an autonomous force.”\textsuperscript{71} From here Roland Marchand expands on this point. “Advertising agencies,” he says, “almost invariably depicted typical consumers as urbanites” throughout the 1920s and 30s.\textsuperscript{72} At least for advertising, the road from mythical rural to powerful factories, glittering urban skylines, and urbanite consumers ran directly through the years of the postcard fad and yet left almost no discernable traces on postcards.

\textsuperscript{69} Leach, \textit{Land of Desire}, 202.
\textsuperscript{70} Lears, \textit{Fables of Abundance}, 110.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{72} Marchand, \textit{Advertising the American Dream}, 79.
Nor do we see what Carolyn Kitch sees in her analysis of magazine covers from the period: “Whereas the promise of uptown gentility and wealth had been represented in the figure of the Gibson Girl at the turn of the century, the dangers of the downtown world of the working classes were represented in popular media through the figures of women after 1910.”73 In postcards we hardly ever see uptown or downtown, only small town and out-of-town. Nor do we see any of the sights central to Leigh Eric Schmidt’s discussion of commercialism and holidays for our period, such as “the holiday charm, mechanical sophistication, and sheer grandeur of the decoration” found in urban department store windows or the legions of “urban women who led the way as purchasers and preparers of Christmas gifts.”74 And as already noted, the urban department store Santa Claus that William Leach describes as central to period’s constructions of Christmas is instead relocated to the countryside on postcards.

Finally, if we want to accept that photographic postcards and artist-produced holiday postcards together met the demands of urban audiences, it still does not explain why there was not crossover between them. As historian Alison Isenberg notes, even the photographic postcard was the product of artists: “Based on photographic negatives, the postcard images were altered by artists and hand colored to present the desired view… With tiny paint brushes, artists touched up photographs to repair broken-down sidewalks, to remove offending utility poles or signs, and to pave streets…”75 With postcard firms employing artists for their view cards, why did these urban idealizations—

74 Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, 149.
these “dense streetscape of entrepreneurs presiding over a managed, simplified, and beautified retail corridor” that Isenberg writes of—disappear in artist-drawn holiday postcards which would seem the ideal place to celebrate beautified retail and commercial spaces?

In other words, there were visual and material cultural trends afoot in this same period that could have given display to an urban and urban holiday nomenclature, but somehow remained removed from the visual output. Now, it should be said that other predominately pictorial depictions of holidays, such as magazine covers, on first blush seem to reveal the same instincts. It is difficult to find a definitely urban, outdoor scene in the holiday covers of these years for such mainstream publications as Collier’s, Lady’s Home Journal, McCall’s, The Saturday Evening Post, and Harper’s Weekly. At first, this might appear to undermine part of the argument—if cityscapes were absent here too, is it correct to suggest that postcard imagery was somehow special, somehow indicative of what was happening to rural Americans?

But there were differences. If exterior scenes of skyscrapers and department stores were missing from holiday magazine covers, so too are cows, barnyards, and chicken coops. Instead, magazine publishers and their artist illustrators like Maxfield Parrish and J.C. Leyendecker tended to aim for the middle. When creating a scene that was exterior, they most commonly placed their central figures in a sea of whitespace. With definitely urban or rural backgrounds removed, holiday tropes such as Christmas carolers,

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76 Ibid., 42.
77 Survey of covers: Collier’s, Lady’s Home Journal, McCall’s, The Saturday Evening Post, and Harper’s Weekly (All issues, 1907-1909)
Valentine ladies with love letters, and Baby New Years instead floated within the neutral settings of a white background. F. Rogers’ 1909 Halloween cover for *The Saturday Evening Post* typifies the technique and illustrates its usefulness. In the image a young woman is lighting a jack-o-lantern. The scene is set outdoors, but she is against an entirely white background. Before her is the fencepost on which the jack-o-lantern sits, and the tops of a couple white fence pickets. Still, the fence gives no indication of its location—it could be in front of an urban brownstone, a suburban bungalow or a rural farmhouse. 78 (Figure 59)

This approach differed from that of postcard illustrators who chose to create their *mise-en-scène* with all the trappings of the rural visual lexicon, leaving no ambiguity. Likewise the woman’s appearance offers no clues. Though clean, elegantly coifed, and very attractive, her attire is remarkably neutral in any signification other than middle-class. She could be a farm girl dressed for a Halloween barn dance or a city girl readying her home for an evening party. Put another way, urbanity remains a possibility in magazine covers in a way that is impossible with postcards—indicating the move towards the entirely urban 1920s imagery described by Marchand, or the “tracks” in the road to a new visual paradigm that we simply cannot see in postcards.

Nor would it be entirely accurate to say that interior images of holidays were precisely the same in magazines and postcards. Again, there are similarities, but they are offset by subtle differences. On magazine covers there are nods to more urbanity, more cosmopolitan trappings…more everything, really. Images from magazines took the

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78 F. Rogers. “Cover” *The Saturday Evening Post* Vol. 182, No. 18 (October 30, 1909)
domestic holiday scene, and like postcards stripped it of windows and doors that might hint at the outside world, leaving us to judge if the occupants are urban or rural. And like our quartet of postcards, it is typically easy to associate one or the other using the signs and symbols provided. In magazines the obviously urban interiors were constructed as fabulous denotations of upper class wealth, going quite a bit farther than their postcard counterparts.

The 1907 Christmas cover to *Ladies Home Journal* is a good example. In it, a group of eight adults—six women and two men—gather around a small table, crowded with decorations and lamps. At this point, it seems analogous to our postcards; however, an African-American servant holds the turkey, while the interior heaps opulence upon opulence for the viewer. The walls are a rich red and adorned with gilded-framed paintings; a painted portrait hangs above a marble fireplace; a sideboard holds china and glassware; an ornate chandelier hangs in the middle of the room. The celebrants are “dressed to the nines” in dinner jackets and evening gowns. (Figure 60)
Magazine covers such as this one neutralized the question of rural versus urban by the use of whitespace. While postcards were unabashedly rural in their depictions of holidays, magazine covers like this one aimed for a middle ground that could be seen as either rural or urban.

F. Rogers. “Cover” The Saturday Evening Post (October 30, 1909)

Although there are some similarities to the urban, interior scenes of postcards, the images of magazines tended to go much further in their signifiers of wealth and prestige. The opulence of this scene carries the extravagance of urbanity to greater extremes than what one would typically find on postcards.

W.T. Smedley “Cover” Ladies Home Journal (December, 1907)

A similar two-page spread in a 1909 Collier’s called “O, Come All Ye Faithful” is even more over-the-top, with the tuxedoed and gowned family and guests entertained in a vast hall by a string quartet, singing along to the musicians brought (or bought) for Christmas to entertain them.79 Not relegated to Christmas, such ornate interiors and extravagantly dressed participants could be seen in holidays like Halloween too.

McCall’s 1908 October cover shows an obviously upper class woman playing a holiday

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game in a richly painted parlor. Her fashionable, but incredibly elaborate white dress leaves no doubt of either her wealth or urbanity.\textsuperscript{80}

Both these points—the ambiguity of urbanity in some images and the overabundance of it as an indication of class in others—are meant to illustrate some subtle contours that separated postcards from other sources of holiday images. Magazine illustrators during this period appear to be negotiating a way to include their predominately urban readers in a visual holiday tradition. If they had not yet achieved a total embrace of modernity, this is perhaps not surprising. The urban focus of the 1920s was still some years off. However, while magazines attempted to navigate this transitionary space, there was no equivalent attempt among postcard artists and their audiences. Exterior scenes were unabashedly rural, while most interior scenes eschewed opulence, richness, and upper class consumption. The few that did tread into this territory (such as the second half of the quartet discussed above) never went so far as liveried servants, expansive dining halls, or hired orchestras. Even in those postcard scenes described as urban (and that seem overstuffed compared to simpler rural scenes) there still appears to be resistance to making interior scenes too opulent, too rich, too upper class, and thus, too urban. By contrast, these were descriptions that magazine illustrators had no trouble evoking. There are two reasons for this difference among postcards, two sides of the same coin.

One side was the defensive half already discussed: In an image-based fortress against the forces of near-constant discursive abuse, rural families could find refuge in an

\textsuperscript{80} “Cover” \textit{McCall’s Magazine} (October, 1908)
ideal of themselves, their farms, and their country communities. Looking at these postcards today we see an overwhelming phalanx of rural images being forced into the consciousness of mass consumers. This interpretation also helps explain the geographical distribution of postcard use described in Chapters One and Two. While the Commission report and other documents outlined the plight of black, Southern, and tenant farmers, the ongoing dialogue in journals, magazines, newspapers, and books was decidedly geared towards, and circulated among, those from the North, particularly New England. When L.H. Bailey listed all of the current agriculturally themed periodicals in his 1909 *Cyclopedia of American Agriculture*, less than one in five of the more than 430 available were Southern publications.  

The cause-and-effect process outlined here, in which the written criticism generated a response based in visual culture, breaks down if the written criticism goes largely unread and unseen. And it is a self-reinforcing argument—a “preaching to the choir” among country denizens that created a loop of affirmation among those who believed in rural America. It was precisely because journals like *Country Gentleman* brought the argument to the New England rural doorstep that the survey of postcard use shows Maine as four times higher than population proportion would indicate; New Hampshire and Vermont six times; Connecticut three times. In turn, it is because Northern, white rurals helped create an imagined community built on visual, 

81 Liberty H. Bailey, ed., *Cyclopedia of American Agriculture* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 81-87. Another study suggests the delta between North and South was even wider, with Southern publications accounting for 11% of all farm periodicals in 1880, but only 5% by 1920. See James F Evans and Rodolfo N Salcedo, *Communications in Agriculture: The American Farm Press* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974), 3
mythological rural symbols that their vision of farm and village life looks so particular to them.  

Interestingly enough, the second greatest concentration of postcard users can be found in the Midwest, and postcard images of farm, hearth, and field fit comfortably into a Midwestern experience as well. In fact, historian John Bodnar argues that throughout the Midwest in this period there was a similar alignment of visual cultural to what is being described here: “By the earliest decades of the twentieth century the celebration of local people in Midwest history had expanded into a fascination with the region itself. The natural landscapes of prairies, woodlands, cornfields, and small town—the places of the pioneers—came to dominate much cultural expression in the region as it was threatened by industrialization.”  

Like their New England cousins, Midwestern farmers and small town dwellers could project onto postcards their fascinations with the natural landscapes that Bodnar describes.

Certainly there were other consumers, millions of them, who could view such images as urbanites or Southerners, and embark on different associative and connotative journeys. But as has been argued throughout, postcards were primarily a phenomenon of Northern, white, rural and small town Americans whose viewership needs to be understood from the defensive position. It is their conversation of images that has been reconstructed here.

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At the same time, these consumers were also playing offensively, seeking not only to reclaim an idealized version of themselves, but to thwart the shift in American culture towards modernism and urbanism. Such cultural contests played out on multiple fronts, but the one to prevent a new interpretation of the holidays based on the urban experience is especially noteworthy, because it evoked longstanding tensions in American holiday culture.

Take the few examples of postcards where a city street or an urban trope is definitively depicted—the majority of them are for New Years, one holiday that still tolerated the carnivalesque revelry of street display and mumming.84 One of Frances Brundage’s New Years series shows a scruffy newspaper boy and a bedraggled tramp, urban images not particularly suited to other holidays. Drunks, always male, frequently appear in New Years scenes, stumbling through city streets or passed out. The fancy clothes that would normally mark him as an urbane (and again, upper class) man of respectability are transformed into markers of intemperance by their disheveled nature. Another image, this one of a public square or park packed with noisy, horn-tooting revelers, is notable because it is one of the few cards that shows buildings (other than a church) that appear to be have more than four stories. By channeling any hint of urbanity into the one holiday that lacked a strong counter-narrative of domestic, interior, child- and family-oriented bliss, postcard users could ensure such slippage did not occur in other, reclaimed holidays. (Figures 61-63)

84 For excellent analysis of the shift from street-focused holiday expressions to interior/domestic rituals see Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* and Schmidt, *Consumer Rites.*
Frances Brundage’s newspaper boy is an urban inhabitant, even though he exists on a backdrop of whitespace. His occupation marks him as urban, as do his torn and dirty clothes and shoes. Such an image made the most sense for New Year’s Eve, the one holiday where the iconography lent itself most easily to the urban.

The carnivalesque elements of holidays that had largely been removed from Halloween and Christmas did still live on in New Years. In the context of the fad, this made it the most fitting holiday to pair with cities and urbanity. The drunk’s emblems of status—his clothes, his pocket watch—are made markers of ridicule by his drunken state. By extension, the city is also being ridiculed for its intemperate staging of New Years festivities, in contrast to the beauty of the idealized rural landscape.

Just as important, the process created a dichotomy between the two types of holidays: carnivalesque versus quietly homebound; street versus interior; male mumming versus female domesticity; friendly revelry versus domestic peace. Now there was yet another layer—urban versus rural. All of those “bad,” suppressed elements of the carnivalesque, street, and male-oriented revelry also became socially constructed as distinctly urban phenomenon in postcards. If some postcards did reveal urban interior scenes—inferior though they be as cramped, small domestic spaces—such images did at
least conform to the basic tenants of domestic respectability governing appropriate holiday expression.

Figure 63: New Years Square
It is a relatively rare image that shows a city scene, as noted by buildings of multiple stories (other than the church). Here a boisterous crowd gathers in a public space at New Years.

Figure 64: Rural Town
Compare the visual cues of this scene to the one on the left. Country villages and rural towns found display on postcards like these by their non-urban signifiers—birds, clear water, short single or double-story buildings, wide spacing, and the quietness of rural life communicated by the absence of people.

Still, we need to see this particular genre of popular culture as taking advantage of a historically situated opportunity. City holidays in this period were often linked in this period to social ills. Schmidt argues in Consumer Rites that commentary on the consumption associated with holidays inevitably led to questions and concerns about the labor involved in staging such orgies of consumerism. During this period there were “Shop Early” campaigns for Christmas and attacks on sweatshop labor used in making
artificial Easter flowers. Such negative associations and potentially ambivalent feelings towards consumerism could thus be defused by taking urbanity out of the equation. Mainstream magazines were too fully invested in advancing a cosmopolitan, urban vision of modernity to their readers to pull away from them fully or completely. They could not replicate images as obviously rural as those on postcards, nor could they create images that were entirely urban. Instead, they offered compromises like the white background, and also historicized figures like medieval minstrels and pilgrims whose clothing also did not have to be defined as urban or rural in a contemporary sense. Postcards, on the other hand, did not need to make such concessions because of their predominately rural and small town audiences, and so the creation of their vision of holidays won out. (Figure 64) This left no room for even seemingly benign urban elements such as city parades, street-level window displays, or department store Santas.

**Conclusion**

None of this is meant to suggest a decidedly conscious or coordinated campaign to advance either the defensive or offensive elements of holiday postcards. The lack of any significant alternative urban vision of holidays was part of a long and ongoing process that pitted urbanism and modernism against ruralism and traditionalism. By the time of the fad, this debate was so familiar and so multifaceted that what was culturally

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85 Ibid., 183, 235-36.
happening in postcard images would have felt entirely natural. Some historians have argued that divide between these two poles has been exaggerated. Hal Barron writes, “The truth lies somewhere between. Like other histories, the history of the rural experience between 1870 and 1930 is a story of change and continuity.”

Yet when we focus on the defensive elements of the imagery that sought to use postcards as the building blocks of the ideal rural self, it does seem starkly black and white after all. In fairness to Barron, the mythologizing project of postcards was decidedly specific to a particular time and a particular discursive process that was uniquely synchronized to the Country Life Commission and its report, a relatively short snapshot in Barron’s longer timeline. And again, this is not to say postcard manufacturers or rural consumers had any sort of master plan when it came to advancing such a unifying vision of rural life. Yet artists who depicted such idyllic scenes were rewarded with more commissions. Firms that printed such postcards were rewarded with more orders. Merchants and retailers who stocked such cards were rewarded with more sales. A key concluding point to this analysis is that the number of postcards sold enforced and then reinforced the messages they carried. The volume of cards raised the volume of cultural noise they generated, until the only message heard was the one that completely refuted the narratives of degradation and marginalization being spun by the Country Life Movement.

Not to be forgotten in this analysis is the fact that postcards were circulated primarily among and between women and their children. It was women who were

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handling most aspects of this cultural project, contributing to it in a way that fit snugly with their other roles as overseers of holidays, domestic spaces, written correspondence, and the work of maintaining kinship relationships. Women tapped into all facets of these constructed gender roles, and found a way to match them to a vision of themselves, their husbands, their children, and their lives that gave the whole family comfort, and presented a better vision of themselves than what could be achieved otherwise.

As they have done for eons, mothers and wives looked for ways to protect, nurture, and comfort their loved ones when under attack. Even if they did so out of culturally constructed beliefs or a false consciousness that it was their unique duty, this is still a powerful example of cultural appropriation and social construction from the bottom up, tied to understandings of femininity and gender in the Progressive Era that we are still parsing out today. Elizabeth Hampsten, for example, looked to journals, letters, and diaries of rural woman and found no evidence of the idealization found here. “What is so conspicuously missing from writings by women living in the midst of an as yet unurbanized countryside,” she writes, comparing her subjects to their Progressive male counterparts from academia, “is any similar desire to mythologize.” Postcards refute that claim and open another aspect to understanding these women, who used mass-produced images to say (perhaps consciously, perhaps sub- or unconsciously) what they did not put to paper.

In a blunt 1909 article entitled “Will Farmers Help Themselves” the author suggests, “It comes as a rude shock to him to find that there is doubt concerning his

87 Elizabeth Hampsten, Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 46.
enjoyment of the highest privileges of life, and if we may judge from the expression of county editors is more or less resentful. While in this attitude he gives relief to his feeling by pointed remarks concerning his well-wishers.” 88 Less pointed, but no less a relief, was the postcard phenomenon that used holidays to construct the farmer and his wife—surrogates for a larger, proud, rural collective—as the central, idealized, mythologized masters and mistresses of American culture’s most important days.

For some years the “New Woman” has been the subject of the space writer’s jibes and jeers and the butt of the would-be-wit’s jokes. The “New Woman” is held responsible for all sorts of things and not the least among them the increase in divorce and the decrease in marriage and womanly virtue. As a matter of fact the very opposite is true. The woman who is forced by industrial conditions to think and act for herself is also forced to see life from a broader viewpoint. She must of necessity become more liberal minded than the woman bound down to the narrow treadmill of strictly domestic drudgery. Hence she is likely to be a more congenial wife and mother.¹

The discourse surrounding women in the United States was every bit as contentious as that surrounding rural Americans. And it came from sources far more mainstream than Kate Richards O’Hare’s socialist journal quoted above. Just as farmers and rural American responded to their attacks from Country Life reformers, so too did woman experience (and respond to) their own set of critics. Such responses came in a variety of forms and ways, including the images women chose to embrace on postcards.

The early twentieth century was awash in political and social movements affecting women’s lives. While still excluded from traditional and dominant apparatuses of empowerment such as enfranchisement, political parties, union rolls and corporate management, women found alternate means of asserting influence and power that gave

¹ Kate Richards O'Hare, *The Sorrows of Cupid* (St. Louis: The National Rip-Saw Publishing Co., 1912), 32.
them a public voice and affected public policy. From suffrage to child labor laws, sweatshop reform to settlement houses, the Progressive Era saw the rise of a female political dominion (to borrow Robyn Muncy’s term) and social maternalism.

Although vitally important, these movements—particularly in the opening decade of the twentieth century—tended to be urban-centered and urban focused. Hull House, the Children’s Bureau, and reforms in the wake of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire: these all were urban elements of the traditional Progressive reformist historical narrative we know so well today. Even suffrage saw more mobilization in cities as a result of denser communities of middle and upper class women with the time, resources, and proximity to one another to organize. Thus if looking to contextualize the postcard fad vis-à-vis women, particularly women living outside of the major metropolises, some of the more known sites and moments of Progressive Era women’s activism do not seem to offer much assistance.

But a second and no less important current was also flowing through the period that was connected to, but distinct from, political and social reform. Huge swaths of American society were renegotiating familial relations, gender roles, and such topics as marriage, divorce, courtship and sex. These “hearth and home” issues were not specific to cities, and were fodder for ceaseless articles and accounts that heralded the change—many with alarm, some with amusement, and more than a few with approval.

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Several scholars have taken up this period’s evolution in gender construction and
the contested norms of domesticity and femininity. Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg cite
it as the beginning of the transformation into the “companionate family” model that
reigns to this day. In turn, they have built on arguments that emerged in the late 1960s
and early 70s suggesting that many of the sexual freedoms and transgressive tendencies
we associate with the 1920s actually began in the decades prior, particularly as an
outgrowth of the social hygiene movements brought about by medical reformers.

Michael McGerr offers a distillation of the transformation taking place when he
writes: “By the end of the nineteenth century, the middle class had drafted—but had only
begun to ratify—a kind of tacit peace treaty between the sexes. Forced mainly by the
individual and collective struggles of Victorian women, this rough agreement included
three principal provisions: eliminating the double standard, easing women’s domestic
burdens, and increasing their public opportunities.” In moving this new treaty forward
on multiple fronts, women began to take on newly ascribed definitions of their
womanhood, often too many for society to deal with individually. Instead, as Ben Singer
suggests, “popular culture synthesized and symbolized these transformations in the social
configuration of womanhood through a cultural construct dubbed the New Woman.”

More than just a textual construction, though, the New Woman was a decidedly visual

4 Steven Mintz, Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life (New York: Free Press,
5 James R. McGovern, “The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals,” The
885-908.
6 Michael E McGerr, A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America,
7 Singer, Melodrama and Modernity, 241-242.
creation too, as Ellen Wiley Todd reminds us: “Numerous forms of representation—including art, literature, cartoons, cinema, and advertising—shaped this discourse, interpreting and constructing the social relationship between the sexes…”8 It is the visual constructions and contestations of the New Woman that are examined in this chapter, in order to reveal historically-specific representations of women and courtship from the early twentieth century.

Just as rural inhabitants were being put under the microscope and scrutinized, so too was the early twentieth century woman. “She rebels when she finds herself treated as a specimen,” railed one writer in an explicit use of the metaphor in 1895.9 In turn, this scrutiny generated both text-based and image-based conversations and reactions, just as it had among rural communities. A well-researched historiography shows that Progressive-era women—particularly urban women—leveraged their socially ascribed purview over morality and maternity to gain access to political power. But women were equally adept at using other tools at their disposal to help shape the dynamics and evolution of heterosexual relationships that McGerr and Singer describe—the contours of their “New Womanhood.” This chapter argues that holidays, and especially holiday images on postcards, were one such tool.

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8 Ellen Wiley Todd, The "New Woman Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xxvi
9 Lillian W Betts, Outlook, October 12, 1895, 587 as quoted in: Martha H. Patterson, The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 135
New Women and the Feminine Domain of Holidays

As discussed in the last chapter, the transformation of holidays into domestic affairs—centered on family and children—directly co-opted the largely male, carnivalesque street displays that had been seen through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. That the transformation of holidays allowed these days to become domestic expressions of femininity is widely understood. What is less appreciated is how holidays could then additionally be used in the advancement of changing rules about courtship and gender relations.

The carnivalesque elements of holiday culture did not entirely disappear just because men lost their central position within holiday rituals and display. The domesticity of female-organized and overseen holidays also had subtle carnivalesque undertones, as women turned the tables on power positions and relationships. In taking control of holidays, women also inherited holidays’ potentially carnivalesque nature. It has often been assumed that this potential for inversion and misrule was obviated by domesticity; however, this ignores the ability of women to also subvert social norms and challenge prevailing cultural constructions. Simply because women typically did not go wassailing at Christmas or trickstering at Halloween, does not mean that holidays lost their ability to invert hierarchies. Women saw to it that holidays did just that. Holidays in women’s hands were not just a platform of feminine expression; rather, they could also be willfully appropriated to create opportunities from which social changes could be made. Not

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10 See Nissenbaum, The Battle for Christmas; Schmidt, Consumer Rites; Pleck, Celebrating the Family; Susan Davis, “‘Making Night Hideous’: Christmas Revelry and Public Order in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia,” American Quarterly 34, no. 2 (Summer 1982)
merely an end, but a means to other ends, holidays and holiday imagery helped move the “treaty process” (to use McGerr’s term again) along, a contributing agent to the transformation of women into New Women.

This transformation occurred most significantly in the ways in which the sexualized portions of holidays were enacted and conducted, impacting the very foundations of courtship, sexuality, and coupling. Valentine’s Day is an obvious holiday opportunity to affect these changes, but Valentine’s Day was not the only holiday that featured prominently in the framework of courtship. Certainly this particular day had its share of love and lust, but so too did Halloween. In fact, in the world of postcards, Halloween was primarily seen as a courtship festival, so much so that Cupid regularly appeared amidst more familiar Halloween icons such as jack-o-lanterns and black cats. One article went so far as to suggest using a marble or terra cotta Cupid statue as the centerpiece for a Halloween party game. Beyond Valentine’s Day and Halloween one also had Christmas, with its traditions centered around mistletoe and New Year’s Eve, a time given over to the famous midnight kiss.

If holidays were the days chosen in order to invert and subvert standing hierarchies of courtship and romance, what forms did this topsy-turvy expression take? Or perhaps more to the point here, how were these forms of carnivalesque opportunity

11 The New Woman was, among other things, considered to be a sexual entity, though such connections made the construction problematic because such sexuality was not tied to prostitution or fallen status. See Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978)
12 “Halloween Games,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 28, 1894, 26. Throughout this chapter I use the terms Cupids and cherubs somewhat interchangeably, as this is the way they were used during the postcard period. “Cupid” frequently just meant a generically cherubic figure, as opposed to a specific figure from Greek mythology. (I emphasize later when the distinction does become relevant). It is important to note, however, how the use of these typically sexless, child-like figures by artists was an interesting way of obviating outright sexual and erotic displays on postcards—which still had to make it through the mails—and to make messages about courtship and romance “safe” for child consumers.
visualized on period postcards? While magazine and newspaper articles obsessed over definitions of the New Woman, this one line from a 1902 article in *Arena* magazine is particularly prescient of the kind of holiday images that would emerge in the postcard fad just a few years later: “the key-note of her character is self-reliance and the power of initiation.” The “power of initiation” is a central and vitally important theme to understanding holiday postcards, worth exploring a bit further.

“Initiation” and “initiative” are perhaps confusing words because they also have political connotations, such as a ballot initiative. But in the period’s context of the New Woman, initiation meant the power to *take* the initiative. Winnifred Harper Cooley suggested in the 1904 *The New Womanhood* that a “lack of initiative” was one of the central problems plaguing women, and that while the “power of initiative” had been revered in men, society “has almost wholly condemned these qualities in women.” One reviewer of Bernard Shaw’s 1903 “Man and Superman” noted that it was a Don Juan theme updated with the sensibilities of the New Woman. “He is in these days the quarry instead of the huntsman—the victim of the tragi-comical love chase of the man by the woman…The pretense that women do not take the initiative is part of the farce that he [Shaw] has utilized very prettily.” Though a deeply flawed and widely criticized book, Grant Allen’s 1895 ode to the New Woman tried to capture the “power of initiation” starting with the title: *The Woman who Did.*

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16 Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did* (Boston: Roberts Bros, 1895)
In the context of the early twentieth century, a strong woman who knew what she wanted could now take the lead, or show the power of initiation. This was especially true in matters of romance and courtship, and by extension, holiday courtship rituals. As both overseers of holidays and assertive, initiative-taking New Women, women could use holidays as stages built from the bottom up to advance their own agenda of changing domestic and sexual relations. Still, if women were, as Margaret Jackson suggests, working towards “what western feminists today would call female sexual autonomy: the right to define and control our own sexuality, free from male exploitation or coercion,” it is perhaps difficult to think of holidays as erotically charged points of conflict in this process. After all, holidays are typically seen as nostalgic, sentimental, and so child-centric as to be devoid of sexuality. Outside of Valentine’s Day, the literature on holidays has yet to fully engage these erotic undertones, or women’s relationship to them. Leigh Eric Schmidt’s analysis of Valentine’s Day does allow that the “private charivari” of comic cards was never entirely contained, but primarily he sees the holiday’s evolution moving toward “safe sentimentality and cozy affections.” Stephen Nissenbaum’s “rude boys” of early Christmas celebrations were more interested in insulting females than courting them.

Eventually these romantic and erotic elements became washed out as the shift towards domestic celebration became further and further entrenched in a child-centric focus. Historians sometimes wrongly assume that this transformation had already taken

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18 Schmidt, Consumer Rites, 76-77.
19 Nissenbaum, The Battle for Christmas, 98.
place or concluded by the early twentieth century. Lesley Pratt Bannatyne is one such author, suggesting that Halloween’s transition from romantic staging ground for adults to a child-centered festival was largely complete by the early 1900s; however, such a proposition is not borne out by the visual evidence, at least when it comes to postcards.20 Certainly Halloween, along with Christmas and even Valentine’s Day to some degree, eventually became appropriated by schools, merchants, and churches as entirely child-centric affairs. But that transformation was far from complete by the 1910s.21

In other words, there was a finite period during which these two currents could and would actually converge: first, the era’s reconstruction of the male/female courtship rulebook and second, holidays’ transition from carnivalesque to domestic to child-centric. In fact, a better metaphor might be that they slid over each other like two tectonic plates. Before holidays transitioned entirely into child-centered affairs, but after women had assumed both the mantle of responsibility for holidays and the assertiveness that came with a new era of gender politics, a pocket of erotic, sexualized possibilities existed. It is

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21 Pinpointing exactly when this shift was complete is, of course, a difficult task. For Christmas, Nissenbaum argues that the shift to a child-centric holiday was certainly not completed by the early nineteenth century (see Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 112), but does not offer a suggestion for when it was. Penne Restad points to evidence from as late as the mid-twentieth century to demonstrate when the central figure in Christmas narratives “devolved to children.” See Restad, *Christmas in America*, 169. Gary Cross believes that the Christmas holiday had indeed crossed over into child-centered for the “late Victorians”; however, for Halloween he suggests: “It is only in the 1930s and 1940s that Halloween was ‘infantilized.’” Gary Cross, “Just for Kids: How Holidays Became Child Centered,” in *We Are What We Celebrate*, ed. Amitai Etzioni and Jared Bloom (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 68. My own sense is that this was an ongoing process through the twentieth century until the 1950s. It was the Baby Boom that ushered in the final step of making holidays child-centered through an “increasingly commercialized, child-centered environment” in which “parents and grandparents spent more money on children than ever before.” Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2006), 277
this moment—this window of opportunity (to push one final metaphor)—that is captured in so many postcards.

It should be said at this point that many of the images seen on postcards have parallels with other mediums of visual culture that have been analyzed in the historiography. Carolyn Kitch, for example, devotes an entire chapter to similar images on magazine covers from the same period. The fact that her chapter is titled: “Dangerous Women and The Crisis of Masculinity” tips her hand fairly early about what she sees in her source material. The woman who took over the rules, pace, and dynamics of courtship in Kitch’s analysis is deemed emasculating. Kitch takes “this theme—a beauty deciding what to do with all the tiny men at her disposal,” and argues, “their heavy-handed point was that if women gained control in the bedroom or at the ballot box, American manhood would suffer.”

However, she is looking at primarily male artists—James Montgomery Flagg, Coles Phillips specifically—and works that appeared on the cover of Life, a magazine with a predominately male audience. None of Kitch’s illustrations are holiday-specific. But Martha Patterson includes a similar image, this one specific to Valentine’s Day, in her The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader. She selects Charles Dana Gibson’s illustration for the 1903 Valentine’s issue of Life, in which a giant Gibson Girl deftly juggles tiny malleable men who contort themselves in spelling out the name of the magazine. Again both artist and imagined primary audience are male. Kitch describes

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23 Ibid., 63; Information on Life audiences, i.e. "predominately male, predominately urban": Ibid., 58.
24 Patterson, The American New Woman Revisited, 83.
this image as an early example of the “crisis of manhood,” an image that “showed women tormenting miniature men, a suggestion of the potential for sex-role reversal in the twentieth century.”

But what happens when such images are consumed primarily by women, quite often were painted by women, and are tied to specific days that are seen as being under the purview of women? In this scenario both the selection and especially the reception of these pictures become points of cultural production and creation by women within the larger conversation of images. The initiative of the New Woman thus becomes less of a crisis or threat within that conversation, and more of a celebration and affirmation of the sex-role reversal that Kitsch describes.

That I am discussing postcard imagery as primarily affirmative of New Womanly patterns and behaviors does not mean that I am unaware of or ignoring the challenges that surround the study (or even the definition) of New Women, either historically or in the twenty-first century. As Patterson suggests, “…the New Woman can signal at once a protest of, anodyne for, and an appeasement to the ideological imperatives of the dominant icon.” Even the term New Woman can be something of a Rorschach test, as Ellen Wiley Todd writes: “The phrase ‘new womanhood’ can be shown to reproduce or challenge dominate ideologies, depending on when, how, by whom, and in whose interest the term is used and to what ends.”

Throughout my analysis I hope to carefully outline

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27 Todd, *The “New Woman Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street*, xxviii
both the challenges to dominant ideologies that can be seen in postcards, as well as the limits of how far such an interpretation can go.

Finally, it should also be noted that these images were far from universal. In the last chapter we had to work hard to find holiday images that were imagined as urban. By contrast, images of New Woman power exist as islands in a sea of traditional, sentimental, nostalgic, and entirely conservative images of women as passive, submissive objects. Still, these examples are not so isolated as to be considered anomalies or novelties. Just as Americans in the years of the postcard fad had hardly settled on answers to questions about New Women, so too does the visual output of the period reflect a negotiation between old and new, traditional and transgressive. To find these spots, we can look across the holiday landscape and locate four tropes in particular—beautiful witches, valentine marketplaces, mistletoe politics, and warrior cupids—all of which speak to the new “power of initiation,” or New Women taking the initiative within holiday practices.

**Beautiful Witches**

Although Halloween witches were frequent denizens of the holiday landscape in postcards, hundreds of these postcard witches did not conform to tradition. Gone were the black clothes, pointy hats, snaggle-teeth and wild hair, and instead we find golden-locked women in form-fitting dresses of green, white or red that flattered shapely legs and generously-drawn bosoms.
Witches appeared on postcards almost exclusively in association with Halloween. Within other media (articles, literature, etc.) manifestations of witches outside of Halloween were rare, but not unheard of. But such witches were still described in familiar crone-specific ways, conforming to pre-established types. There were splashy news stories about a man who committed suicide because he was tormented by “an old woman dressed in black, and with the figure of a witch who prophesized his violent death,” and articles recounting the Salem witch trials, reminding readers that “the traditional witch was usually some decrepit old village crone, of a sour and malignant temper.”

Even Frank Baum’s 1900 introduction of the good Witch of the North in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was something of a hybrid. Although the good witch’s “hat was white, and she wore a white gown that hung in pleats from her shoulders. Over it were sprinkled little stars that glistened in the sun like diamonds,” she was still described with: “Her face was covered with wrinkles, her hair was nearly white, and she walked rather stiffly.”

The traditional narrative of witches as crones thus dominated the rest of the year.

Confined then to Halloween, it is tempting to see postcards’ beautiful witches as women in costume. David Skal falls victim to this assumption in his book on Halloween, writing: “Halloween costumes, when depicted on postcards, are not at all grotesque. Witches in particular—at least the ones imitated by mortals—are highly fashionable if not outright glamorous. Flanked by black cats and jack-o’-lanterns, beautiful women and angelic children sport conical hats, stylish frocks, and absolutely no warts.”

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While costumes were part of the female- and domestic-oriented Halloween party tradition, it was not to the extent we may assume today. Most depictions of Halloween parties, either in illustrated magazines or in Halloween postcards, show men and women not in costume, but in the clothing of any party regardless of season—women in full length dresses, men in jackets and ties. (Figure 65) Accounts of Halloween parties reveal that the costumed entities were not the guests themselves, but specific individuals dressed to help facilitate the party’s activities and games. In one account, “the ‘Sibyl of Terefia’ told fortunes with teagrounds. She was dressed in a fantastic flowing robe. ‘Ophelia’ told fortunes in a white tent covered with autumn leaves. On her arm hung a basket of flowers from which the visitor must make a choice…”31 In the Halloween edition of Werner’s Reading and Recitations, the author suggests it is the hostess who, after she disappears briefly, “returns dressed as a fortune-teller. She offers to tell fortunes or read character.”32 Tableaux games and plays offered other opportunities for costumes.

The emergence of the beautiful witch image, then, is more complicated than simply assuming that they were depictions of beautiful women dressed in Halloween witch costumes. To start, postcards’ glamorous witches were not figured at parties where the clothing would make sense as a costume. Instead they are most often drawn in forests, fields, or under the full moon without the trappings of a Halloween party anywhere in sight. Not only are they away from the party (if a party exists at all), but also they are firmly entrenched within the rural landscape. (Figure 66)

Figure 65: Halloween Party Costumes
Although costume parties were fashionable in the early twentieth century, most depictions of Halloween events, both on postcards and in the illustrated press, showed party goers in evening wear, not costumes. This illustration in Woman’s Home Journal is indicative of the proposition that only certain “characters” dressed as witches at parties. Thus assuming a beautiful witch on a postcard was just a beautiful woman in a witch costume becomes more problematic.

“The Appearance of the Witch with her Fortune-Bearing Branch.” Woman’s Home Companion, October 1905, page 24

But to fully appreciate depictions of beautiful witches as manifestations of New Women, one first has to understand some of the underlying contexts of the larger Halloween holiday at the beginning of the twentieth century. The beautiful witch was positioned in a wider field of tropes within the postcard genre—and the literature on the holiday generally—that had to do with the planning and execution of divination games.

Figure 66: The Beautiful Witch
Beautiful witches were not partygoers at all, but instead staged their scenes in the rural landscape. Images of their supernatural abilities, mystical companions, and nighttime adventures were projected as extensions of ruralness, such as this image in a field.

Courtesy G & L Postcards
The number of Halloween fortune-telling games were legion. Mary Blain filled over 45 pages with them in her 1912 book *Games for Halloween*. And almost universally, they were centered on an unmarried girl or woman learning the identity of a future husband.

From tossing an apple peel over the shoulder (the shape it took on the floor would be the initial of the future mate) to naming a batch of chestnuts for potential suitors and then watching to see which one popped first, the games had hundreds of variations. The most popular of these games were depicted over and over again in the output of the postcard craze, giving a visualization to columnist Laura Jean Libbey’s 1910 overheated purple prose: “This is love’s own night, the night when maidens challenge the love god, to find out if there is to be marriage for them within the next twelve-month, or still another year of waiting for the hero who is to crown their hearts with love’s jeweled diadem and clasp their hands in wedded bliss.” The gender segregation of the games was also fully acknowledged at the time. “While the girls are busy getting wisdom from dumb-cakes,” suggested Helen Philbrook Patten in *The Year’s Festivals*, “the boys of the family, who care neither for past or future, indulge in the present joys of “snap-apple.”

Beyond obviously conditioning girls for a variety of socially constructed value sets—normative heterosexuality and the necessity of marriage for happiness among them—these customs were also notable for another reason. As fortune-telling games, they were almost without exception passive in nature. The point of each game was to learn what the future would bring, not to shape the future. The title of an 1871 *Scribner’s*

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33 Mary E Blain, (New York: Barse & Hopkins, 1912).
35 Helen Philbrook Patten, *The Year's Festivals* (Boston: D. Estes & company, 1903), 207.
"Monthly" article says it all: “Halloween or Chrissie’s Fate.” Fate could be revealed on Halloween, but it was assumed women must first wait until Halloween to know fate, and then wait for fate to deliver what had been foretold.

This is why the emergence of beautiful witches in postcards is so interesting in its timing. The transformation of a topic that had been the domain of the old crone and the weathered hag for centuries lay in the power both the traditional witch and her newly imagined counterpart wielded. Consider these three rhymes, each found on a postcard with an accompanying image of a traditional witch with a pointed cap, broom, or cauldron (Figure 67):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May every enchantment</th>
<th>The Halloween Witch</th>
<th>I’m brewing now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of witch and sprite</td>
<td>On her broom rides to you</td>
<td>for you a charm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring you luck</td>
<td>There’s a wish with each straw</td>
<td>‘twill bring good luck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On All Hallows night</td>
<td>And I hope they come true</td>
<td>and save from harm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The traditional witch had magical powers that did more than just passively prophesize. These powers allowed witches to actually alter circumstances, change the direction of fate, and rewrite outcomes. The witch here has the power to create spells of both luck and love.

The witch motif had the power to do more than prophesize. She could take an active role in changing the course of fate, the very “power of initiation” that marked the New Woman. Postcards of traditional witches often depicted them in their laboratories, in front of their cauldrons, or over their spell books doing precisely what young girls at parties could not: creating spells, charms, and potions that would actually force action. (Figure 68) Understanding that women desired this level of power helps to create a logical bridge to the emergence of beautiful witches, but taking this path of reasoning also helps to explain another visual phenomenon of Halloween postcard output: the
Of the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of fortune-telling games played during Halloween, it is the mirror game that was far-and-away the most depicted in Halloween postcards. The mirror game had several variations, but at the core of them all was the idea of a woman looking into a mirror at midnight to see the face of her future husband. Although still ultimately a passive activity (all the girl could do was look and hope to see a face at midnight), this game differed from the others in a way that ultimately served as a liminal space through which “regular” girls confined to passive party games could be visualized as witches in their own right.

Unlike other party games, this one was played alone, away from the mixed-sex crowd of the Halloween party. The required midnight viewing necessitated this. Laura Jean Libbey writes of what was often depicted in postcards: “The little Halloween party breaks up promptly at 11 o’clock…There’s a quick flitting to her own room, a quick tossing of ribbons here and lingerie there, for the old clock’s hands, as she sped by it on the stairway, pointed to five minutes to 12.”37 In many of the images, the girl looking into the mirror is dressed in a nightgown, emphasizing not only the lateness of the hour, but also the solitary nature of the ritual. The girl in sleepwear has obviously entered a private sphere where others will not witness her. (Figure 69) In other images, particularly those showing a young woman as opposed to a young or adolescent girl, the more formal dress of the party remains, but the ritual is still without witnesses.

37 Libbey, “All Halloween is Love's Own Eve,” 11.
The solitary nature of this ritual has significant implications. Thinking back to Halloween parties, a woman who pretends to be a witch or fortune-teller does so essentially as part of an act. She is playing a role and wears a corresponding costume. Thus any “magic” or fortune telling she enacts can be seen as part of a show. It is understood to be a subterfuge. By contrast, a woman who conducts a fortune-telling ritual alone does not have an actor’s trickery to explain the results. If a man’s face appears in the mirror—and in postcard after postcard it does—then she has really performed a bit of magic. She has taken on the power of a witch. Moreover, the location of the mirror game further blurred the lines. The woman performing the mirror ritual in her solitary bedroom begins to take on the physical trapping of the witch, her dresser with bottles and boxes strikingly resembles the witch’s laboratory.

38 Like so many other elements already discussed, the trope of the young woman moving towards solitude in order to practice magical arts is not unique to this era. In Lydia Maria Child’s Hobomok, Mary ventures into the woods alone to create a magic circle for knowing her future husband, casting “a keen, searching glance behind” as she goes to ensure she has not been followed. While Mary’s sneaking off alone is part of her overall rebellion (culminating in marrying the Indian Hobomok), within the confines of holiday ritual such solitude was sanctioned. See Lydia Maria Francis Child, Hobomok: A Tale of Early Times (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard & Co., 1824), 16

Figure 69: Young Girl and Mirror Game
Unlike other Halloween games, the mirror game was played outside the sight of others. The midnight hour, during which a girl could see her future husband in the mirror, meant that the solitary aspects of the game were emphasized. If a girl was young, she was often shown already in her nightgown, ready for bed and obviously away from the gaze of others, particularly men.

Image Courtesy G & L Postcards

Figure 70: The Woman Becomes a Witch
The mirror game at Halloween was thus a time when a woman could slip into the role of the witch, and presumably demonstrate the power of initiative that a witch had. Note how the dresser is filled with bottles and containers, resembling the witch’s laboratory. And the shadow on the wall is not the woman’s shape, but the shape of a witch. With no corporeal witch seen, this shadow must be the woman’s, making her witchiness manifest to the rest of us.

Author’s collection

Just as the witch works alone over her cauldron or potions, so too does the woman in the mirror game operate outside of the view of others, particularly men. But the images go even further in blurring the line. In many images the woman is not entirely alone. In several postcards a witch is part of the scene, and in many more it is the shadow or outline of the witch that can be clearly seen in the background or forming a frame around
the picture. In one sense, this element (particularly those showing a corporeal witch) could be interpreted as representing a separate entity, the supernatural being who comes into the scene in order to provide the knowledge sought by the woman. But the fact that many postcards create the shadow of a witch also suggests that it is not a separate entity at all, that it is the woman herself who has passed into the realm of magic and spell-casting to become, at least for the moment, a witch. And in that moment she then possesses the power of the witch and thus casts a witch’s shadow on the wall.

Therefore, the popularity of the mirror game in postcards can be seen as part of the same phenomenon that gave rise to the outright image of the beautiful witch. With the beautiful witch, the ideas percolating in the more ambiguous images of the mirror game were extrapolated to their logical and unambiguous conclusions. Unlike Halloweens of the past where women were confined to the passive fortune-telling games of the Halloween party, now women were assuming a proactive power for themselves. They were using the “power of initiation.”

I am a witch with skill and art
To make a clean sweep of your heart

So went the prose accompanying one postcard image of a contemporary woman astride a broom that takes her into a sky full of stars and a smiling full moon.

On Halloween your slightest wish
Is likely to come true.
So be careful, or the goblins
Will spoil your wish for you.

This little poem accompanied an image of another beautiful woman, her supernatural nature emphasized by the fact she dances with a mythical “boogie man,” a
mythical male figure constructed out of pumpkins and gourds. In both these examples the focus was shifted from a woman who merely seeks to know her future, to one who could shape it “with skill and art” or with the “slightest wish…likely to come true.” In each case this more powerful woman is depicted as a witch, albeit a beautiful witch—riding a broom in one, the other wearing emblems of the moon and stars while dancing with supernatural creatures. But the genre went further still.

Be careful men, on Halloween
Witches inveigle and entice
Bachelors to the golden dance
That’s naughty though its nice.

Here the suggestion is of beautiful, contemporary women in soft, white flowing gowns. They hover in the sky, ethereal and beckoning, reaching down to two well-dressed and handsome men below. A traditional “hag”-style witch sits in a crescent moon in the corner, strumming her broom like a guitar, as if accompanying the golden dance to which these floating sirens entice their men.

Young men have a care
Witches are flying through the air
Not old and ugly
But young and fair.

Here the accompanying image is of a buxom woman in a skin-tight blue dress, tied to a floating broom as she moves her hands through her hair and under her ridiculously large hat that only barely manages to make a nod to the witch’s conical cap. Another card shows a beautiful witch working away in the laboratory. In this fantastic image her pointed hat is adorned with stars and moons, while a swastika charm hangs around her neck. She is clearly working magic, but the magic involved is love-based—
tiny hearts flow from the mouth of a beaker, while in the main bulb of the flask a miniature man is trapped inside, pleading with his giantess captor. Of course, not all the postcard artwork of this genre was as explicit as these in linking beautiful witches and traditional witchcraft, but the entire genre of the attractive witch seemed to operate with this basic convention—that the beauty of the modern witch is part of her magic. (Figures 71-72)

Figure 71: Young and Fair
By changing the very definition of a witch—from the “old and ugly” to “young and fair”—images like this one placed the New Woman in the witch’s role, thus combining the New Woman’s power of initiative with the magical powers of a witch. The results were potent enough that young men needed to therefore “have a care.”
Image Courtesy G & L Postcards

Figure 72: Old and New
This postcard was even more explicit in explaining the transformation. By giving a visual for both kinds of witches, old and new, it highlighted that a new social construction was afoot.
Image Courtesy G & L Postcards
Such sentiments of enticement and bewitchment were not confined just to postcards. Edward Barnard’s final stanza of “After Salem” in a 1903 edition of Puck also reveals concerns about the womanly power to bewitch:

When I went up to Salem Town
Immune was I from Cupid’s guile—
At least I thought so! Maid might smile
Or, if it please them better, frown.
It mattered not. Suave, debonair,
I went my way. But now I care,
And all my plans are upside down
Since Hester smiled and frowned on me.
And witchcraft’s a reality
As I return from Salem Town.40

A 1909 article called “Premeditation” was even more to the point. Discussing how a woman could use the mirror game as an excuse for catching the man of her desires in the reflection, the text, like postcards, blurred the mirror-game player into a hybrid of woman and witch:

But in these modern times everything is different. A careful reading of the daily papers, each with its chronicle of entries in the divorce courts, has taught milady that Fate has grown old and fussy, and is no longer to be trusted. Realizing this fact, milady of modern times will take things into her own hands this Halloween…She will instead don her prettiest gown—the one he has said was so becoming. She will arrange her hair in this way he has said he likes it best.41

In both these examples—Hester’s smile or frown, the mirror-game player’s gown and hair—women were able to bewitch men in magical ways through the liminal space of Halloween. But these examples, as well as the collection of modern witches on postcards,

41 “Premeditation,,” Chicago Daily Tribune, October 31, 1909, G1.
hinged on understanding the bewitching power of Halloween, and the ability to put men
under some sort of spell, was simply a pretext to a larger, universal truth. Ultimately the
power of these women lay not in a single night of Halloween magic, but in mystical
powers that women possessed year-round through their smiles, frowns, gowns, and hair
arrangements. Halloween was a holiday-based site of courtship, now controlled by
women, that provided an exaggeration or enhancement of a power which perplexed and
frustrated men throughout the year—the power to bewitch or enchant

Again this seems to veer closer to Carolyn Kitch’s interpretation of such themes
as bespeaking a crisis of masculinity. Some cards can be seen as exact parallels to Kitch’s
magazine covers, such as the postcard with this stanza:

    Flee bachelors flee
    If you would single stay
    Tis Halloween Eve
    The witch’s wedding day.

Men flee from both a floating beauty in a white dress, and a traditional witch in black
with her broom. The beautiful woman who is actively scooping the fleeing prey of men
with a butterfly net (while a lasso hangs down from the nearby text) is coded with all the
traditional and ultimately superficial markers of the coquette, women who are
emphasized for their beautiful faces, their slim figures, their attractive and flattering
clothes, and their carefully managed hair. (Figure 73)
Figure 73: Flee Bachelors Flee
An image such as this could be seen as a “crisis of masculinity” image, in which the
New Woman’s assertiveness made men fear for their superior cultural position.
However, as an image that would have circulated primarily among and for women, the
crisis of masculinity becomes a celebration of the new contours of femininity. Note too
the style in which the woman is drawn—powerful in her position, but also sweet and
young. Her dress is painted with shades of pink, emphasizing her femininity, and is
simple and plain. We can read this image in the context of our known rural audiences—
interested in combining the power of the New Woman with the wholesomeness and
simplicity of the rural ideal.

Image Courtesy G & L Postcards

Why should we not see this as Kitch does, as a “scheming beauty, a gold-digging
heartbreaker who emasculated men…”?42 Because postcards were designed for women’s
pleasure more than men. It could certainly be argued that such pleasure was ephemeral
and simply fed into a false consciousness of ultimately normative behavior and values;
however, this dismisses what our historical subjects felt for themselves—not a crisis of
manhood, but an enjoyment of new womanhood.

Martha Patterson reminds us that even images of Gibson Girls in Life magazine,
drawn by a man for a male audience, could be appropriated in the larger narrative by
women: “…by presenting women as interacting with men in an unchaperoned

42 Kitch, The Girl on the Magazine Cover, 60.
environment or as engaging in physical activity, he promoted a measure of women’s personal independence and sexual freedom, which many women used to sanction their own reform efforts.” 43 However, we do not really have to make that stretch towards appropriation here.

First, images that were more “naturally” part of women’s sphere of the household mail and kinwork of the holidays offered even greater pleasure than Gibson Girl illustrations, because they were images women saw as part of their own cultural output—no reappropriation or renegotiation necessary. Moreover, looking not only at the content of these images, but their style too, we can see how thoroughly well crafted they were for a particular audience. These are not the Gibson Girls in Life magazine, drawn to appear aloof and knowing. These are women wholly born of the rural ideal discussed in the last chapter: rosy cheeked, innocent, sweet, and sentimental. They have been almost uniformly styled by postcard artists to make them readily accessible to our established, key postcard audiences. If these represent a somewhat cautious (even ambivalent) trope of new womanhood, they still reveal an important characteristic of the New Woman within the conversation of images—imagining a break from the passive associations of Halloween that had predominated for decades.

“And even at this time,” wrote T.S. Author in 1849, “‘Hallow-eve’ as it is called, is not suffered to come and go without the effort of some loving maidens to penetrate the mystery of their matrimonial future.” 44 More than sixty years later, Laura Jean Libbey

43 Patterson, The American New Woman Revisited, 82.
was still suggesting “he must be a very cruel Cupid indeed who would fail to grant a maiden’s prayer and show her in her dreams the hero whom she is to wed.”\textsuperscript{45} Part of the liberating effect of these images lay in the suggestion that women had (at last!) the power of initiation inherent in witchcraft. (Figure 74)

Having said that, we also should not overreach past some of the critiques that certain feminist readings of these texts would suggest. Whatever power women were reaching for in Halloween images also had to be carefully contained, and these images show the ambivalence that surrounded such boundary transgression. Traditional witches—those of the familiar crone variety—had power separate from beauty. But the attractive witches that appeared as this genre of postcards had power that was intrinsically tied to their ability to make themselves attractive.

Mary Dean told her readers in 1902 that the clothes they chose for Halloween “will best express the wearer’s sympathy with the charms she is about to weave.”\textsuperscript{46} The power of the charm is tied not to the woman herself, but to her fashion sense. In establishing new modes of power and proactivity, this stripe of American popular culture was also careful to keep women’s power within the confines of traditional spheres of feminine influence—such bewitchment was still directed towards men and towards heterosexual marriage, and naturalized the role of consumer culture in attaining both. Another postcard brings home the point: a beautiful witch stirs a potion inside a hallowed-out pumpkin—her flowing gold hair offset by a pointy but white witch’s hat.

The accompanying poem reads:

\textsuperscript{45} Libbey, “All Halloween is Love's Own Eve,” 11.
\textsuperscript{46} Mary Dean, “For Halloween Parties,” \textit{The Atlanta Constitution}, October 12, 1902, C3.
On Halloween, when the hour is right
Let the witch mix a charm in a Pumpkin bright.
Then rub this nearest to the heart
And the one who’ll tarry you’ll surely marry
If you acted right your part.

Here the woman is allowed to work magic in order to get a man to stop “tarrying” and start “marrying,” but such magic had its limits—it still relied on “if you acted right your part,” a part that would have included the attractive appearance emphasized in the postcard’s image of a witch who is not a crone. (Figure 75)

In the end, the trope of the beautiful witch should be seen as a small step in the process of redefining the rules of courtship. And it is an interesting step to observe because it is so rooted in the contained realms of domesticity. From interior scenes of home life in mirror game postcards to the very act of sending postcards to a person’s home, postcards like these made their mark in a very specific arena. And it was a very different arena from other visual genres which put contested womanhood on display—genres such as the femme fatale. The femme fatale was virulently anti-domestic, a man-crusher whose power lay in large measure in her unwholesomeness. These postcards were definitely not that, featuring styles that embraced wholesome, perhaps even child-like women—indications perhaps not only of domesticity, but a particular, rural-based domesticity. The genre thus emphasized—through both compositional factors as well as tone and style—a set of options and opportunities that the power of initiation created, without crossing the boundaries that still tied women to home and hearth. And such images serve us today as a valuable starting point for seeing how holiday traditions and narratives could be appropriated and used by women.
While hundreds of images implicitly linked the power of initiative with the beautiful witch, this one overtly states the case: “It’s best beware of the witching hour in which the witches show their power.” But the witch showing her power is a beautiful woman, not a traditional crone.

Author’s collection

While beautiful witch postcards had some liberating effects, they were still tightly contained. As the verse on this card suggests (“And the one who’ll tarry you’ll surely marry,”) women were still expected to apply their witch-like powers to the task of achieving normative heterosexual marriages.

Image Courtesy G & L Postcards

Valentines and the Choices of the Marketplace

Women controlled another aspect of culture that frequently overlapped with holidays—shopping. And this narrative of control and choice likewise found its way into postcards, particularly around Valentine’s Day. As Ellen Gruber Garvey illustrates, period narratives of shopping and courtship had become quite intertwined by the early twentieth century. Magazines in particular advanced descriptions of women wisely picking among suitors as they would among cereal products. “In this reformulated vision
of the marriage market,” Garvey writes, “women held power; a man’s happiness was entirely up to women’s wise decision making.”

Valentine’s Day in particular invited near-literal interpretations of the marriage market metaphor. In a frequent trope, hearts were converted into a visualized product to be bought and sold (not unlike valentines themselves). Market stall metaphors were popular, as were tropes that suggested itinerant peddlers, with baskets of hearts as portable wares. In another scene, a cherub vendor spreads out a market display of caged hearts. For rural consumers, the outdoor market was a familiar stage, perhaps even more than the interior store which could also be read as potentially urban. There is nothing urban about the tables and stands surrounded by green grass and flowers in these cards. (Figures 76-77)

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Further, the market emphasized the feminine role of the shopper. The open market—specifically the food market—was understood to be a feminine space, particularly as it served the domestic-oriented daily task of food shopping. Women who bought food to prepare and place on the table were also bringing that ritual of choice to the marketplace of courtship. In postcards portraying just a vendor, this presumption of a feminine audience/viewer could be assumed. But other times it was more explicit, with woman shown to be the consumer, purchaser, and decision-maker. In one image a stylish woman selects from a basket of roses instead of hearts. In it, she pauses, hand frozen as she carefully weighs her options, thus giving further emphasis to the role of choice. In another amusing image the cupid holds a pair of opera glasses over the hearts as she
examines them, while the proprietor cupid motions with outstretched hands to emphasize the number of choices. (Figures 78-79)

Figures 78 & 79: Choosing in the Marketplace
Women having choices is given visual importance in these images. Both the stylish woman and her cupid counterpart give careful consideration to their selections, and take their roles as consumers seriously. This was a pervasive textual as well as visual metaphor during the years of the phenomenon.

Author’s collection

This trope becomes all the more interesting when placed against another common valentine motif: waiting for the postman. (Figures 80-81) In this ubiquitous Valentine’s Day theme, women sat by a window or door, waiting for the postman to deliver a hoped-for valentine. Like most Halloween games, this was a holiday ritual that was entirely passive. One could only wait for (and hope for) a valentine that would first have to be bought by another and secondly, delivered by another—and importantly both these stages
were controlled by men. A piece of 1873 Valentine’s Day sheet music provides an excellent example of the presumptions inherent in this trope. A woman sits by the window, hand on chin and eyes cast downward. The scene is labeled “suspense.” The second scene shows her holding a valentine to her lips, smiling broadly as the postman exits to the right. This vignette is called “realization.” By contrast, the motif of shopping for hearts can be seen as the opposite of waiting for the postman. Shopping is entirely active, spurred on by the initiation of women.

Figures 80 & 81: Waiting for the Postman
The motif of waiting for a valentine to be delivered had a long lifespan. The example on the left from 1873 operates from the same conventions as the example on the right from nearly forty years later. It was also a trope that emphasized the passive nature of valentine rituals for women. By contrast, the act of shopping for valentines was proactive and was another demonstration of initiation.

“St. Valentine's Day” (Ransford and Son, 1873), Grossman Collection, File Cabinet 3, Drawer 1, Winterthur Library

Cover. Harper’s Weekly. February 10, 1912

48 “St. Valentine's Day” (Ransford and Son, 1873), Grossman Collection, File Cabinet 3, Drawer 1, Winterthur Library.
The Politics of Mistletoe

The witch’s power of initiation or the shopper’s power of choice reveal how women could take advantage of the carnivalesque possibilities contained within holidays. As days firmly under their purview, holidays presented opportunities for women to demonstrate control—including control over men and courtship. Christmas provided similar opportunities. Mistletoe at Christmas (and occasionally New Years) was another linkage between holidays and courtship.

“The undeniable right of a man to kiss the maid he catches under the mistletoe has existed since feudal times,” the Chicago Tribune reported in 1903, suggesting a number of the city’s citizens had begun courtship through the mistletoe custom. “If 12,000 girls are married in one city in one year on account of having wandered under its shade, how many must have been similarly ensnared in the whole civilized world during eight or nine centuries.” In the eyes of at least one early twentieth century writer, mistletoe clearly had more than a superficial cultural impact.

However, unlike the images from Halloween, mistletoe provides an interesting case study because it shows an actual shift in power. The games and rituals of the Halloween party were never an original part of the male experience. Men gave up entirely different rituals in order to participate in the domestic, interior ritual. As Gary Cross writes, “one set of Halloween customs was female and domestic (parties with costumes, apple bobbing, nut roasting, and divination games that had once assuaged fears of death and the future). A second set of Halloween customs centered on pranks and

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mumming committed by older boys and young men, in effect, attacking the domestic order.”

By contrast, mistletoe use was part of men’s larger holiday displays of charivari towards women. In one common scene, exemplified in an 1887 piece in *Youth’s Companion*, a “precocious boy of ten,” is described as one who “carried around a sprig of it in his pocket, and successfully astonished all the ladies in the house by unexpectedly whipping out this bit of green, holding it over their heads, and kissing them.”

Such descriptions, along with words like “undeniable right” and “ensnared” in the *Tribune* article, become problematic from a feminist perspective. In what Margaret Jackson calls the “Eroticization of Women’s Oppression,” this period’s particular set of metaphors which focused on pursuit and capture then normalized sexual abuse and rape. They were part of “a re-enactment of primitive, animal courtship.” The male act of forcing unwanted sexual favors onto women in the name of a right or privilege inscribes the very undertones Jackson suggests. That the boy in the *Youth’s Companion* piece was “whipping out” his sprig of mistletoe further emphasizes the phallic/male cultural significance of the ritual. And in several postcards, men reenact this unwanted sexual advance by holding mistletoe above their victims in order to secure illicit sexual gratification.

However, in an equal or even greater number of images, it is the women who stand under the mistletoe, waiting for the man’s advance. With women as the arbiters of

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50 Gary Cross. “Just for Kids” Etzioni and Bloom, *We Are What We Celebrate* 68
51 Reprinted in “Some Christmas Superstitions,” *New York Evangelist* 58, no. 51 (December 22, 1887): 6
52 Jackson, “‘Facts of Life’ or the Eroticization of Women’s Oppression?,” 56-57.
Christmas and Christmas decorations, it can be assumed that she herself has hung the mistletoe. Should the mere act of decorating for the holidays be construed as a romantically charged opportunity? Certainly the editors of *Good Housekeeping* were willing to connect the two in a 1908 poem illustrated by James Preston:

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In the front room window Polly
Hung her Christmas wreath of holly;
Caleb, down the post road turning,
Wins a smile and goes home beaming. 53
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In Polly’s case the decoration in question was not even the more courtship-linked mistletoe. What are we to make of the act of hanging mistletoe in the first place and then purposefully standing under it? Here the importance of audience again cannot be underestimated. Had postcard images circulated primarily among adult men, the

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53 James Preston, "Christmas Tyme," *Good Housekeeping* illustration, December 1908, 1
connotation might be read very differently. We might assume the image to be a reaffirmation of male sexual power in which women become sex objects solely for men’s pleasure. But as a visual text by and for women, the hanging and then standing under mistletoe would seem to indicate a leveling of the sexual playing field, an appropriation of the ritual into an act performed at least partially on women’s terms and at women’s choosing.

A series of cards called “Come Under the Mistletoe” features both scenarios, and shows the important differences between them. In some of the images an aggressive male engages in an unwanted and unrequited chase. In such postcards the woman pulls away or raises her hand against his advance. In these images, the man holds his own sprig of mistletoe, a prop brandished as part of his assault scenario. The stick of the sprig takes on phallic powers, encouraging him act as an aggressor and predator.

Yet in the other images in which the attraction seems mutual, the necessity of the man having his own branch of mistletoe disappear. Instead, the couple stands under mistletoe that has already been hung, presumably by the woman who serves as overseer of Christmas and its appropriate decorations. Gone too is the chase and in its place is a scene in which the woman has controlled the events. In one postcard, the woman looks directly at the postcard holder as she kisses the man, suggesting not only pleasure at her present position, but complicity with the viewer in a scheme to get the man in that position in the first place. (Figures 83-84)
Figure 83: Mistletoe and Aggression
In this image the male attempts to assert dominance over the female through the use of mistletoe. Her upraised hand and attempt to pull away from him signal that this is an unwanted kiss. A diagonal line exists from the phallic sprig to the young man’s crotch, while his position suggests a thrusting gesture. In other words, this is male sexuality and aggression on display, and he is enacting a ritual rooted in the carnivalesque elements of Christmas—elements that women were attempting to diffuse throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Author’s collection

We have no way of knowing which of these images in the series were more popular. And it is worth pausing to acknowledge that the production of millions of postcard images did include those that could be seen as more suitable for the male viewer, purchaser and sender—perhaps even for the purpose of male to male postcard
exchanges—such as those that lent assent to mistletoe aggression. Even the small audience of adult males revealed in the postcard survey of Chapters One could still be a profitable niche market for postcards such as Figure 83.

However, I would suggest that the evidence as previously explored suggests that such postcards were indeed that—a niche—and one that could even be appropriated by women interested in making a joke or evoking irony. They also provide a useful counter-example to images of women showing the power of initiation and taking control of mistletoe display. Knowing the contexts as we do, such tropes would have carried more cultural currency in the conversation of images advanced primarily by women. Other period sources indicate the same. A reprinted 1903 poem in the *Herald of Gospel Liberty* was originally published in the very-differently-targeted *Harvard Lampoon*, suggesting that the question of power in mistletoe displays had wide and diverse audiences interested in the answers:

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She thanked them all for everything
From Christmas card to diamond ring;
And as her gifts she gaily flaunted,
She told her friends, “Just what I wanted.”

But I, who had no cash to blow,
Just kissed her ‘neath the mistletoe.
She blushed a bit, yet never daunted
Repeated low, “Just what I wanted!”54
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Again, a healthy dose of skepticism needs to be read into this text. We have only the male author’s voice to assure us the kiss was just what she wanted. But if we take it at face value, it does seem to match the message advanced visually by postcards, namely that women could use their holiday labor towards their own pleasure and gain, essentially

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54 “Her Thanks,” *Herald of Gospel Liberty* 95, no. 52 (December 24, 1903): 838.
creating their own *mise-en-scène* to enact the kissing ritual on their own terms. That the author’s object of affection was “yet never daunted” suggests the scene unfolded just as she intended.

Another poem titled “Her Gift” was more explicit. In it the male poet’s object of affection is described in the first stanza as a “coquette” who gives him a look, which causes him to fall in love. In the second stanza we see what happened the previous Christmas involving the mistletoe:

> With ardent love burning, I wooed her,  
> I made of myself just a slave;  
> With vows and with gifts I pursued her,  
> And only her smile did I crave.  
> Then Christmas rolled round; as I sought her.  
> ‘Neath mistletoes stood this sweet miss  
> When I pleaded that fairly I’d caught her,  
> She gave me a laugh—and a kiss.

In the final stanza, the author concluded that “his heart is so needy” and that this Christmas he wants her to give herself as his gift.\(^5\) True, once again the narrative is not without problems. The author’s suggestion that his amore should give herself to him after his pursuit is veering into now-familiar dangerous territory highlighted by Margaret Jackson. However, throughout the text it is she who holds the power, turning him “needy” and into “a slave.” And the entire story hinges on her standing under the mistletoe. He does not pursue her with a phallic sprig of his own; instead, he must come to her. When he attempts to characterize the encounter as him catching her, she laughs at his attempt to assume the upper hand, and then chooses to kiss him anyway.

The role reversal is even more pronounced in another period article describing mistletoe use. The piece is about a steamship captain described as “popular,” “handsome,” and “gallant.” The article’s subheadlines sets the stage of what follows:

“Capt. Gates was Popular with His Women Passengers; They Lured Him into the Saloon of the Minneapolis, Under the Mistletoe, and Then ------.” With a “trap” successfully set entirely by women, it is the captain who is accosted and endures kisses, some welcome, others not. Such scenarios could be imagined as postcard scenes of women hanging mistletoe, likewise setting the stage (perhaps even the trap) for themselves. (Figure 85)

Like the beautiful witch postcards, these images were conservative, not overly transgressive messages. Although women could demonstrate the power of initiation in initiating the construction of mistletoe displays, they were then required to engage in the largely passive act of waiting under their handiwork. Men, by contrast, did not stand under mistletoe waiting for a woman’s kiss that may or may not come—such a position of male vulnerability still went unimagined. (Figure 86) Children were often placed into the mistletoe-kissing scenario in order to obviate the sexual tension that accompanies the ritual. However, like Halloween and Valentines Day shopping images, these do demonstrate a gentle widening of possibilities brought on by women’s control of holidays and their accompanying rituals.

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56 “All Kissed the Skipper,” The Washington Post, December 31, 1907, 3.
Figure 85: Hanging Mistletoe
Here the act of hanging mistletoe as part of the “feminine sphere” of decorating for the holidays is shown. By hanging the mistletoe the New Woman was using a stage provided to her by her gendered duties around the holiday. From this stage she could then control the courtship rituals which surrounded the holiday.

Author’s Collection

Figure 86: Standing Under Mistletoe
In this scene the woman stands placidly under mistletoe, in a spot that she has chosen, rather than having mistletoe thrust upon her.

Author’s Collection

Warrior Cupids and the Battlefield of Love

If women in postcards demonstrated the power of initiative, the appropriation of control, and the power of choice, they also exerted their rights to refuse courtship and romantic overtures entirely. Again, these images were islands in a larger sea of sentimentality. It was true that most postcard valentines of the early twentieth century carried with them almost all the traditional visual iconography that emerged in the commercially produced valentine cards of the nineteenth century. Flowers, cupids, doves,
hearts, children and anachronistic couples all found their place in postcard art—just as they had in earlier valentines—often with little, if any variation on the presentation.

Still, in addition to all those traditional signifiers, there emerged a decidedly confrontational theme among postcards. Importantly, battle- and combat-themed cards were not comic cards, the postcard equivalents of the comic valentines that Leigh Eric Schmidt calls private charivari, with grotesque images.57 These were still sentimental postcards in their artistic style and use of traditional imagery, just slightly reimagined in a way that denotes a more belligerent tone.

To sense the tonal shift, it is perhaps easier to reaffirm how the majority of cards were seen to function. Again, Schmidt is an invaluable resource here, demonstrating that valentines were advertised as a kind of magical aphrodisiac that moved budding relationships from the initial stages to consummation. They served as “ambassadors between people,” and “provided a ritualized exchange through which to negotiate awkward situations, to help ease the transition from social distance to intimacy, and to minimize the social risks of rejection.”58 Certainly valentine manufacturers prior to the era of the New Woman felt like their products performed this function. The covers for McLouglin Brothers’ valentines catalogs, in back-to-back years of 1882 and 1883, suggested that the contents sold within were for love, courtship, and marriage (presumably in that order.)59

57 Schmidt, Consumer Rites, 77-94.
58 Ibid., 92. See also complete chapter “St. Valentine’s Day Greeting” 38-104
59 “Valentines for 1882; Valentines for 1883” (McLoughlin Brothers, 1882), Grossman Collection, File Cabinet 12, Drawer 3, Winterthur Library
Most nineteenth century valentines and their postcard prodigy created this ritualized bridge by visualizing the desired outcome—couples embracing and kissing were among the more blatant signs, or the use of other signifiers such as doves nuzzling, Cupid firing off an arrow, or a heart brought center stage on a pillow or chariot. However, the visualization of the awkward situation or the social risk of rejection itself would be totally counterproductive and seems to have had little, if any, currency in earlier valentines outside of comic or “vinegar” cards.

By contrast, several tropes among postcards posit this very problem.

Cupid often in melting
A heart when love arise
Leaves the other
As cold as ice

This rhyme accompanies an image of Cupid trying to thaw an ice-covered heart by heating it under a fire; however, the implication that even Cupid would be unsuccessful in making two hearts afire—that one would remain “as cold as ice”—is telling. In another card a forlorn looking child imagined as an ice delivery boy holds a heart made of ice and asks, “Where does this go?” “Doesn’t Cupid cut any ice with you?” queries another image, this one veering into comic territory with a more grotesque image of Cupid. Still, the traditional and sentimental visual language of cupids or cherubic boys is deliberately revealed to be insufficient to the task at hand—there are hearts in the postcard universe that run the risk of resistance to the magical properties that valentines are inherently supposed to possess. Perhaps the postcard will thaw the frozen heart, but the distinct possibility remains that perhaps it will not. (Figures 87-89)
In an amazing confession of helplessness, Cupid not only shows the work involved in trying to melt this heart, but also acknowledges that the other heart involved could be left “as cold as ice.”

In another play on the icy heart metaphor, this child delivery boy seems at a loss for what to do with the frozen heart he is asked to deal with. From the confused look, the need to use an interrogative, and the vague pointing off to the side, this is a subject mystified by what to do in the era of the New Woman.

Another variation on the ice heart theme, this early card with an undivided back (pre-1907) uses a more crude drawing style somewhat similar to that found on comic cards—sentimental cards’ vinegar counterpart in the marketplace. This card could be seen as part of a transition that moved the joke of the frozen heart to the vernacular of the sentimental card.

This could be seen as an awful admission, but of course it is not—there are no carnivalesque consequences, no visual distortions to suggest anything but a tacit acceptance of new realities. Although the third card is more crudely drawn (and probably thus much cheaper in the marketplace), the style of the other two is firmly entrenched in the realm of sentimental greeting cards—with the conscious placement of garlands of flowers and borders of intertwined hearts. In other words they are stylistic equals to
Schmidt’s sentimental “ambassadors,” but with very different messages about social risk, awkward situations, and rejection.

Here we must pause and acknowledge an individual who thus far has remained largely outside the conversation of images propagated by women—the male sender. Although earlier images of mistletoe aggression could be seen as a niche for males attempting to display prowess and power, valentines can hardly be categorized the same way. We know men bought valentines to woo women—by the millions in fact. Unlike the kinwork rituals of exchanging messages at Christmas, Easter, Halloween, New Years, and Thanksgiving, men had a central role to play in the advancing the volume of volume in Valentine’s Day cards. A male voice would typically be behind those questions about Cupid’s power to cut ice and melt hearts, thus adding men to the conversation of images that continued largely without them the rest of the year.

Still, it might be argued that the rising tide of empowerment among New Woman had the additional effect of marginalizing this male actor who sent postcards. While it was primarily a male voice asking the questions, it would have been primarily the female voice providing the answers. From this perspective, the sender of postcards—male or female—becomes somewhat less relevant than the recipient, who we know to be primarily women. Certainly the postcard could be intended as a plea if sent from a male suitor, but ultimately it was the woman who decided if it was a token or a joke; endearing or ironic; helpful or harmful to the cause of love.

It is also important to remember that it was entirely possible for postcards’ image-based conversations about courtship to could continue without male input. Women could
send such cards to female friends as a joke or pun—a useful alternative to the comic card. Women could also oversee the circulation of such cards among their children. Returning to the survey of postcards from Chapter One, of the 251 Valentine’s Day postcards in the database, nearly half (121 or 48%) were sent to children under the age of 14. While a young boy might send such cards to a young girl—technically conforming to the male/female sender-to-receiver relationship—one can imagine an adult, motherly hand behind the transaction that allowed the woman to take the place of a postcard-purchasing adult male. She could steer the flow of images to those that would have suited her tastes and sensibilities, including those of a New Woman. And it cannot be discounted that women could simply collect these kinds of cards for themselves. While hardly a scientific sampling, nearly half of the cards used in this chapter (from the author’s collection) never went through the mails. As seen earlier, women were encouraged—often by postcards themselves—to become shoppers and choosers. Women could take the initiative to buy postcards that enhanced their viewing pleasure, placing them directly in their postcard albums and display boxes. In a way, the conversation of images could occasionally be talking to oneself.

These contexts and potential viewing scenarios are helpful in looking at additional images that questioned the power of love to conquer all. In several postcards, for example, cherubs busily try to repair a broken heart. In many cases a doctor is required. Postcard illustrator Samuel Schmucker took that metaphor and changed it from sexually ambiguous cupids to a beautiful female nurse, carefully bandaging a heart while an “elixir of love” sits nearby. The repair process across postcards was multifaceted, and
could involve taping up the heart, sewing it back together, or engaging a cherubic blacksmith in the heart-repairing project. Far from doves nuzzling or cherubs frolicking because love has conquered all, these cards serve as visual reminders that love hurts. Here, the damage to the heart is fully acknowledged, and the visual metaphor of rejection is placed front and center on the card. (Figures 90-91) Sometimes it is the violence itself that is put on display—not violence against a person per se, but violence against the very idea of love. Images such as a cupid boxer using the heart as a punching bag or a cupid baseball player taking a swing with a bat emphasize this motif. (Figure 92)

Then there are images that go further still, making manifest the old saying “love is a battlefield.” In one, the heart has literally been transformed into a fortress, bristling with cannons and guns. A uniformed cupid stands inside. A note is pinned to this “castle” which reads, “Dear, if I surrender will you take me in the fort?” The fairly unsubtle sexual reference to being taken inside the fort would suggest that although brimming with guns, cannons and swords the fort is feminine, with a feminine cupid sentinel guarding against access. (See Figure 93)
Figure 90: Patching Up
Unlike Valentine’s Days of old, postcards put the damaged or broken heart on full display. Again, these are not comic cards, with crudely drawn caricatures of the broken heart. Postcards like these took the period’s sentimental visual language and redirected it to account for changes in courtship.

Author’s collection

Figure 91: Dr. Cupid
Puns about Doctor Cupid, nurses bandaging hearts, or hearts being carried off on stretchers arose from a new understanding and frankness about Valentine’s Day, and that not every romantic encounter would be met with success.

Author’s collection

In other images, it appears that Cupid’s bow and arrow are no longer adequate to the task at hand. One Winch postcard shows him outfitted in full military gear, while another makes the point explicitly: “No longer with Cupid can you trifle; he’s changed his bow for an up to date rifle.” In other postcards, Cupid has been stripped of his weapon by a New Woman who turns his trademark bow and arrow back on him. Here the specificity of Cupid is important. Although he is often depicted as a childlike cherub in postcards, Cupid is still a male figure in classical mythology. Capricious and random, this male figure controlled fate by shooting arrows into the hearts of his targets. Part of the
Metaphors of sport also opened the door to the symbolic beating the old norms of courtship seemed to be taking. With hearts as targets for baseball bats or boxer glovers, the mawkish notion of revering and coddling the heart gave way to the rough and tumble seen here.

In this image the metaphor of love as a battlefield becomes manifest. Although the figure is not definitively sexed, the message on the note, “if I surrender will you take me in the fort,” alludes to the desire to enter the female sexually. Thus the figure and the heart becomes gendered as female, although it bristles with guns, swords and cannons. The fact that the woman is being offered surrender emphasizes her position of power behind the defended walls.

thrill in removing Cupid’s power (or in a more Freudian interpretation, castrating him by removing his phallic arrows) also lay in the initiative-taking woman removing this sense of randomness from male-dominated hands. Most dramatic of all, though, is a Nash series entitled “Cupid’s Military Tactics” with such scenes as “Storming the Fort”, “The Spy,” and “Taps.” In “Storming the Fort” the woman holds the high ground, with the man forced to climb to her. Subheads of “Ordered to Retreat” and “Cessation of Hostilities” remind the viewer that such a woman has the power to issue orders, like a general.

(Figures 94-96)
The necessity of cupid upgrading his weapon of choice to a rifle stemmed from the new realities of courtship resembling a battle. The “up-to-date” rifle was designed for the “up-to-date” target, i.e. the New Woman.

The weaponry of Cupid was subject not only to being ineffectual, but to being taken away by a more powerful, i.e. more empowered New Woman. It is again important to emphasize that although humorous, this was not a comic card with crude caricatures. The woman here is of sentimental, traditional bearing, but is still allowed a transgressive turn of the tables on Cupid.

Although this card and the entire “Cupid’s Military Tactics” series was fraught with the language than naturalized conquest and aggression against women, in this image the woman does hold the upper hand. Her position requires an arduous scramble through vines and past a boulder. “Ordered to Retreat” suggests the status of a general, able to give orders.

What ties all these themes together is the relatively cynical view of courtship and love, especially on a day devoted to romance. On the one hand, such images as broken
and bandaged hearts could refer to a woman’s problems with love and men. One might expect that the boxer or baseball player or a soldier taking aim at love would be interpreted as men inflicting damage on the hearts of women. The potentially male boxer of Figure 92 is lent further nationalistic, jingoistic power by his stars-and-stripes shorts. Such readings not only reinforces traditional gender roles of men as boxers and soldiers, but also reaffirms their ultimate control over normative courtship and marriage rituals—including the act of sending the postcard in the first place.

However, there was also a real opportunity for gender transgression in these images. A New Woman could step into this traditionally male role in order to exert the power and impact over love that such motifs imply. Other images, especially the Cupid’s Military Tactics series, make it clear that it is the women who have necessitated doctors, triage, and battlefield strategies. Such interpretations are of course dependent on who is involved in the courtship transaction, with male actors exerting a voice through the postcards bought and sent to women. If men were sending these postcards to women, one could imagine manufacturers and senders intending them as a kind of hat-in-hand incitement to a reluctant woman.

Yet period accounts show increased skepticism with this approach. In a somewhat rambling 1903 essay on Valentine’s Day, “Sarge Plunket” a.k.a. Addison Wier, a Southern commentator and journalist, explicitly linked the decline of valentine metaphors with the New Woman. “It used to be counted that the birds came with St. Valentine’s Day, and they did, but they don’t come much now…It may be that the birds became imbued with the ideas of what we call the ‘new woman’ and like these women had a
contempt for the good old ways.”60 The fact that in Plunket’s opinion New Woman had
the ability to alter ecosystems, and nature itself, is telling. What chance did traditional
tokens of courtship have in the face of such power?

The valentine itself was no longer a strong enough totem, the magical aphrodisiac,
for the changing universe of romantic arrangements of the period. “What puzzles us,”
wrote a perplexed author in 1904, “is how do the young men and women nowadays
express their sentiment, and have they any to express? In how far is an emotion
dependent on the symbols of its expression? Is it a chance that concomitantly with the
decline in the number of valentines comes a rise in the number of divorces?” Although
here the author seems to implicate all youth, earlier in the piece it is clear that the New
Woman had contributed influence over on the situation.61

Another piece in poetry form made the point even more explicitly with the
opening line:

What, send her a valentine? Never!
I see you don’t know who “she” is.
I should ruin my chances forever;
My hopes would collapse with a fizz.

The poem then goes on to explain that the “she” is a New Woman, and after
describing such a women in a few stanzas the author concludes:

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61 “The Passing of St. Valentine,” The Independent ... Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and
She’s erratic, impulsive and human,
And she blunders—as goddesses can
But if she’s what they call the New Woman
Then I’d like to be the New Man.62

For author Richard Hovey, a valentine not only becomes useless in the face of New Womanhood, it actually becomes toxic. Obviously valentine postcard manufacturers would not want to go quite this far—after all they still had product to sell. But part of that product now included a line that spoke to women who were at the very least skeptical of such tokens, and enjoying seeing that skepticism manifested in visual form. By taking the sentimental visual language of the holiday and adjusting it from within, women found another way of reaffirming a slightly more advantaged position. The conversation of images by and for women—even with the introduction of male postcard senders during this one time of the year—thus remained largely intact because these images reminded women that they had the power to accept or reject their suitors. Like beautiful witches, they had power over men. Like empowered shoppers, they had the power of initiative. Like proactive mistletoe decorators, they had ultimate control over the courtship transaction, no matter what the male involved might wish to believe.

One final set of card images shows how these opportunities for visual empowerment and even transgression and carnivalesque inversion might have played out in the context of the New Woman. We start with “A Valentine’s Pipe Dream,” a card that offered a pun that not only emphasizes the unlikeliness of romantic success, but also suggests that such a beautiful woman is available only through the haze of an opium

dream. That the pipe in question might be an opium pipe is made certain by the Siamized lettering of the text. Here Cupid’s powers are truly called into question—the pain caused by the unattainable girl of the “pipe dream” pun can only be assuaged by the narcotic power of opium pipe. (See Figure 97)

Figure 97: Pipe Dream
The pun of the pipe dream girl does double damage to Cupid’s credibility. Not only is a “pipe dream” something unattainable (and nothing should be unattainable for Cupid), the joke also refers to an opium pipe, particularly with the Chinese-style lettering popular in Chinatowns. The necessity of opiates in the face of the New Woman, who remains as uncapturable as a puff of smoke, is a far cry from Valentines Day’s normal message of love conquers all.

Author’s collection

The opium pipe was just one variation on a larger theme of pipes and smoke that appeared around Valentine’s Day. As in the image above, the trope rested on an apparition of love emerging from the smoke—a bit of fantasy not dissimilar to the appearance of a face in the Halloween mirror game. Here, however, the gender roles were reversed, with the man looking into the smoke that he produced in order to determine the presence of love. (Figures 98-100) On the surface, such images would seem to be generated for male postcard buyers. Text such as “was it a pipe dream?” and “oh won’t
you tell me I may have yours for a Valentine” are presented as if uttered by the men pictured on the cards, not unlike the questions posed around frozen hearts.

Figures 98-100: Men, Smoking, and Valentines
The linkage between smoking and Valentine’s Day was well established in postcards; however, the context of women smoking added a potential inversion to these scenes for the female viewer. A female postcard recipient who read the ubiquitous accounts of women smoking could use that knowledge as a license to invert the roles seen here. Such fantasies were also made easier to imagine given their similarity to the popularly depicted mirror game.

Author’s Collection

Yet as art historian Dolores Mitchell reminds us, the visual topics of smoking and women at the turn of the century were a minefield of potential inversions and transgressions. Although firmly entrenched for decades in the male sphere of privilege and pleasure, smoking in the early 1900s had become contested ground for women. “At the turn of the century,” writes Mitchell, “as women demanded the vote, rode bicycles, and smoked, the image of the middle-class woman as a secret smoker—or intruder in the smoking room—took on a new face, increasingly popular in the arts,” to which one might also add
popular texts. A Valentine’s Day postcard to a woman—depicting a female face surrounded by smoke—could quite literally arrive the same week that her issue of *Town and Country* asked “Should Women Smoke?”

Mitchell goes on to discuss how several of this period’s women artists—Frances Benjamin Johnston, Jane Ataché, and Louise Lavrut—took up themes of smoking in their work. Certainly the conservative female postcard artists producing mass-consumed images for their conservative, primarily rural audiences would never have gone as far as Johnston’s famous photographic self portrait complete with a cigarette and beer stein. But Mitchell also asserts that smoking “carried associations of a wider knowledge of life from which women were excluded. Suffrage movements gained momentum at the turn of the century and stimulated public debate about restrictions on women’s lives, including smoking.”

Upon receipt of such postcards from a man, women could safely engage with transgressive associations through the playful inversion of their postcard scenes—imagining themselves as the producers of fate-revealing smoke, i.e. New Women, especially since the motif was so similar to their own gendered mirror game.

In light of this context, it is possible to go even further—beyond outright images of tobacco smoke from pipes, and into images of smoke and fire surrounding a heart. Although “hearts afire” metaphors were nothing new, in the early twentieth century they quite often found themselves sharing cultural space with discourses about women and smoking. Thus, looking at these images through the contextualist lens, the fantasy of

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63 Dolores Mitchell, “The "New Woman" as Prometheus: Women Artists Depict Women Smoking,” *Woman's Art Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring - Summer 1991): 4 The suffrage movement, however, should not be seen as the exclusive driver of this public debate.
64 “Should Women Smoke?,” *Town and Country*, no. 3119 (February 24, 1906): 17
smoke and fire surrounding an internal organ could serve as a reminder of the reality that real smoke and fire could be drawn into a woman through mass produced and marketed cigarettes. Lines could become further blurred within the household of consumer goods where colorful lithograph imagery (also typically produced in Germany) on cigar boxes and labels shared similarly constructed themes to postcards. Built for the male eye, these tobacco advertisements had smoke-specific motifs such as incense burners, flowing drapery resembling smoke, and hookahs interspersed with images highly relevant to Valentine’s Day ritual, such as flowers, musical instruments, and fruits. 66 Valentine postcards, presumably viewed with the feminine eye, saw these same sorts of elements reconfigured and rearranged, but perhaps not entirely removed from the male-dominated narratives of smoking’s pleasures. (Figures 101-102) Although this is a speculative interpretation, the debate over women smokers was never far from the consciousness of the bourgeois (or aspiring bourgeois) consumer. Textual reminders that linked women and smoke—and the transgressive power associated with it—could easily transmute into visual reminders of the same themes both overt (the pipe dream motif) and subtlety associative (hearts afire).

In a period in which obsession over women smoking was on the rise, one cannot discount at least some associative connotations with this image. An exaggerated amount of smoke is generated in this scene, which emerges from a heart, an internal organ. The heart is feminized by flowers, garlands and the cherub, who also holds two lit torches that resemble the shape of cigarettes. While not an obviously conscious image of smoking, the image has enough signifiers within it to make this interpretative leap in the context of the times.

Figure 102: Smoking Heart II
This image combined two themes—the “hearts afire” motif, which presented suggestive billowing smoke, as well as a heart under repair. The cupid glues the pieces of the broken heart back into place.

Conclusion

Like all the other examples, it again has to be acknowledged that these were relatively contained and safe modes of feminine expression and agency. Many normative,
heterosexual, hierarchical assumptions still formed the underpinnings to all of these cards, and there is no suggestion here that postcards challenged patriarchy in dramatic ways. The Cupid Tactics series from earlier resurrects concerns about legitimizing pursuit and capture male fantasies, especially when the series concluded with “surrender” motifs of Cupid’s tactics ultimately winning out. Still, even if the images of this section were sent from men to women (and especially if they were visual conversations between children overseen by women or were directly purchased by women for themselves) they are in fact affirming the New Woman’s prerogative that the time had come to replace some of Valentine’s Day’s mawkishness with moxie, without devolving into the comic cards that were so reviled.

Let us not forget either that these conversations illustrating the markers of New Women—initiative, control, choice, and the power of rejection—were taking place largely among rural and small town women. The Rural Delivery Service ensured farmwomen had access to same national periodicals that their city sisters read. *Outlook*, which by 1902 had a circulation of more than 100,000, featured such articles as Lillian Betts’ “The New Woman.” In text arguing “this is the new woman, the flower of this marvelous century, not the caricature drawn by the would-be wit,” 67 a metaphor emerged that women could draw their own image, using their own tools, and in their own way. Not only was it a metaphor perfectly suited to the postcard conversation of images, it was accessible to rural and urban women alike.

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It is perhaps easy to slip into a mindset that all New Women were urbanites that morphed into Harlem flappers by the 1920s. Of course, such characterizations are reductive (as is the characterization itself, admittedly). So it is important to remember that beautiful witches, savvy valentine shoppers, mistletoe politics, and war-weary cupids were all part of conversations that were intelligible enough, and familiar enough, to rural women for them to appropriate the images for their own needs and agenda. These were very gentle (and safe) constructions of new womanhood that suited their rural audiences. The vamps and femme fatales of other period genres of visual culture are nowhere to be seen; instead, postcards were populated by rosy-cheeked and sentimentally young and pretty women. Postcards were the canvas that rural women used to draw such images, employing a visual language and repeated tropes still deeply steeped in a popular, sentimental, and nostalgic style. In this sense they are remarkably similar to the images of the idealized, rural landscape in the last chapter. These postcards offer an opportunity to perhaps expand our understanding of such labels as “progressive” and “conservative” as they applied to the entire American landscape of the period.
6: Oh Beautiful for Pilgrim’s Feet: 
Patriotism and Race in Holiday Postcards

My share in work among immigrants has been with the Jewish people, but human nature is the same everywhere...Tell him to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday—that it is not a church holiday or a Jewish holiday—well, he cannot understand it...Let his own child have a part in depicting the home life of New England families, where people travel hundreds of miles for the family reunion at Thanksgiving. He will thus get an idea of American home life.¹

Like the debates surrounding the Country Life Movement and the New Woman, the discourse surrounding immigration, ethnicity and race was both sustained and pervasive during the years of the postcard fad. And with synchronicity reminiscent of the Country Life dialogue, the peak of immigration into this country—nearly 1.2 million in 1907—corresponded with the skyrocketing popularity of the postcard craze. The date is important in other ways as well. As Steven Diner notes, not only did this represent a peak of immigration, but a different kind of immigration: “Eighty-seven percent in 1882 arrived from countries of Northwestern Europe, but by 1907, 81 percent hailed from the South and the East. A majority of the ‘new’ immigrants were not Protestants, and they spoke languages, such as Polish, Yiddish, Lithuanian, Czech, and Greek, that were

completely unfamiliar to Americans.”\textsuperscript{2} Agitation for immigration restrictions and literacy tests would be consistent throughout the life of the fad.

The postcard images explored in this chapter are images that spoke to questions of national belonging and a place within American holiday tradition. And if one looked solely at the patterns of previous chapters, it would be precisely the “new” immigrants who would make use of such postcards to help deflect and dispute the anti-immigrant rhetoric. Rural Americans idealized their pastoral existence as an antidote to Country Life Movement deprecations, while women embraced a genre of images that advanced notions of “New Womanhood,” in part to create a counter-narrative against pervasive opposition to change. Within the postcards of this chapter—especially those with patriotic themes and images of holiday traditionalism—one might anticipate similar patterns. There was nothing that blatantly excluded new immigrants from enjoying patriotic iconography. Among these cards there were no epitaphs and caricatures specific to Russians or Greeks, Italians or Jews. In fact, appropriation of such cards might have been seen as a step towards assimilation and inclusion, and one might assume that those under attack, rather than the attackers, would find visual refuge in these images. And as Ellen Smith found with Jewish New Years postcards, such pockets of small postcard appropriation did exist.\textsuperscript{3}

Primarily, though, it was not the new immigrants who found something assuaging in the commercial, mass-produced postcard fad. Instead that mantle went to the rural and small town inhabitants of New England and the Upper Midwest—a group with long-

\textsuperscript{2} Diner, \textit{A Very Different Age}, 77.
\textsuperscript{3} Smith, “Greeting from Faith: Early-Twentieth-Century American Jewish New Year Postcards.”
standing familial roots in this country that stretched back to Northwestern Europe. These were the folks that tilted postcards from just another mass-produced product to a cultural phenomenon, and it was a group largely immune to the negative characterizations that stemmed from the immigration debate. The articles and textual discourses that advanced definitions of whiteness and hierarchical standing among ethnicities did not denigrate the third core group of postcard users—Native-born, Anglo-Saxons, and Teutonics. In fact, these postcard users were placed in a position of privilege and power by immigration debates. Their “old-stock” heritages were held up as the paragons of American nationalism and civic suitability.

We therefore require a somewhat different approach to establishing context for our next group of images. This chapter argues that perceived external threats to “traditional” demographic, social, and psychic constructions in Northern, white, rural and small-town America helped to foster holiday postcard use. Although granted a privileged position within the hierarchy of whiteness, these postcard audiences internalized larger fears that whiteness and white belonging were themselves in jeopardy in the early twentieth century. This internalized anxiety was given external form in the postcards chosen, bought, circulated, and saved. Postcard images that enjoyed popularity among these audiences were those that reaffirmed and re-emphasized believed traditions that they chose to see as insular and unique to themselves. Symbols and emblems that emphasized nationhood and patriotism also perpetuated beliefs in a specific type of national/civic fitness predicated upon race and ethnicity.
Consumerist holiday traditions (including the purchase and circulation of postcards) helped foster what Charles McGovern dubs material nationalism, and did so with an eye towards reaffirming the white and especially Northern Anglo-Saxon qualities of those holiday traditions. That holidays in particular could serve as a fulcrum for this kind of racial nationalism (as Gary Gerstle has called it), is a reminder that holidays were not always the inclusive, generous, and open affairs we sometimes assume them to be. In fact, holidays were so important to the processes of racial nationalism that I have coined and described a specific stripe dubbed “racial holidayism.” This chapter thus explores the way holidays and their images were deployed to define the boundaries and limits of nationalism.4

The Context of Internal Anxieties

As noted in Chapter Four, the idealized rural landscape that emerged in response to the County Life Movement had a secondary function that served as a “firewall” against the general spread of modernism into holidays. Holidays remained privileged as idealized rural experiences in part because of long-standing mythic constructions of the virtuous farmer as arbiter of such festivals. But the role of the idealized and nostalgic farmer was more precise than simply occupation. It was a construct built around a specific geographic sensibility (New England especially), and a specific set of racial and ethnic markers—White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant.

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Even Zionist writer and publisher Jacob De Haas ceded the rural landscape of holidays to the WASP: “It is of course pleasant to see brethren dwell in harmony. But I have no good ear for the variations of a tune, and if immigrant, plus Jew, may be allowed the word. I would prefer to see a return to the leit motif of Thanksgiving.” De Haas’ comments had important implications beyond simply reaffirming the New England rural ideal. He would go on to explicitly link that ideal with a transformation that was afoot: “Puritan followed Hebrew under stress of similar environment and happenings. Now Jew is following Puritan back to the farm—is perhaps tilling his old homestead.” De Haas had acknowledged that Jewish settlers, primarily Russian Jews, were moving into traditionally WASPy regions of the rural landscape. And therein lay the rub.

The 1910 United States Immigration Commission, commonly known as the Dillingham Commission, found that more than 2,000 farms in New England, New Jersey, and New York were Jewish run. The same report found various pockets of Poles, Italians, Bohemians, and Greeks also in agricultural pursuits. Other data shows the Midwest and Great Plains were also seeing subtle shifts in rural ethnic populations. Although “…Slavic ethnic people are preeminently urban,” wrote Frederick Luebke in 1977, “…some of them were led, chiefly through church agencies, to the West.”

Demographic shifts were occurring in the bastions of the rural ideal.

Americans were used to thinking of new immigrants as particularly linked to cities and old immigrants as linked to farms. Sentences like this one in the Dillingham

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report either reassured readers the change was small or emphasized the inevitability of transformation: “In the East the influx is directly from abroad, and while the increase in number of Polish farmers is not great, the movement to New England farms seems steady and permanent.”8 Other information from the period suggested additional worrisome trends that threatened to disrupt the old rural order. A tract called “The Immigration Problem” suggested that fecundity (the ability to reproduce) was higher in the country than the city, and higher among new immigrants than old. Rural Poles, the study suggested, “bore in the years indicated one child every 2.3 years, while it is least in the second generation of English women, who bore on the average one child only every 5 years.”9

All of this disrupted an assumption that the divide between rural and urban mirrored the divide between old and new immigrants. If an influx of un-Americanized, un-acculturated new immigrants was “steady and permanent,” and their birthrates were double those of second-generation Anglo-Saxon stock, then for those who considered themselves heirs to the idealized rural landscape, a set of unwelcome changes were in need of redress.

An “Old Fashioned” Holiday

It is into this conflict that the social construction of the “old fashioned” holiday surged in popularity. Just as images of the rural landscape had antecedents in forms like

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8 Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigrants in Industries, Part 24 Recent Immigrants in Agriculture Vol II, 162
Currier and Ives prints (discussed in Chapter Four), so too was the theme of the “old fashioned” holiday an ongoing thread. As Stephen Nissenbaum illustrates, commentators lamented the passing of Christmas traditions of the past as early as the 1820s.\footnote{Nissenbaum, The Battle for Christmas, Chapter 3, 90-131}

Still, a survey of holiday-related news coverage suggests that by the 1880s and 90s, the terms “old fashioned Christmas” and “old fashioned Thanksgiving” were coming back into cultural ascendancy.\footnote{For example, a text-mining search of online copies of articles from the New York Times reveals the use of the phrase “Old Fashioned Thanksgiving” in 1864 during the Civil War, and then not again until 1882, with eight further instances throughout the 1890s. Four articles with the phrase “Old Fashioned Christmas” are clustered between 1868 and 1870, and then the phrase reappears in 1880, where it is used five times in the 1880s and over a dozen times in the 1890s. Within an online archive of the Chicago Tribune (which dates back to 1849) the phrase “Old Fashioned Christmas” does not appear until 1880, and “Old Fashioned Thanksgiving” until 1892, after which they are both repeated frequently. See ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed 1/1/11. Though much less accurate, text-mining the Google News Archives yields a similar timeline. “Old Fashioned Christmas” between 1800 and 1900 produces 17 hits for the entire 80 years between 1800-1879. Then in the 1880s 13 instances, and in the 1890s, over 40. http://news.google.com/archivesearch/advanced_search accessed 1/1/11.} Some historians have seen this term primarily in an anti-modernist or anti-consumerism context.\footnote{See Margaret J. Weinberger, “How America invented Thanksgiving” (Doctoral Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 2003); Schmidt, Consumer Rites. See also Bryan Le Beau’s discussion of “old” and “old New England” in Currier and Ives prints Beau, Currier & Ives, 168-177} However, its position as a nativist, anti-immigrant paradigm cannot be overlooked, and some historians have indeed suggested this argument. Roy Rosenzweig wrote that genteel elite of Worcester were the ones who tended to look back nostalgically on a “golden age” of celebrations and would write that they had “gone out of fashion.”\footnote{Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will, 66.} Ellen Litwicki is more explicit when she offers “the nativist American League sponsored an ‘Old Fashioned’ Fourth, at which the main speaker condemned immigrants who waved two flags at their celebrations.”\footnote{Ellen Litwicki, “Our Hearts Burn with Ardent Love for Two Countries,” in We Are What We Celebrate, ed. Amitai Etzioni and Jared Bloom (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 228.}
Unlike descriptions that portrayed a holiday like Thanksgiving historically (i.e. the First Thanksgiving), “old-fashioned” imagery imagined a Thanksgiving that was still reconstructable and attainable. The rituals described all take place in the current era of the discourse—gathering around the table for a Thanksgiving dinner of turkey and pie—but they are reimagined as better because the setting is not in the city but in the woods, the countryside, or New England, i.e. “old fashioned.”

In a 1910 comic strip “Old Opie Dillcock’s Stories,” the grandfatherly Dillcock tells his grandchildren of a “good, old-fashioned Thanksgiving” and begins: “I don’t know that I ever enjoyed a Thanksgiving dinner more than I did that one that day in the north woods with my old friend Jeems and Mrs. Jeems.”\(^{15}\) An extensive article in *The Ladies’ Home Journal* entitled “To Spend an Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving Day,” offered a spectrum of advice “as an important aid in carrying out successfully the true spirit of an old-time New England family Thanksgiving...”\(^{16}\) In another illustrated article entitled “A Thanksgiving Party,” the author begins: “One finds, as the years pass, more and more seldom the keeping of this most pleasant festival in the merry old fashioned way.” She goes on “last year it was the writer’s good fortune to be a guest in an old homestead in Westchester for Thanksgiving Day.”\(^{17}\) In each of these cases, the setting for the “best” rituals lies in the a tiny portion of the United States—the North Woods, New England, Westchester.

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\(^{15}\) “Old Opie Dillcock’s Stories (comic strip),” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 20, 1910, D4.


Access to these tiny geographical spots was predicated on more than just the ability and funds to travel. One also had to have someone to actually visit. As the *Boston Daily Globe* wrote, Thanksgiving Day travelers “will also forget all about the busy cares of the city. They want to be at home to sit around the old family table with the extra leaves put in for the occasion, and partake of the good old turkey dinner as so deliciously prepared by mother.”  

The fact that the article is titled “Rush Home for the Feast” only goes to emphasize the requirement of a separate home and family in the countryside waiting for the myriad of urban dwellers to arrive. Of course, only a small percentage of Americans actually fit this precise model, but many more could at least imagine themselves as connected to these “old fashioned” enactments cause they too had “Old European” lineages—the same kinds that populated these nearly-mythic enclaves to the North. Such psychic connections were decidedly out of reach for those newly arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe.

Naturally, the accompanying illustrations that helped readers imagine these “north woods,” “Westchester,” and “New England” settings as antonyms to the city also only portrayed white participants—scrubbed of any non-Anglo-Saxon ethnicity—in the Thanksgiving ritual. The dichotomy was reinforced: “old-fashioned” was an elevated claim to Thanksgiving attainable only by whites who could at least visualize themselves outside the crowded cities and urban landscapes. New immigrants who presumably would (or should in the logic of the day) only know the urban landscape were left with an

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inferior interpretation of the holiday, outside their own experience or the experience of their older generations. (Figure 103)

But the construction of an “old fashioned” holiday built around assumptions of ethnic heritage and Northern and rural superiority was just one way among many to present and promulgate an exclusive vision of holidays. With the space around holidays thus contested—not only between rural and urban, modern and traditional, and now old immigrant versus new immigrant—is it any wonder that patriotic emblems and signs became folded into the visualization of the holidays?

Figure 103: To The Old Homestead
The notion of the “old fashioned” Thanksgiving or Christmas, and variations on the theme touting the “old homestead,” assumed cultural and familial ties to the mythic rural landscape. This was something obviously beyond the reach of newly arrived, urban immigrants from countries with short histories of immigration to the US.

Author’s collection
Patriotism and Material Nationalism

Symbols referencing the idea of the American nation—flags, shields, stars and stripes, red/white/blue color schemes, Uncle Sam, Columbia, bald eagles, and more—found their way into the iconography of holidays, with some linkage at Christmas and most forcefully at Thanksgiving.\(^{19}\) These emblems are partially explained, as Charles McGovern suggests, by the connection between American nationhood and consumption. “As easily recognized and widely accepted symbols,” he writes, they bequeathed “…an aura of official endorsement to goods.” One could easily add to that argument the word “holidays,” with all their goods and consumer glory.\(^{20}\)

Certainly we cannot ignore that nationalist or patriotic iconography was superimposed on any number of mass-produced products throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries without there necessarily being larger texts and meanings behind them. David Hackett Fischer reminds us that manufacturers “often used the most sacred emblems of the republic to advertise their wares...The most mundane products were adorned with emblems of liberty." This included doormats, handkerchiefs, toilets and toilet paper.\(^{21}\) However, the purpose of deeply contextualized analysis is to break through these conventions to explore their deployment at a specific time and in specific functions. In a way, patriotic iconography is similar to the idealized rural landscape or the

\(^{19}\) I refer here only to the six holidays of the study, so I am not addressing more obvious holiday rituals were the nationalistic emblems are more logical to the purpose of the holiday, i.e. Fourth of July, Memorial Day, Flag Day. Obviously patriotism factored heavily in those images, but not unexpectedly so, as might be the case with Thanksgiving and Christmas.

\(^{20}\) Charles F. McGovern, Sold American, 109-112.

expression of holiday-related nostalgia—we have to accept that long patterns of use and consistency of theme does not necessarily preclude changing contexts and meanings.

Thus in light of the period’s obsession with immigration and citizenship, the official visual endorsement of holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas by sacred national emblems fostered or nurtured notions of citizenship through participation in those holidays. McGovern, building on the ideas of Gary Gerstle offers three ways such citizenship can be imagined: “civic nationalism,” an inclusive ideal of belonging; “racial nationalism,” based on an exclusionary notion of nationhood; and “material nationalism” a hybrid that purports inclusion, but is really exclusionary in its visual representations.22

This third path is the best way to consider the patriotic landscape of holiday postcard imagery. We have already seen that there was an exclusionary visual vocabulary surrounding the old-fashioned holiday—one that assumed long-standing ancestry in the United States that was white, rural, and preferably New England. This palette of tropes was then paired with the national aura of patriotic referrers. Flag-waving Santas and star-spangled turkeys on postcards were very specific communicators of a rural, Northern, white, Anglo-Saxon nationalism and holiday tradition. Not coincidentally, those were exactly the people who consumed such images in quantities large enough to turn the postcard from a form into a phenomenon. It was they who engaged in an inward-looking conversation of images that helped to reassure and reinforce larger cultural constructions. Again my claim is not that new immigrants could not use and enjoy these same postcards, particularly as part of a path towards self-assertion into American holiday culture. But as

the survey and subsequent research shows, they did not do so en masse, and a lack of access to postcards and insufficient funds to buy them are only part of the answer at to why. Those that were buying holiday postcards were doing so at a pace that assured their cultural voice was heard—the volume of volume. It became an internal, almost self-fulfilling conversation of images that helped foster their exclusive views of whiteness.

Relative to Thanksgiving, this claim runs somewhat counter to the traditional narrative in the historiography. Most scholars have addressed the patriotic overtones of Thanksgiving by seeing them as a move towards inclusion, not exclusion. Elizabeth Pleck, for example, argues that at least initially Progressive Era sentiment around Thanksgiving could signal prejudice, particularly in the incorporation of pilgrim mythology into the holiday. However, while she initially sees prejudice, she more forcefully argues that this gave way to stronger impulses of using Thanksgiving inclusively. She writes:

Schoolteachers recognized that they had to develop an emotional bond between the immigrant and the nation, a love of country. Immigrant children could be taught American history and learn about the holidays, but the home was where the deepest feelings of patriotism were conveyed...A feast around the common table represented an acceptance of American customs and history by the newcomers and their recognition that they would do their part in encouraging their child’s budding patriotism.

Margaret Weinberger echoes the sentiment: “reformers saw Thanksgiving, along with other holidays, as vehicles for inculcating American culture in immigrant children

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23 Pleck, Celebrating the Family, 27.
24 Ibid., 29.
and providing feelings of nationalism.”25 On the theme of Thanksgiving inclusion
Weinberger also writes that even prior to the first official national proclamation in 1863,
Thanksgiving advocate and promoter Sarah Hale (editor of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*) saw it
as “a means of creating national harmony and preserving the Union.”26 Matthew Dennis
agrees when he writes that following the Civil War “a depoliticized Thanksgiving served
perfectly as a rite of reunion, and the American holiday achieved unprecedented national
stature, particularly because it continued to be prescribed and promoted by newspapers
and women’s magazines…”27

Thus the primary historiography of Thanksgiving suggests viewing patriotic
holiday postcards as representing inclusive impulses. Can an alternative reading of
Thanksgiving patriotic images suggest opposition and exclusion instead? Is it possible to
contextualize postcard use in ways that did not include new immigrants into the holiday
experience, and in fact worked as an exclusionary device? As noted above, a first step in
answering those questions is understanding the anxiety over the arrival of new
immigrants into traditional bastions of German and Anglo-Saxon rural hegemony. But
there were other forces at work as well. An equal anxiety of Germans about their place
within the hierarchy of white races was discussed in Chapter Two, but is worth
reemphasizing here. In his perceptively titled book *Becoming Old Stock*, Russell Kazal
argues that Germans were extended an “invitation” throughout the early twentieth
century to join in a core of old Europe lineages that could serve as true American race

26 Ibid., 117.
and as an antipode to the new immigrants. However, this invitation was not universally accepted or always enthusiastically embraced, and in many cases it would take until after WWI for “some second-generation immigrants [to] accept that ‘old stock’ invitation,” as Kazal suggests.28

Kazal’s *Becoming Old Stock* is focused on urban Germans, specifically those in Philadelphia. However, it is a useful text not only in imagining German ethnicity as a fluid construction, but in understanding that even the German-American community was hardly homogenous. In fact, it was the urban/rural splits that generated some of the community’s greatest tension. We sometimes think of rurals as isolated and individualistic (certainly the Country Lifers did); however, accepting and affirming the “old stock invitation,” would have been much more important for German farmers living amid a patchwork of Native-born and Anglo-Saxon ethnics than it would have been in a comparatively insular urban enclave. Engaging in the postcard fad in which ruralism, holidays, and patriotism were all spun around a German-born creation would have helped to counteract any lingering doubts about fitness within the “old stock” club brought on by unassimilated urban cousins.

Into this mix of stresses over the hierarchies of race, ethnicities, and ruralness the typography of the patriotic holiday landscape can be seen as yet another example of the appropriation of postcard imagery by a group with something to assert, defend, and contest. Even though the rhetoric surrounding immigration never seriously challenged the Northern European bloc of “good” American stocks, a defensive posture was nonetheless

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assumed because of changing circumstances and underlying anxieties. The trickle of new immigrants into the native, Teutonic, and Anglo-Saxon rural domain of New England and the upper Midwest, paired with their seemingly limitless fecundity, threatened to upset an old order. It also put Germans in particular on the defensive, lest their invitation to “old stock” be revoked (the anti-German backlash at the onset of America’s entry into WWI in 1917 was several years removed from the postcard fad’s rise and fall). Just as the social construction of the “old fashioned” holiday worked within the precepts of material nationalism to subtly (or not so subtly) exclude alternative depictions of idealized holidays, so too did postcards with patriotic emblems function in a similar way for this specific constellation of whites.

For Christmas, perhaps the most striking use of patriotic emblems is one of Santa Claus and Uncle Sam shaking hands and drinking champagne. (Figure 104) But the picture is completely consistent with the notion of staging one’s own fitness within the construct of nationalism. In Charles McGovern’s words, the goods and products one bought—especially in connection to such a consumption-heavy holiday as Christmas—“expressed American values and ideals,” through which “consumers asserted their own American nationality, vesting it in the things they purchased.”29

29 Charles F. McGovern, Sold American, 120.
Figure 104: Santa and Uncle Sam
Christmas is given a decidedly patriotic sheen in this card. Material nationalism forms the underpinnings of the image, with Uncle Sam sanctifying the work of Santa, as the ultimate arbiter of consumer products and the importance of purchase. Meanwhile Santa toasts Uncle Sam, emphasizing the importance of nationhood in the consumer process. Consumption equaled good citizenship in the early twentieth century (and could be argued still does).

Author’s collection

Figure 105: Santa and the Panama Canal
This image ties together multiple themes, including its potential use by German-Americans to help make larger claims about the white hierarchy of races. By combining American imperialism (the Panama Canal) with a symbol of German engineering prowess and national pride (the zeppelin), Germans could insert themselves into the patriotic agenda, assuring their place in the Anglo-Saxon/Teutonic constellation.

Author’s collection

By having Santa—Christmas personified and the ultimate purveyor of things and goods—shake hands with the nation personified, the link between goods and country was made manifest. Not only that, the link was emphasized with a celebratory toast of champagne, like two businessmen closing a deal. For those looking to make specific claims on nationalism (i.e. rural Northerners) or to bolster the argument for fitness within the nation (German-Americans), images such as this one asserted sound nationalist credentials. Postcards became a consumer good that emphasized the material nationalism of all the other consumer goods implied in the Christmas holiday tradition.
Another striking image is one of Santa looking down from a dirigible through binoculars at the site of the Panama Canal, while a large American flag hangs off to his left side. (Figure 105) The pairing of Santa and the Panama Canal (under construction during the years of the postcard fad and opened in 1914) lends a nationalist tinge to the holiday-specific ritual of gift buying. In terms of proportion, the American flag flying off the airship is larger than Santa himself, drawing conscious attention to its importance within the image. Santa—in mythology a nationless figure living at the North Pole—is made a proxy of America by flying such an enormous flag. At the very least it is a tribute to his adopted country. But it also calls to mind the practice of registering ships and airplanes by country, and displaying the flag as an announcement of national affiliation. It is as if Santa has now registered his airship as an American vessel. In doing so he has not only adopted America as his country, he has converted his toy-delivery enterprise into a significant American, i.e. capitalist, operation. Like any good capitalist, he does not simply fly past the new Canal Zone; instead, he stops and carefully inspects it through binoculars. Like a factory owner or manager, he takes an immediate and personal interest in the work of capitalism (and the expansion of new markets) taking place below.

Clearly this speaks to America’s expansionist and imperialist ambitions of the period, giving a benign glow to the enterprise by the interested gaze of Santa Claus. The ships that line up on either side of the isthmus evoke the global trade of capitalist products and goods that will flow through the eventually-completed canal, but for the time being are stored safely in Santa’s pack with him on the dirigible. Moreover, Santa’s white jolly face and the giant American flag could also help reassure viewers that
America’s imperialist adventures were not going to lead to race suicide and influxes of dark immigrants. In a way, Santa stands in for Uncle Sam (both white, bearded, paternalistic men) to demonstrate that “traditional” Christmas icons—Santa himself, Christmas trees, presents—would stand as a bulwark against the race-based fears that America’s imperial agenda generated.

It should also be noted that other icons—the zeppelin, the Canal, and the giant flag—are seemingly unrelated to the traditional iconography of the Christmas holiday; and yet, all are seen here. America in the early twentieth century was fascinated by the theme of technological progress, and American technological progress in particular. The zeppelin, an upgrade from presumably inefficient reindeer and sleigh, has improved Santa’s work; and commerce will be made even more efficient with the opening of the Panama Canal, a shining symbol of American imperial progress. This postcard also would have been part of the image-based conversation between those with German ethnicity, who would understand the significance of the zeppelin, a particularly important symbol of German aviation prowess. The image is not just a celebration of American progress, but a claim to a specific historically situated place for German-Americans in the advancement of that progress.

Yet outside of these and a few similar images, the majority of the patriotic Christmas landscape consists primarily of Santa and his pack of toys having some sort of small American flag connected to it. A much more diverse collection of images emerges from Thanksgiving, the holiday where the various permutations of visual claims and counter-claims can truly be seen.
Reading the Visual Vocabulary of Thanksgiving

Patriotic emblems connected to Thanksgiving largely fell into four major categories. First there was the familiar idealized rural landscape, with patriotic iconography inserted onto an otherwise stand-alone image. This was typically accomplished through a banner of red, white, and blue or a small shield in the corner. But even small patriotic elements carried important messages for those circulating these images within tightly-knit groups of specific whites. “From the late 1880s onward, and especially during the 1890s, organized zeal on behalf of the flag attained fever pitch,” writes Wilber Zelinsky in an article on nationalistic emblems. “Not too coincidentally, this was also the period when many of our patriotic-hereditary organizations were founded or began to flourish, when fresh varieties of xenophobia began to sprout, and when old-fashioned imperialism attained maximum virulence.”30 Such visual instincts clearly carried forward into the twentieth century. The message of the mythically rural paired with the subtlety patriotic was a nod to the interplay of both, the marriage of convenience between the tropes of anti-urban and anti-immigrant. (Figure 106)

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The second group of images centered on the turkey and the bald eagle as rival national birds. Of course, the story of Benjamin Franklin wanting the turkey as America’s symbol was well known. Franklin’s remarks about turkeys attacking British redcoats while the bald eagle was a thief and coward were still being circulated in articles in the 1900s. In postcards, the juxtaposition of the two birds at Thanksgiving offered numerous possibilities, ranging from the unremarkable to the downright bizarre, but each increasing in violence. At one end of the spectrum images simply showed the two birds occupying the same landscape—the eagle flying in the background, while a turkey roamed the foreground, for example. From there the images progressed to what might be called a menacing of the turkey by the eagle, in which the latter hovers over or in front of the former in a bellicose manner. These would then be ratcheted up to the actual slaying

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of the turkey by the eagle, and finally, the eating of the turkey by an anthropomorphic figure with a bald eagle head, often dining at a flag-draped table. (Figures 107-109)

This last image is perhaps most significant in its symbolic coding. The eagle is gendered male by his jacket and boutonnière. Not only is his strength presumably communicated by his gender, but is reinforced with the long, powerful (and phallic) knife. Men were frequently written into the Thanksgiving narrative as figures of violence. It was men who anachronistically went into the forest with a musket to shoot a turkey or the farmer (or his son) who chopped off the turkey’s head with an axe in the farmyard. It was traditionally the patriarch who cut into the cooked bird at the table. By inserting the bald eagle and the flag-draped table into that same narrative of violence, this role of stalker and killer becomes doubly coded—both as a male figure and the embodiment of nationhood. Both were capable of carrying out violent acts (like killing the turkey) in large part because of their presumed position of strength and superiority as both men and Americans.
In the first stage of violence between eagle and turkey, the eagle assumes some sort of position above his counterpart. This image is not especially threatening; however, other images show the eagle aggressively menacing the rival bird.

In the second stage of violence between eagle and turkey, the eagle slays his rival.

In the final stage of violence the eagle eats the turkey. The long, extended knife is there to both carve the vanquished foe, as well as to serve as an overall reminder of power. With the eagle firmly on the side of nationhood in the iconography, the inferior turkey became the projected antagonists who threatened a white national order—new immigrants, blacks, etc. The escalating levels of violence between the two birds served as a fantasy of proscribed violence by specific whites against their “foes.”
Of course, if the eagle could be a symbolic substitute of the powerful aggressor, his victim could be loaded up with similar symbolism. As a notoriously weaker, dumber bird, lower on the evolutionary chain than the eagle, the turkey was also a logical substitute for anything (or anyone) deemed inferior to the virtuous and victorious national bird—especially that trickle of new immigrants that rural Northerners so dreaded would become a deluge. In his 1904 *The American Natural History*, William Hornaday, Director of the New York Zoological Park, made the use of such symbolism explicit in his “Orders of Birds” section:

The American Eagle needs no defence [sic] from me. Whether ‘He clasps the crag with hooked hands, Close to the sun in lonely lands,’ or perches defiantly on the United States coat-of-arms, with a brow to threaten or command, he is beloved by at least seventy-two million people who will rise as one whenever he is really in need of defenders…At home, it is quite time for all strangers to secure an introduction to him, and for some of those who should be his friends but are not, to write him down no longer.32

“Threaten,” “command,” “rise as one”—these words link the eagle to a violent persona, which is manifested in postcard images. The eagle motif of staged violence could be filled with whatever anxiety a nervous postcard viewer might wish to assuage. And as we have seen, new immigrants and their fecundity was a particularly pressing anxiety to our core postcard audiences. Moreover, it gave license to that anxiety by offering a nationalistic tinge to the act of eliminating the presumably deficient, lower bird embodied by the turkey. That such an outlet existed at all is another reminder that Thanksgiving was not always the inclusive, consensus-building holiday described in the historiography.

A third category of patriotic images may seem to be a wide assortment at first glance; however, all of them centered around human interactions with the turkey—both living and as a cooked dinner. All those interactions are elevated to a symbolic national level with the added context of a flag or banner or similar patriotic emblem within the image. Quite often these veered into the realm of the fantastic, with turkeys pulling chariots and carts made of flowers, vegetables, and gold while young boys hold the reins. Other times the turkey would be ridden like a horse, or might be carried into the scene by cart, basket, or carriage.

As silly as these images are, they still advance certain ideological messages. The consumption of a turkey dinner is preceded by fantasies that emphasize delivery—an important step in the capitalist system. The delivery of goods by flag-drapped chariots and carriages also emphasized modes of delivery that linked rural abundance to citizenship. Flag-waving (and always white) children representing idealized citizens deliver their turkeys and other fruits of bounty from the rural harvest (pumpkins, grapes, corn) to their fellow citizen-consumers who hold and view the postcard. Based on the findings of Chapters One and Two, we can largely assume those viewers to be whites of particular ethnicities and nativities, who could view this white-delivered national bounty as specifically for them.

Such linkage between the citizen, the products of rural production, and the abundance of the marketplace was not new. As the New York Times reported in 1880: “Anybody who has watched the influx of Thanksgiving materials into this City in the last three days might easily imagine that the whole of Manhattan Island was to be paved with
turkeys and pumpkin pies.”\footnote{“Thanksgiving Turkeys,” \textit{New York Times}, November 25, 1880, 5.} In this visualization the urban is transformed into a cityscape of consumable goods, goods that of course came from the idealized rural landscape. The same \textit{New York Times} article listed reasons for thanks that included “good crops and prosperous business,” linking the two in a way that later Country Lifers would explicitly understand.\footnote{Ibid.}

“Six million turkeys will be consumed by the people of this nation next Thursday,” the \textit{Washington Post} reported in 1896. “This is only a rough estimate, but the wholesale dealers say that one turkey for every twelve persons is a very fair average.”\footnote{“Turkeys for a Nation,” \textit{The Washington Post}, November 22, 1896, 18.} \textit{The New York Observer and Chronicle} wrote in 1910 “I have heard it stated on good authority that if the ‘turkey money’ of the nation were applied to the national debt, it would be wiped out within ten years.”\footnote{“Household: The Thanksgiving Bird,” \textit{New York Observer and Chronicle}, November 10, 1910, 89.}

In these ways readers were thus invited to imagine endless purchasing, the ultimate act of the good American citizen, on a mind-boggling scale. In the same way, and using the same logic, postcard viewers were asked to extrapolate from the spectacles of abundance paraded across the fronts of cards.

In fact, the parade motif was emphasized by so many pictures using some sort of wheeled apparatus—carts, carriages, chariots. Just as a parade rolls down the street during holidays, so too would these images of parade-ready vehicles have rolled past on the twirling postcard rack. The multiplicity of delivery scenarios within this parade all linked patriotism to bounty. But of course, consumers were expected to do more. The twirling parade of bounty and prosperity was meant to excite purchase. Displaying the
turkey was not enough; one had to buy too—buy the postcard, the turkey, the pumpkin, the grapes, the corn, and so on. (Figure 110)

Once this process was completed, the next thing to visualize was, of course, the act of consumption. This is why in many images diners enjoy their Thanksgiving dinner by eating off flag-draped tables or in front of streamers of red, white and blue. For these citizen consumers, this is their nationally sanctified reward for having participated in another annual bacchanalia of purchasing products that successfully link the virtuous farmer with the rest of the nation. These images also reaffirmed their privileged status as Americans by virtue of their whiteness. In Figure 111 we see the physiognomies upon which national belonging were predicated as part of the conversation of images—white skin, slender build, blond hair for her, and a stylish upturned mustache for him. The white couple’s consumption—both of Thanksgiving products and the postcards that document them—is made explicitly patriotic by the words “For Good Citizenship” over the top of a flag-draped table.
Figure 110: Symbolic Prosperity
All the symbols of Thanksgiving prosperity—the turkey, the pumpkin, the grapes and corn—were made symbols a national bounty by the addition of the flag. College football games—especially the fabled Harvard versus Yale rivalry—were increasingly linked to Thanksgiving in the popular press. The boy holding a melon like a football adds further emphasis to the rituals of the day, again giving a patriotic sheen through the nationalist sign.

Author’s collection

Figure 111: For Good Citizenship
Celebrating Thanksgiving and its consumerism become civic virtues in this image. Whether this was seen an inclusive invitation or an exclusive retrenchment depended on the viewer; however, the mechanisms of material nationalism are at work here, by suggesting good citizenship came in a very specific package of racial, class, and familial signifiers.

Author’s collection

The final set of patriotic images for Thanksgiving specifically employ Uncle Sam as the delivery device of Thanksgiving’s bounty. Uncle Sam holds turkeys both living and dead (sometimes somewhere in between as when Uncle Sam appears to be throttling a bird) in another enactment of the delivery ritual. This time, however, the act of delivery is not by an assortment of figures, but by one specific and unique individual. That Uncle Sam stands in for the nation is understood—he is the ultimate citizen, encouraging the viewer to join in a celebration of national prosperity and abundance. Kenneth Ames makes a similar point about a popular Uncle Sam postcard, writing of his example: “This postcard employs allusions to triumphal chariots and parade floats, metaphorically
harnessing traditional conceptions of abundance and bounty to American energy, under American direction.” But of course by doing so through the image of the postcard, Uncle Sam’s magnanimity is really couched in material nationalism. Only those using postcards, which largely excluded blacks and new immigrants, could join the American holiday. (Figure 112)

![Uncle Sam Presenting](image)

Figure 112: Uncle Sam Presenting
The image of Uncle Sam presenting a turkey at Thanksgiving was also the embodiment of nationhood presenting the embodiment of prosperity and bounty. It is also a very patriarchal image—the male deliverer of prosperity offers his gifts just like the idealized father offers prosperity to his family.

Author’s collection

The employment of Uncle Sam also drives home another point. As Ames also points out, “Thanksgiving became a feminized event, a celebration of connectedness and intimacy within a setting of abundance and nurture.” In a tradition dominated by female ritual, skill, and creativity, why is not the iconographic figure of Columbia used to

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37 Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture*, 92.
38 Ibid., 88.
embody larger messages relative to the strength and bounty of the nation? Certainly the trope of Columbia was readily available and recognizable to the period’s mass-viewing public. Yet among all the patriotic-themed Thanksgiving postcard images I have seen, only one depicted the feminine Columbia in the same role as Uncle Sam as a presenter of national bounty—not to mention all those bellicose eagles, boys, soldiers, sailors, or other male icons that embody the citizen consumer. (Figure 113)

The question can perhaps be answered partially by historical precedent. Very occasionally the female figure of Columbia would stand in for the male Uncle Sam in other venues of visual culture, such as in Louis Dalrymple’s illustration for the November 27, 1902 *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Here Columbia is praying, presumably giving thanks, with a sheaf of wheat at her knees titled “American Prosperity.” Figures labeled Farmer and Labor are part of a group behind her, also in prayer.39

More in keeping with a long visual tradition stretching back to the 1870s (remembering again that Thanksgiving was first declared a national holiday in 1863) is the 1896 Thanksgiving cover of *Harper’s Weekly*. Here Columbia steps into a decidedly female role as she pulls a turkey out of the oven to present to Uncle Sam. The turkey lets off ringlets of steam that spell “sound money restores confidence, opens factories, revives business.”40 With Columbia on her knees in front of the oven, holding up the turkey for Uncle Sam’s approval, the gender roles were very clear. Although it was Columbia’s work as a woman that had generated the turkey that would be the bounty of 1896, it was under the man’s watchful eye and only with his approval that the turkey could be

declared a success. (Figure 114) In fact, in Lydia Maria Child’s original 1844 poem entitled “A Boy’s Thanksgiving” the famous line we know so well today was actually “Over the river, and through the wood, to Grandfather’s house we go.” The male figure of Uncle Sam had a long career as the paternal embodiment of national prosperity, and by the early twentieth century it may have been difficult to rethink a reified iconography that seemed so natural.

Still, another, more historically situated answer also suggests itself. With suffrage hotly debated in the period of postcard use, the personification of the nation as a woman carried politically-charged implications. *Life* made just such a point, in its own patriarchal, condescending way, in its October 16, 1913 “Pro-Suffrage Number.” The pages include a Harrison Cady illustration in which Uncle Sam hands Columbia a bouquet of roses marked “ballot,” to which Columbia replies, “Oh, thank you so much, Uncle Sam. I never doubted your gentlemanly instincts.” Columbia was imagined as more than just the female embodiment of nationhood—she could also embody enfranchisement.

Pageants, plays, and tableaux in support of suffrage also employed the Columbia character, such as when the entire Metropolitan Opera Company came to Washington DC for a suffrage procession in 1913, with famed opera singer Lillian Nordica posing as Columbia on the Department of Treasury steps. Meanwhile, postcards as a medium were no strangers to the question of suffrage. In her analysis of suffrage as a topic in

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postcards, communications scholar Catherine Palczewski finds: “Postcards were ubiquitous, cheap, easily accessible, and clearly participated in the suffrage controversy in a way that developed and extended the argument beyond what can be found in the verbal arguments contained in broadsides and print media.”

Still, the cards in Palczewski’s study were not holiday postcards. Even though postcards circulated primarily among women, the men who ran postcard printing firms may have opted to avoid linking traditional, sentimental events like holidays with one of the day’s most contested controversies. An equally important (and less “top-down”) historical fact also helps to understand audience reactions to images of Columbia in a role with liminal potential. Marilyn Watkins, looking at Washington State, specifically singles out Germans as a group which showed lackluster support for suffrage: “Studies of Midwestern communities,” she writes referring to analysis of both Kansas and Nebraska German communities, “have shown strong opposition to women’s suffrage among German immigrants, whether Catholic or Lutheran, because of religiously based gender beliefs and fear of prohibition.”

If German women, a core of the postcard user base, were not supporting more images of Columbia in the personification-of-nation role because of psychic links to suffrage (which they opposed), this might explain why only one postcard seems to have emerged in the marketplace. In this way the language of nationalism and patriotism becomes further linked to the narratives of the previous chapter. Negotiations were

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occurring between the cautious trope of giving initiative-taking New Women a role in the
domestic sphere of holidays, and a much more ambivalent role of showing initiative at the
ballot box in the context of nationhood.

This detour into gender constructions of nationalism only helps to emphasize the
larger point—holiday images reveal contemporary conflicts if one considers them in
context. The context of suffrage debates shares resonance with the context of immigration
debates in that both attempted to address who was worthy of citizenship and who was not.
Patriotic visual themes and motifs could be employed on both sides of the divide between
the inclusive instincts of civic nationalism and the exclusive instincts of racial
nationalism (or gender nationalism, or ethnic nationalism, or religious nationalism, etc.) 46
But as argued throughout, scholars of holidays have perhaps been too quick to argue for
the inclusive interpretation. In addition to all the reasons to resist that interpretation that I
have elucidated above, there is one more genre that reminds us of all the exclusive,
barrier-forming, cultural retrenchments that can occur around holiday tropes. We next
turn to images of African-Americans and Native Americans.

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Figure 113: Columbia as Presenter
This is the only image I have discovered in which Columbia serves in the same role as Uncle Sam when it comes time to present the bounty of the nation symbolized by the Thanksgiving turkey. With Columbia often appropriated by suffragettes (a group of women that Germans typically chose to stand against), this image may have had too many political signifiers to inspire additional production of similar tropes within the marketplace.

Figure 114: Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving
The relationship of Uncle Sam to Columbia was decidedly traditional in Thanksgiving iconography. In this image, Columbia is on her knees in front of the oven, working on the bounty of the Thanksgiving dinner; however, it can only be declared a success by the male Uncle Sam.


Race and Otherness: African-Americans and Native Americans

Historians of visual culture have become accustomed to seeing racial and stereotyped images of African-Americans and Native Americans in mass-produced products. Such forms were ubiquitous by the early twentieth century. Yet as Martin Berger reminds us, it is not simply the seen images of sambos and Indian braves that we must address. Such images also helped to establish cultural boundaries that influenced all
white experiences. Berger writes that the “acceptance of whiteness conditions the sight, beliefs, and actions of European-Americans, thus naturalizing their sense of entitlement…” and that “this racialized value system led European-Americans to interpret their art in decidedly racial terms.”\textsuperscript{47} Substitute “their art” with “their holidays and the visual manifestations of those holidays,” and one begins to see what one might call racial holidayism (with a nod to Gerstle and McGovern).

Racial holidayism assumes that the conditions of seeing and experiencing holidays are informed by the dynamics of race. As we have discovered, Christmas and Thanksgiving were specifically appropriated on postcards for larger narratives of nationhood and citizenship. But those notions of nationhood and citizenship were further influenced by the manifestations of race within Christmas and Thanksgiving traditions. That one set of images was racial and the other material; that one emphasized differences of race and skin color, and the other enforced it through absences and silences—these are all merely variations of the main theme. Old-fashioned narratives and patriotic consumerism worked in the service of nativism and racism, as did more obvious deployments of race on postcards. This is the essence of racial holidayism: that the seen and unseen visualizations of race were inseparable within the cultural conditions of the period.

Chapter Two examined how race created separate race-based narratives around the Thanksgiving holiday, with blacks being shown with chickens or raccoons for Thanksgiving dinner rather than turkey; having to chase a chicken rather than buy one;

\textsuperscript{47} Martin A. Berger, \textit{Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 7
and having to pluck a turkey rather than purchase one already cleaned. Christmas too featured a separate set of images that supposedly depicted black experiences. For example, a white family seen at Christmas might have two or three children in the scene. By contrast a Christmas postcard shows a black family numbering 19 gathered around a single turkey. Though technically a New Years card, another image shows a black boy holding a Christmas wreath and standing under what should be mistletoe; however the mistletoe has been replaced with a watermelon. (Figures 115-116)

Figure 115: African-American Family
In order to keep African-Americans out of the traditional holiday ritual, their holidays were entirely reimagined. This “racial holidayism” was predicated on the belief that whites and blacks had different holiday experiences. This black family gathering around a Christmas turkey, for example, numbers nearly 20, a notion inconceivable in the portrayal of a white family’s Christmas.

Figure 116: Alternate Scripts for Blacks
In this image, Christmas tropes are in play, even though it is a New Years card. But instead of mistletoe, the African-American child’s emblem of the day becomes the stereotypical watermelon. Had he been under mistletoe—part of the a separate white script of Christmas ritual—this black child might have had access to white women. By making it a watermelon, the child loses his opportunity to kiss white girls, and is perhaps denied the opportunity of a kiss at all.

Author’s collection  Author’s collection
Another card is made particularly problematic by its depiction of black characters. (Figure 117) Taking the viewing position of the period’s white, rural Northerners, we see instantly that some of the stylistic elements of this image lend dignity to the couple. They are not imagined through racial stereotypes. Instead, an elderly African-American man stands outside a log cabin with a trussed up goose, which he hands to an African-American woman who stands at the door. The scene evokes equivalencies to the white rural ideal, including a snow-laden rural landscape and a beautiful Christmas tree. The tree and goose further emphasize participation in the bounty of the holiday.

And yet in spite of the potentially sympathetic and generous tone of this portrayal, it still reveals that white audiences had trouble imagining (mentally or commercially on postcards) blacks as completely equal in all holiday rituals. Is this image meant to be a nostalgic or contemporary scene? If contemporary, certainly no white farmer living in the idealized rural landscape would have a log cabin as a home. While the cabin is anachronistic, the people are not, in contrast to a similar trope commonly used at Thanksgiving. In those postcards a thoroughly historicized Puritan, complete with musket and pilgrim hat brings a turkey back to the cabin for his wife. (Figure 118) There is no mistaking that the scene with white holiday actors and their cabin is a historic scene. But the image with black participants is ambiguous. The man’s top hat and umbrella are not colonial. Further, are the man and woman husband and wife? The white beard emphasizes his age, but we have no way to guess hers—visual information that would let us know if they are meant to be a married couple, neighbors, or something else. If they are not
husband and wife, then his role as provider to his family is muted; whereas in white portrayals this was never brought in question—the man was always clearly bringing a holiday bounty back to *his* home and family. Age also complicates the reading in other ways. White male providers were always seen as young, so the very act of providing for the family emphasized their virility and manliness. By contrast, this elderly black man is made less threatening to white viewers by his distinct gray beard and his heavy lean on the umbrella.

Part of the difficulty in interpreting this card is that it is so entirely alone within the holiday postcard genre. Unlike the consistently repeated tropes of white portrayals, this is the only example I have found that makes such a sympathetic attempt at portraying blacks. Again, there is much in this card that succeeds in that endeavour. However, the image’s uniqueness is also useful for exploring the dimensions of racial holidayism. For example, after so many pictures of chicken thieves and thwarted farmyard chases, it is refreshing to see a black figure fully engaged with the commercial marketplace. His goose is tied up, plucked, and fully trussed—clearly indicating that it has come from the market. Yet at the same time, it cannot be overlooked that this portrayal also provides a solution for not wanting to show a black man (even a seemingly benign elderly black man) with a gun. By contrast the white pilgrims were always shown toting their musket or rifle. So we can view this card as an intentional attempt at creating a normalized holiday ritual among blacks centered on home, family, and bounty. And yet, that attempt at normalization ultimately fails because there is no exact parallel to a white person’s
Christmas visualized in exactly this way—where questions of temporal positioning and family responsibility are resolved rather than left ambiguous.

Figure 117: Cabin Setting for Blacks
This is a decidedly ambiguous image, straddling elements of the past (the log cabin) and the rural ideal (the wooded setting), but not fully embracing either. As such this African-American pair remains distant from the “old fashioned” Christmas, because of their race, their unspecified relationship, and their placement as either contemporary or historicized.

Author’s collection

Figure 118: Cabin Setting for Whites
Unlike the ambiguity of the card depicting African-Americans, it is obvious in this image that the man is bringing a turkey home to his wife. There is no question to his role as a provider to his family. The scene is also clearly historical, placing the couple in a mythic past as opposed to an ambiguous present.

Author’s collection

Other images did not write an entirely different script for blacks, but inserted them into a “traditional” white holiday trope, employing stereotype to emphasize difference. Patched up clothing and impoverished surroundings served as the *mise-en-scène* for these holidays. Blacks often entered the white enclave of holidays solely by their presence as servants, cooks, and “mammies.” (Figures 119-120) Still, the most pervasive way to deal with blacks as visual participants in the holiday was to not deal with them at all.

Proportionally, racialized cards are rare relative to the overall output of the fad. It is the
absence of racial diversity or depictions that do not change as they cross color lines that speak most loudly. It is silence that communicates exclusivity so forcefully.

Figures 119 & 120: African-American Servants
If blacks were written into the traditional white holiday iconography it was typically as servants, cooks, and other subservient roles. The exaggerated racial features in this card just reinforces that the visual of holidays as a purely white affair—the very definition of Racial Holidayism.

Author’s collection

Native Americans present a different set of interpretative challenges. Like those of blacks, these images often relied on the shorthand of easily understood stereotype to signify a Native American—a feathered headband for example, or the bare chest to mark a male brave. However, most images of Indians were not male at all. In a twist on patriotic imagery for Thanksgiving, the images of Indians at Thanksgiving, arriving with the bounty of a turkey, corn, or other foodstuffs, were almost always seen as female. In postcard after postcard they hold up or hold out the signs of the Thanksgiving meal.

(Figure 121)
Figure 121: Indian Maiden and Thanksgiving Bounty
Like the images of Uncle Sam presenting a turkey as the bounty of the nation, images of Native American women also typically showed them presenting turkeys or other fruits of the Earth to the viewer. As both anachronistic and non-threatening, these women served as the feminine surrogate to Uncle Sam and the nation. They could do so because unlike personifications of women as the nation (like Columbia), there was no impulse to imagine these women as voters. They were quite unlike the middle class white women for whom Columbia was a model.

Author’s collection

These images were primarily (though not exclusively) generated by the Winch Publishing Company and were often the work of Samuel Schmucker. Jack Davis and Dorothy Ryan write that Schmucker used Native American women in other visual scenarios as well, offering them as the representation of the United States in two postcard series, “International Girls” and the unpublished “Little Miss Nations.”48 Thus to the artist, and I would suggest to the viewer as well, the image of the Indian maiden, arms outstretched in offering products and goods of Thanksgiving, served as the visual

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embodiment of the nation. Like patriotic emblems in general, Indian maidens in mass culture were nothing new. David Hackett Fischer finds much historical evidence of such female Indians as “an image of prosperity, liberty and free commerce.”  

But again, context matters. In this trope we can find multiple examples of Indian maidens standing in as the equivalent to Uncle Sam, quite unlike our solitary example of Columbia in the same role. Why were there dozens of female Indians serving in this role on postcards, and only one of Columbia?

The context of the period reveals that the difference lay in the use of the Indian maiden as a symbol unencumbered by the baggage of suffrage. As Alan Trachtenberg suggests in Shades of Hiawatha, “In the early twentieth century it was much easier for white Americans to imagine a Pole or Serb eventually qualifying as an equal American citizen than a Mohawk or an Arapaho.”

While not speaking specifically of women or suffragettes, Trachtenberg’s point is applicable to other processes of imagination taking place at this time. Americans had to visualize women in line at polling places and inside voting booths, as part of the process of debating whether they were either for or against suffrage. Such visualizations and imaginations did not include Mohawks or Arapaho, be they men or women. Because Native Americans stood outside of the visualization of equal citizenship by whites, the trope of the Indian maiden never threatened to conjure ambivalent questions about voting rights and enfranchisement. The assumption by whites

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49 Fischer, Liberty and Freedom, 393.
that Indians already lacked citizenship qualifications thus diffused the link between an embodiment of nationhood as a woman and a potential suffragette.

Additionally, not only were these figures from another race, but also another time. The images of Indians were deeply nostalgic, idealized and sentimentalized, not unlike the rural landscape itself. This is especially clear in one image in which a modern-day white woman and a historicized Native American meet for a Thanksgiving exchange. (Figure 122) The woman, dressed in a bright pink dress, wears a fashionable feather headband mimicking the maiden’s own headgear. While the white woman offers a pie, probably baked with all the modern conveniences of an up-to-date kitchen, the Indian brings items unadulterated from their wild state—a whole pumpkin and a dead, but still unplucked or uncarved turkey. The meeting of the two races is also a meeting across time. These Indian maids were largely seen as part of a noble timeline in which “progress” had turned their lands over from inefficient Indians to the highly productive use of rural inhabitants. As feminine, beautiful, and inviting (in fact, drawn using many of the same stylistic tropes of “Caucasian” pretty young girls) they were also made harmless to whites, stripped of memories of genocide and the ability to wreak vengeance on aggressors. For all these reasons, then, the Native American woman could serve as acceptable stand-ins for the personification of Thanksgiving’s bounty—the feminine Uncle Sam that Columbia could never be. But of course the process robbed Native American women of any claims to the inclusive category of citizen or national/patriotic participant. Native American men were even more of a problem.
Figure 122: Thanksgiving Exchange
These two women meet in an exchange between races, but also an exchange between times. The white woman is modern, while the Native American is relegated to a historic past. The white woman brings a finished product to the exchange, the Indian brings unprocessed pumpkin and turkey. In this way the Native American woman is locked in a perpetual past, only given access to Thanksgiving through her historic role in the First Thanksgiving, not as a participant in the modern celebration.

Author’s collection

Male Indians were portrayed in ways that also tapped into a variety of cultural constructions surrounding Native Americans. One can see a continuum of imagined Thanksgiving-based relationships between Indians and whites—a continuum that started with violence, progressed through to ostracization and exclusion, continued on to charity, and finally ended with outright expungement from the Thanksgiving narrative.

As aggressors the Indian could be imagined as trying to interrupt or ruin the work of the white man as he tried to prepare for Thanksgiving. Again, this was deeply rooted in the mythology of “First Thanksgiving” stories. Child readers of St. Nicholas periodicals might have taken the editors at their word when a young girl in the story “A Thanksgiving Guest” suggested that Indians “Did n’t attend the Thanksgiving feasts” but “they lurked in the ambush.” When corrected that an “ambush” is not a type of shrub she
is at least assured that “you’re right about Indians not joining the Puritans at the table.”

Young readers were encouraged to visualize ambushing Indians trying to ruin Puritan Thanksgivings. Corresponding postcard images of the period show Indians chasing white pilgrim forefathers, forcing them to leave the all-important turkey behind. (Figure 123)

A different image, this one by Frances Brundage, also engaged a white viewer’s concern about Indian aggression and interruption. The pilgrim squats down over his turkey, and clutches it tight in his fist, while his clinched jaw and hand-on-gun shows that he is aware of the Indian behind him. However, Brundage has chosen to draw this particular Indian in an almost sympathetic way. His face is smooth and gentle (even handsome) compared to the wizened Pilgrim, and unlike his presumed antagonist, he has no weapon and has done no violence. (Figure 124) On the one hand, the artist is likely tapping into period narratives of Indians as a lost civilization, just as we saw with the Indian maiden above—figures made safe in the early 1900s for nostalgic constructions of nobility thanks to successful policies of elimination and quarantine. On the other hand, nostalgia about Indians still does not translate into an invitation within the Thanksgiving ritual—the armed white man ensures that will not happen. Instead the noble Indian is pushed to the outside, in this case by a giant pumpkin pie. He is left to look on (in curiosity perhaps), but remains separated from white tradition. In another striking image, the Indian is quite literally on the outside looking in, this time through a window. (Figure 125)

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51 Carolyn Wells, “A Thanksgiving Guest,” St. Nichols, November 1909, 28
This continuum is further emphasized in the styles chosen for each message. The violence of the Indians in the first card is further contained by the comic styling of the rendering, not unlike the child hunter in Chapter Four (Figure 42). The white viewer of the postcard is not threatened by this violence because it is depicted as both anachronistic and goofily comic. The second image’s ambivalence about moving the Indian towards marginalization is on display in the non-narrative style. Many interpretations are possible depending on the viewing position (and sympathies) of the viewer. Is the Indian standing or looming behind the pie? Is the pilgrim simply protective of his turkey or unduly threatened by the man behind him? The sea of whitespace (similar in style to the magazine covers discussed in Chapter Four), leaves the narrative open. In the third example, the door (or window) to multiple possibilities is slammed shut, and a definitive narrative is reasserted. We are assured that the Indian is on the outside looking in, completely removed from the Thanksgiving rituals taking place inside.
Figure 123: Disrupting Thanksgiving
The stereotype of the Indian brave as shirtless (even in the snow) and wielding a tomahawk or bow and arrow is reinforced here. More to the point, it places the Indian in a culturally ascribed role of interference or obstacle to Thanksgiving. Far from the communal nature of the First Thanksgiving myth, Indian males on postcards were more likely to be seen as disrupting the Thanksgiving celebration.

Figure 124: Transitioning out of Thanksgiving
Here the pilgrim hunches over his kill, his gun still at the ready should violence need to be inflicted on the Indian who stands behind. Still, this Indian is relatively benign—far more curious than threatening. But his lack of aggression does not translate into an invitation to join the Thanksgiving feast. The stern pilgrim and a giant pumpkin pie conspire to create physical and psychological space between the two men. The Indian is pushed to the periphery.

Figure 125: Completely Outside Thanksgiving
Here the male Indians are literally shown outside of the Thanksgiving tradition, having to look in through the window. Although the father’s shirt is oddly anachronistic, these are modern celebrants of Thanksgiving, as evidenced by the lamp and her attire. Whether the Indian has arrived to disrupt the meal, or is merely curious, is left to the viewer to decide, but the viewer is also assured that the Indian will remain “in his place” (i.e. on the outside looking in) by the white man’s prominent gun on the wall.
As part of a continuum then, we can also see how images steadily marched the Indian towards outsider status, working to ensure white supremacy at Thanksgiving. The next logical extrapolation of this then was Indian males (like immigrants) were in need of white charitable instincts during this important day. Christmas has long been understood within the scholarship as a holiday in which charity was a major component, but Thanksgiving also featured a charitable dimension.\(^5^2\) Prior to the postcard phenomenon, it was immigrants who were frequently written into the Thanksgiving narrative (through an especially visual press) in a way that emphasized charity.\(^5^3\) The 1884 illustration “Castle Garden—Their First Thanksgiving” in *Harper’s Weekly* (Castle Garden was New York’s predecessor to Ellis Island) relied on the complete lack of anything “traditional” in the immigrant’s Thanksgiving experience to deliver its visual message.\(^5^4\) The family sits on a bench eating bread. There is no turkey, no celery, not even a table to sit around for the immigrant’s meal. (Figure 126) The artist thus reminded viewers that these poor Castle Garden immigrants would need an act of charity in order to make their Thanksgiving experience recognizable.

In the accompanying text to an even earlier 1868 image “The First Thanksgiving Dinner,” also in *Harper’s Weekly*, there was no explicit mention of the child pictured as an immigrant: “a poor little girl who has been called in from the cold street to feel the

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\(^{52}\) For more on Christmas and charity see: Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 219-258

\(^{53}\) For an account of other linkages between Native Americans and Immigrants see: Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha* Trachtenberg argues that Indians were used in the staging of Americanization “key players in the symbolic drama of ‘forging’ a ‘composite’ national identity.” (37) While I think this was certainly the case, I think Indians and immigrants were also linked by those with little or no interest in Americanization and assimilation, but rather, exclusion.

delicious warmth of a home such as she never has had, and to taste dishes and dainties never tasted before.” But visual cues within the picture left open the strong possibility that spectators would have assumed “poor” and “immigrant” as synonymous. The girl’s dark hair tucked under a bonnet (as opposed to the other girl’s blond and flowing hair), a plaid scarf around her neck, and her little boots instead of slippers all tie back to an immigrant who lived in the absence of Thanksgiving until charity made it possible. (Figure 127)

One Thomas Nast cover explicitly tied Indian and immigrant together as recipients of charitable handouts. The cover is titled “The Annual Sacrifice that Cheers Many Hearts.” Nast evokes a wide range of ethnic tropes who await the Thanksgiving meal as they stand in line, forced to up from below to completely focus on Uncle Sam and his benevolence as he readies himself for the charitable role of carver/provider. Uncle Sam stands dressed in a pilgrim’s costume, while an American Indian is first in line for his piece of turkey, followed by Irish, German, and assorted other tropes. (Figure 128) Thus Native Americans and immigrant ethnics are conflated into a mass of needy charity cases.

Prior to the postcard phenomenon, images such as these from Harper's Weekly established a linkage between immigrants, charity, and Thanksgiving.


These sorts of pre-fad examples informed a viewer’s understanding of later postcards. Indian males who took WASP Thanksgiving charity in postcards could be directly linked to immigrants who did the same. Postcard examples of the trope include one of a young Indian brought into the interior of a white couple’s log cabin for an “Indian Peace Dinner,” or the visual of a card (stylistically veering into grotesque “comic card” aesthetics) of a buffoonish male brave trying to pick food off a proffered plate with his arrow. (Figure 129)
Figure 129: Charity for Indians
Another way Native American males could be written into the Thanksgiving narrative was as men who needed charity or white intervention. Here the grotesque drawing style of the comic card is used to exaggerate the Indian’s facial features as buffoonish. The message, of course, is reinforced by his spearing of his food with an arrow, as the white woman looks on warily at the Indian’s ignorance. Her superiority is reinforced by her standing over him—his place on the ground only adds to his need to become the object of pity and charity.

Author’s collection

The former image of the Peace Dinner, is worth pausing on for other reasons, namely, its highly sexualized depiction. (Figure 130) The male brave stands nearly naked in the presence of his white hosts. His slightly hunched pose while everyone prays crunches his abdominals into “washboard” status. His arms are likewise extenuated in their muscularity. With everyone’s eyes closed, the Indian appears to be taking advantage of the situation by placing his hand under his loincloth, the only clothing he wears. To modern eyes, he looks as though he is pleasuring himself in front of the Puritan couple, taking his eroticisation to near pornographic extremes.
Given what we know about the sensibility of postcard audiences, we have to wonder about projecting graphic sexuality onto viewers from a century ago. By the same token, we also cannot sell our historical audiences short. Pigeonholing viewers as dour and humorless Edwardians robs them of the agency to be a little risqué. Clearly the brave is made an Other within the picture by his near-nakedness. His exposed body and exaggerated musculature, placed in the center of the image, invited the gaze of the white viewer, extolling the “barbarian virtues” discussed by Matthew Frey Jacobson. Those virtues could be variously interpreted, in what Jacobson describes as “the paradoxical intertwining of the impulse to dominate and a sentimental idealization.” With the paradox in place, dominant savage or sentimental ideal, the artist could have drawn the brave’s hand anywhere in the picture to help resolve the tension—clasped with the other hand, placed on the table (where the other hand rests, perhaps adding food theft to his list of transgressions), put over his heart, scratching his head—ANYWHERE but exactly at the crotch of his loincloth where it then entirely disappears!

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At the very least this image builds on the notion that American Indians needed the charitable and missionary uplift of Whites in order to bring them into the Thanksgiving narrative. Whether the Indian additionally has his hand beneath his loincloth in a masturbatory gesture or not, the idea of the “dirty savage” already has a foundation in his sexualized, near-nude state.

Such a detail surely did not and could not go unnoticed, inviting condemnation based on white cultural assumptions about the “dirty savage,” not in control of his own base impulses. On the other hand, this image sold. It was not one of the “blue” postcards that vendors would have kept under the counter. This was a mainstream image that women in particular bought and sent. Which means the saucy detail of the Indian fondling himself in front of his hosts, particularly in the direction of his male inviter while he prays, suggests enough familiarity among women (rural and small town women in particular) to “get” the joke, and to enjoy it.

There is one final note about the place of Native Americans in postcards. We return again to the continuum in which the Indian is pushed further and further to the periphery of the visual narrative—from aggressor, to outsider looking in, to charity case.
The final extrapolation of this would be to write Native Americans out of the narrative entirely, expunging them both textually and visually. And this is exactly what happened in the early twentieth century. Although it is hard to imagine today, many narratives from the period about the First Thanksgiving describe a history in which there are no Indians. Most Thanksgiving stories did make the First Thanksgiving some variation on the traditional motif, with Indians and Pilgrims coming together for a dinner. The reason or intent behind the meal could vary though, from Indians helping Pilgrims to survive the winter to simply a communal meal with both parties equally bringing contributions to the table.

However, there was an alternate version of the story posited, which appeared in a variety of outlets, of which this account is characteristic:

The settlers, hemmed in between the dark forests and the deep sea, looked forward not only to a bleak New England winter, but also unto a probable starvation and death. On the last Thursday in November men, in grievous extremity, met to commend themselves and their enterprises unto the mercies of God. That day a good ship with weather-beaten sails and backed sides sailed into harbor, bringing food against the winter, seed against the returning springtime, friends and reinforcement against the enemy. Delirious with joy, their fasting was turned to feasting; and the last Thursday of November became, for the Pilgrims, Thanksgiving Day.⁵⁸

The fact that in the early twentieth century Thanksgiving’s Indians could be replaced entirely by White Europeans arriving with ships, seeds, guns, and more settlers is another reminder that nativism reached out into all corners of the cultural landscape. It also further disrupts the belief that Thanksgiving was always an inclusive holiday.

Many schoolteachers probably did, as Julie Husband and Jim O’Loughlin suggest, transform “the image of Native Americans welcoming the ‘first immigrants,’ into an icon representing the nation’s general position towards the new immigrants.” 59 But if such teachers did choose this course, they were competing for their charges’ hearts and minds against alternative versions of the story circulating in the mainstream, such as the 1907 Thanksgiving cover of Youth’s Companion. The magazine showed a ship in a circular frame surrounded by the words “Fasting and prayer made way for Thanksgiving to God when a food-laden ship reached Boston harbor and saved the starving settlers, 1631.” 60

The discrepancy between these two narratives is important. Instead of Husband and O’Loughlin’s narrative that “all immigrants who pledged to become citizens and patriots were symbolically welcomed into the fold on Thanksgiving,” the story of the Anglo-Saxon ship coming to save Anglo-Saxon settlers instead became symbolic of “no immigrants allowed,” like a sign on a clubhouse door. 61 Awareness of this alternative narrative also helps to contextualize other modes of exclusion within Thanksgiving rituals, myths, and images.

Conclusion

Indians in the Thanksgiving narrative served the agenda of Whites in sometimes complicated ways, but that agenda was implemented so that Indians remained removed from a contemporary Thanksgiving tradition. There are no Indians dining around a

60 “Cover,” The Youth’s Companion, November 26, 1907.
modern-day kitchen table, rushing into a house to greet loved ones, or cracking a wishbone with a family member. Nor are any of these images given the nationalistic blessing of a patriotic icon like the American flag. Indians are not presumed to be citizens any more than blacks or new immigrants. In other words, they join all the other elements of this nativist landscape as part of the same overall strategy and agenda. Racial holidayism; cultural quarantine in a mythologized past; aggrandization of “old fashioned” celebrations; racial stereotype; and material nationalism under the rubric of patriotic emblems all functioned towards the same purpose—to privilege a particular vision of these holidays constructed for rural, Northern whites who happened to herald from a specific conglomeration of ethnic heritages.

Postcards advanced this conversation through their volume of volume. The image-based noise of the postcard fad made this particular vision of holidays not only seem normal, it also drowned out alternatives almost completely. Just as with images of the rural ideal, it is important to remember the role of women in advancing this specific construction of citizenship and national belonging. Works like Kathleen Blee’s *Women of the Klan* remind us of the intersections between gender, nativism, and nationalism, albeit in a slightly later period. Yet the pathways of these intersections need not be as jarring as Klan memberships. Postcard images reveal the ways that women found a voice in public discussions about the meaning of whiteness. Women—rural women especially—added to that discussion by visualizing holidays as constructed around a set of racial, ethnic, and place-based markers. Their work helped to establish an iconography that lives

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with us still today. We have grown so accustomed to these symbols and motifs (and the myths that perpetuated them) that we sometimes forget to examine and interrogate the contested spaces from which they emerged: internalized angst and concern over the changing demographics of immigration and rural settlement that affected both men and women. Like so many other holiday postcards, these too reflected a need for cultural defense and retrenchment, in the early twentieth century.
Epilogue

What postcard images would have been produced without the Country Life Movement? Or the debates over courtship and the New Woman? Or a flood of immigrants with unfamiliar countries of origin? Would different contexts have produced a different set of images upon these cultural surfaces? Or were postcards ultimately so tied to these specific contexts that different circumstances would have pushed the public discourse to an entirely different medium, leaving postcards largely untouched? Postcards were a wildly popular form of cultural expression, with various and attendant genres as part of the overall phenomenon. To ask these questions returns us to the irresolvable problem noted at the beginning—there is no way to know how many postcards came from each of the various genres. Certainly holiday postcard use was inextricably tied to each of these historically precise circumstances and contexts (and perhaps many more besides, as future scholars may discover). Without those forces in play, holiday cards could indeed have languished on postcard shop shelves and drugstore revolving racks. But how much of a dent would that have left in the phenomenon? We may never know.

Still, the fact that we have to consider the proposition suggests that this project has accomplished one of its primary goals—to shake us from the commonplace assumption that all postcards are somehow tied to souvenirs and mementos of travel. Postcards—at least the historical artifacts from the early twentieth century—were much more than that,
and their users and audiences understood them as such. In his lengthy 1907 article on “Profit and Pleasure in Post Cards,” columnist Frederic Haskin reminded his readers about what was obvious from stores and albums—that the souvenir was just one portion of cards when “every imaginable thing may be had on a post card.” That included all the images of Easter, Christmas, and other holidays “sure to cause a flood of post cards through the mail.”¹

Such questions also highlight another purpose of this project. The questions and their answers only make sense by repositioning postcard users—rural, Northern, white women—as the center of the narrative. It is the burden of cultural historians to know we will never stumble across a journal entry that reads: “Dear Diary, Today I bought a postcard of a flag waving turkey to send to my sister because it helps to reaffirm our hierarchical position in the construct of races and assuages my anxieties about new immigrants.” Instead, we must strive to fully document and appreciate these women’s lives, and then work equally hard to empathize with their circumstances and temporally based situations. Doing so means being especially attuned to conflict.

As has been argued throughout, it was conflict and tension that moved these postcards from a product of mass culture to one of popular culture. It was precisely the contested spaces of the early twentieth century that feed a need for affirmative appropriation, and turned postcards into one of the largest visual phenomena of the century. Lawrence Levine wrote in his essay “The Folklore of Industrial Society” that we tend to ask the wrong questions of popular culture, if we assume such expression was

¹ Frederic Haskin, “Profit and Pleasure in Post-Cards,” Dallas Morning News, October 16, 1907, 6
escapist. “What is essential, as Robert Escarpit has argued,” wrote Levine, “is to ‘know from what and towards what we are escaping.’ Even in their escape people can be quite realistic in understanding what it is they need to do to maintain themselves; what kinds of fictions, myths, fantasies they require not primarily to escape reality but to face it day after day after day.”2 The notions of conflict and escape are inextricably intertwined, and one would be hard-pressed to find better examples of Levine’s “fictions, myths, fantasies” than early twentieth century postcards.

These two threads—taking a broader view of a cultural phenomenon that complicates our understanding of the medium being used and being particularly sensitive to the historical overlays of contention and debate that shaped users’ experiences—are not uniquely entwined here. Similar frameworks have shaped the questions historians have asked of popular and visual culture since social history and cultural studies came to the fore, starting in the late 1960s. If the uniqueness of my project is in the application of this framework to the postcard phenomenon, it is also a reminder that the such frameworks have applications to similar forms of culture output.

There are clear parallels between postcards and their modern-day equivalencies, although again we must maintain our broad view of postcards to see them as such. Remembering that postcards were image-based conversations circulated between networks of community and kin, one should ask how conversations are conducted today. Would there be Facebook and Twitter without an underlying need for affirmative connection by their core users? Would there be incalculable numbers of cellphone pictures

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filed away on social media websites, or innumerable video clips posted to YouTube? Would a generation develop its own language of texting if not to help create the solidarities of imagined communities around them? Would the instant connection of IM, blogs, picture taking, and Skype be as appealing without the historical coincidences of generational demographics, economics, politics, and social change to activate their use?

Answers to such questions are available, just as they were for postcards. But finding the answers takes a commitment to three distinct but equally important factors. I have sometimes called this triangulation—the triple overlay of a quantifiable/verifiable audience; a detailed accounting of the historical contexts; and a register of consistent themes, motifs, and tropes. Postcards have proven to be remarkably cooperative in all three categories. They retain their demographic information through time, just as they retain their images. They even come time and date stamped so that historical conditions can be precisely pinpointed. Postcards are in many ways a perfect subject for this form of cultural diagnosis—but they are hardly the only one.

Today’s instant communication users could prove to be as equally prolific as their postcard-crazy predecessors. Although it may take time and creativity (just as it did with postcards), the interconnected model of audience, context, and output is also worth applying to the electronic conversations of the 21st century. As was discovered with the postcard phenomenon, the conversations of actual audiences and subjects happening today will reveal far more than the literal words and images left behind.
Appendix

Table 1: Total number of postcards by year as identified by postmark within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

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<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total postmarked</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>1556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No postmark</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Percentage of postmarked cards by year, per each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey.
(Percentages within Appendix tables may not total exactly 100% due to rounding.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Total number of postcards by the population of the recipient’s home community within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Group</th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural (&lt;2,500)</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>1019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,500-5,000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000-10,000</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-25,000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000-50,000</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-100,000</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-250,000</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250,000-500,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000-1,000,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000,000+</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Percentage of postcards by the population of the recipient’s home community within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural (&lt;=2,500)</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,500-5,000</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000-10,000</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-25,000</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000-50,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-100,000</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-250,000</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250,000-500,000</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000-1,000,000</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000,000+</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Total number of inhabitants by community classified by size, US Census, 1910

See Census Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Population, US Census, 1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural (&lt;=2,500)</td>
<td>49,348,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,500-5,000</td>
<td>4,105,656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000-10,000</td>
<td>4,364,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-25,000</td>
<td>5,609,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000-50,000</td>
<td>4,062,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-100,000</td>
<td>4,178,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-250,000</td>
<td>4,840,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250,000-500,000</td>
<td>3,949,839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000-1,000,000</td>
<td>3,010,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000,000+</td>
<td>8,501,174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Department of Commerce, "Report on Population" Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, 64.
Table 6: Percentage of inhabitants by community classified by size, US Census, 1910, based on total U.S. Population of 91,972,266

| Total Population, US Census, 1910 |  
|-----------------------------------|---
| Rural \((<2,500)\)               | 54%  
| 2,500-5,000                      | 5%   
| 5,000-10,000                     | 5%   
| 10,000-25,000                    | 6%   
| 25,000-50,000                    | 4%   
| 50,000-100,000                   | 5%   
| 100,000-250,000                  | 5%   
| 250,000-500,000                  | 4%   
| 500,000-1,000,000                | 3%   
| 1,000,000+                       | 9%   

Table 7: Total number of postcards by the age of the recipient within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 and under</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-14</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Percentage of postcards by the age of the recipient within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 and under</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-14</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9: Total number of postcards by the gender of the recipient within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey, plus male children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females (including couples)</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>1414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males (including couples)</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male children (Age 0-14)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Percentage of postcards by the gender of the recipient within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey, plus male children as a percentage of males overall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females (including couples)</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males (including couples)</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male children (Age 0-14)</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Total number of postcards sent to women and children within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females (all) and males (0-14)</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>1725</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Total percentage of postcards sent to women and children within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females (all) and males (0-14)</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13: Total and percentage of inhabitants by age, US Census, 1910
See Census Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 and under</td>
<td>10,631,364</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-14</td>
<td>18,857,772</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>18,120,587</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>26,809,875</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>13,424,089</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>3,949,524</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Total and percentage of inhabitants by sex, US Census, 1910
See Census Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47,332,277</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44,639,989</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Total and percentage of male children, US Census, 1910
See Census Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male children (0-14)</th>
<th>Total Population, US Census, 1910</th>
<th>Total percentage of male population, US Census, 1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male children (0-14)</td>
<td>14,906,472</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Total and percentage of women and children, US Census, 1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Females (all) and males (0-14)</th>
<th>Total Population, US Census, 1910</th>
<th>Total percentage, US Census, 1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females (all) and males (0-14)</td>
<td>59,546,461</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

4 Ibid., 298
5 Ibid., 248
6 Ibid., 303.
Table 17: Total number of postcards by the occupation category of the recipient within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minerals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No occupation</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: Percentage of postcards by occupation category, per each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey where occupations were found

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minerals</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19: Total and percentage of employed by occupation category, US Census, 1910
See Census Report7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>12,659,203</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minerals</td>
<td>964,824</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>10,658,881</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>2,637,671</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>3,614,670</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>459,291</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>1,663,569</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>3,772,174</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>1,737,053</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Total number of postcards by the nativity and parentage of the Head of the Household within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nativity and Parentage</th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>1643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born &amp; Native Parents</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>1265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born and Mixed or Foreign Parents</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21: Percentage of postcards by the nativity and parentage of the Head of the Household within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nativity and Parentage</th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born &amp; Native Parents</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born and Mixed or Foreign Parents</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 Department of Commerce, "Report on Occupations" Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, 40.
Table 22: Total and percentage of the nativity and parentage, US Census, 1910, based on the white population
See Census Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>13,345,545</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born</td>
<td>68,386,412</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born &amp; Native Parents</td>
<td>49,488,575</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born and Mixed or Foreign Parents</td>
<td>18,897,837</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23: Total number of postcards by the nativity and parentage of the Spouse of the Household within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>1517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born &amp; Native Parents</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>1141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born and Mixed or Foreign Parents</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Spouse in the Household</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24: Percentage of postcards by the nativity and parentage of the Spouse of the Household within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey that has a spouse in the household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born &amp; Native Parents</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born and Mixed or Foreign Parents</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

8 Department of Commerce, "Report on Population" Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, 132
Table 25: Total and percentage of the nativity and parentage, US Census, 1910, based on the white female population
See Census Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total White Female Population, US Census, 1910</th>
<th>Total White Female Population US Census, 1910 (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>5,821,757</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born</td>
<td>33,731,955</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born &amp; Native Parents</td>
<td>24,259,357</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born and Mixed or Foreign Parents</td>
<td>9,472,598</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 Ibid., 264.
Table 26: Total number of postcards by the nativity and parentage of the Head of the Household within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey, segmented by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born German</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Stock</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born English*</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Stock*</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Canadian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Stock</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Swedish</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Stock</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Norwegian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian Stock</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Irish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Stock</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Scottish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Stock</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Western Other**</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Other Stock**</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Southern/Eastern Other***</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern/Eastern Other Stock***</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc.****</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*England and Wales; **Denmark, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, Luxembourg, French Canada; *** Russia, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland; **** Mexico, Cuba, South Africa, Australia. Used for all tables unless otherwise noted.)
Table 27: Percentage of postcards by the nativity and parentage of foreign-born Heads of the Household within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey, segmented by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born German</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born English</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Canadian</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Swedish</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Norwegian</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Irish</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Scottish</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Western Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Southern/Eastern Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28: Percentage of postcards by the nativity and parentage of Heads of the Household with foreign or mixed stock within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey, segmented by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German Stock</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Stock</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Stock</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Stock</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian Stock</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Stock</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Stock</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Other Stock</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern/Eastern Other Stock</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 29: Total number of postcards by the nativity and parentage of the Spouse of the Household within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey, segmented by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born German</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Stock</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born English</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Stock</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Canadian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Stock</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Swedish</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Stock</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Norwegian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian Stock</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Irish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Stock</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Scottish</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Stock</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Western Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Other Stock</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Southern/Eastern Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern/Eastern Other Stock</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 30: Percentage of postcards by the nativity and parentage of foreign-born Spouse of the Household within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey, segmented by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern/Eastern</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 31: Percentage of postcards by the nativity and parentage of Spouse of the Household with foreign or mixed stock within each 500-card survey and in total 2,000-card survey, segmented by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-500</th>
<th>501-1000</th>
<th>1001-1500</th>
<th>1501-2000</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German Stock</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Stock</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Stock</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Stock</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian Stock</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Stock</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Stock</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern/Eastern</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 32: Total and percentage of the country of origin, US Census, 1910, based on the overall foreign-born population
See Census Report\textsuperscript{10}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born German</td>
<td>2,501,333</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born English</td>
<td>960,207</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Canadian</td>
<td>819,554</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Swedish</td>
<td>665,207</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Norwegian</td>
<td>403,877</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Irish</td>
<td>1,352,251</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Scottish</td>
<td>261,076</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Western</td>
<td>981,532</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born Southern/Eastern Other</td>
<td>4,399,896</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc.</td>
<td>282,577</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 784.
Table 33: Total and percentage of the country of origin, US Census, 1910, based on the overall foreign or mixed stock white population

*Denmark, France, Switzerland, and French Canada only. See Census Report\textsuperscript{11}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stock Type</th>
<th>Total of Foreign or Mixed Stock within white Population, US Census, 1910</th>
<th>Percent of Foreign or Mixed Stock within white Population, US Census, 1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German Stock</td>
<td>8,282,618</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Stock</td>
<td>2,571,389</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Stock</td>
<td>1,614,433</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Stock</td>
<td>1,364,215</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian Stock</td>
<td>979,099</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Stock</td>
<td>4,504,360</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Stock</td>
<td>659,630</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Other Stock*</td>
<td>1,926,341</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern/Eastern Other Stock</td>
<td>7,341,795</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 34: Relative proportion of state’s postcard recipients within sample to state’s percentage of U.S. population, 1910

See Census Report\textsuperscript{12}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th># in sample</th>
<th>State's percentage within sample</th>
<th>State Population</th>
<th>State's percentage of US Population</th>
<th>Relative Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>2,138,093</td>
<td>2.32%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
<td>204,354</td>
<td>0.22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
<td>1,574,449</td>
<td>1.71%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>2,377,549</td>
<td>2.59%</td>
<td>128%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.65%</td>
<td>799,024</td>
<td>0.87%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
<td>1,114,756</td>
<td>1.21%</td>
<td>281%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
<td>202,354</td>
<td>0.22%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
<td>331,069</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
<td>752,619</td>
<td>0.82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
<td>2,609,121</td>
<td>2.84%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>325,594</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>5.80%</td>
<td>5,638,591</td>
<td>6.13%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
<td>2,700,876</td>
<td>2.94%</td>
<td>111%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
<td>2,224,771</td>
<td>2.42%</td>
<td>145%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 879.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 26
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
<td>1,690,949</td>
<td>1.84%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>2,289,905</td>
<td>2.49%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>1,656,388</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>742,371</td>
<td>0.81%</td>
<td>409%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
<td>1,295,345</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
<td>3,366,416</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
<td>176%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>5.15%</td>
<td>2,810,173</td>
<td>3.06%</td>
<td>169%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>2,075,708</td>
<td>2.26%</td>
<td>102%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
<td>1,797,114</td>
<td>1.95%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
<td>3,293,335</td>
<td>3.58%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>376,053</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.55%</td>
<td>1,192,214</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>120%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>81,875</td>
<td>0.09%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2.90%</td>
<td>430,572</td>
<td>0.47%</td>
<td>619%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2.95%</td>
<td>2,537,167</td>
<td>2.76%</td>
<td>107%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>327,301</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
<td>9,113,614</td>
<td>9.91%</td>
<td>143%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>2,266,287</td>
<td>2.46%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>577,056</td>
<td>0.63%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>4,767,121</td>
<td>5.18%</td>
<td>160%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>4,767,121</td>
<td>5.18%</td>
<td>160%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
<td>672,765</td>
<td>0.73%</td>
<td>198%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>12.25%</td>
<td>7,605,111</td>
<td>8.27%</td>
<td>148%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>542,610</td>
<td>0.59%</td>
<td>153%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
<td>1,515,400</td>
<td>1.65%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>583,888</td>
<td>0.63%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>2,184,789</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>3,806,542</td>
<td>4.14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
<td>373,351</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
<td>355,956</td>
<td>0.39%</td>
<td>581%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.55%</td>
<td>2,061,612</td>
<td>2.24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
<td>1,141,990</td>
<td>1.24%</td>
<td>129%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.45%</td>
<td>1,221,119</td>
<td>1.33%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
<td>2,333,860</td>
<td>2.54%</td>
<td>169%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>145,965</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References
References

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Curriculum Vitae

Daniel Gifford is a professional researcher, and has worked with national non-profit organizations since 1992. He holds a Master of Arts in American History from George Mason University, and earned the Department of History and Art History’s Outstanding Graduate Student of the Year award for 2009. He was also awarded the department’s top prize for a graduate research paper in 2007, and was published that same year in the peer-reviewed *Mid-Atlantic Almanack*. He additionally holds a Master of Arts in International Affairs from Washington University in St. Louis, and a Bachelor of Journalism from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. He is also an accomplished travel writer and photographer, and has been published in the *Washington Post*, *Dallas Morning News*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and *National Parks* magazine.