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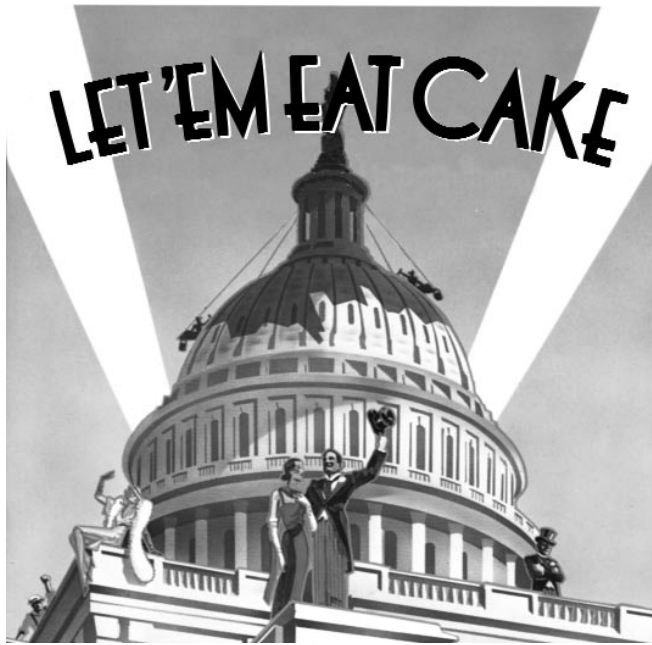
Although we value all our clients, the twelve thousand high schools who perform our shows are of particular importance, for it is at these schools that music and drama educators work to keep theatre alive in their community. MTI shares with these educators the goal of raising the next generation of theatre artists and audiences. To help these educators, it has taken a leading role in theatre education by creating MTI THEATRICAL RESOURCES, a "theatrical tool box" designed to help not only ensure the success of each musical production, but also to establish the study of musical theatre as a permanent part of the school curriculum. These resources include: STUDY GUIDES designed to bring the study of specific shows into the classroom; MTI REHEARSCORES® which provide unlimited rehearsal accompaniment via an easy-to-use, fully interactive computer program on disk; professional TV SPOTS allowing companies to affordably advertise on television in local markets; LOGO PACKS to aide in poster and program design; TRANSPOSITIONS-ON-DEMAND to allow flexibility in casting and musical key changes; and VIDEO CONVERSATIONPIECES™ featuring video seminars with artists such as Martin Charnin, Stephen Sondheim and Scott Ellis discussing the creation of their shows from inception to production.

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Musicals are America's premiere contribution to the theatre and MTI is firmly committed to supporting and nurturing a musical theatre that will continue to develop and flourish into the next century.







**Music by  
GEORGE GERSHWIN**

**Lyrics by  
IRA GERSHWIN**

**Book by GEORGE S. KAUFMAN  
and MORRIE RYSKIND**



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## ABOUT **Let 'Em Eat Cake**

*Let 'Em Eat Cake*, a sequel to *Of Thee I Sing*, was written by the same team, music by George Gershwin, lyrics by Ira Gershwin and a book by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind. It appeared on Broadway in October 1933. *Let 'Em Eat Cake* was a satire on dictatorship; it was considerably more cutting than *Of Thee I Sing*. While the first show was gently optimistic in its spoofing, *Let 'Em Eat Cake* was far more pessimistic in nature, reflecting the increasing desperation of the Depression and world events of that period.

A powerful satire on the growth of totalitarianism in Europe, *Let 'Em Eat Cake* traces the activities of John P. Wintergreen after he is defeated for re-election to the Presidency. After opening a clothing shop where he and his wife Mary sell rebellion as well as shirts, Wintergreen engineers a government takeover that fails at the hands of power-hungry rebels. The beguiling world of beauty pageants, corn muffins, and White House babies created by the authors in *Of Thee I Sing* was transformed into a darker landscape more in keeping with increasingly dangerous times. The discordant contrapuntal score of *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, which George Gershwin felt represented his best work to that time, was closely integrated into the plot of this potent, innovative show.

## Characters In Let 'Em Eat Cake

GENERAL ADAM SNOOKFIELD, U.S.A.

TRIXIE FLYNN—General Snookfield's lady friend.

FRANCIS X. GILHOOLEY—Secretary of the Navy.

MRS. GILHOOLEY

LOUIS LIPPMAN—Secretary of Agriculture.

MRS. LIPPMAN

SENATOR CARVER JONES—A Senator from the South.

MRS. JONES

SENATOR ROBERT E. LYONS—A Senator from the West.

MRS. LYONS

MATTHEW ARNOLD FULTON—Newspaper magnate.

MRS. FULTON

MARY WINTERGREEN—The First Lady.

JOHN P. WINTERGREEN—The President of the United States.

THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT

ALEXANDER THROTTLEBOTTOM—The Vice-President of the United States.

KRUGER—A revolutionary.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNION LEAGUE CLUB

UNCLE WILLIAM—An ancient attendant at the Union League Club.

LIEUTENANT

JOHN P. TWEEDLEDEE—The new President of the United States.

FLUNKEY



# Plot Synopsis

## ACT I, SCENE 1

A presidential campaign is being waged on an American main street. The voters are choosing between the incumbent, John P. Wintergreen, and a newcomer, John P. Tweedledee. Wintergreen, who originally ran for the White House on a campaign of love, is flanked by pictures of his twin children on his campaign banner. Tweedledee is flanked by twin question marks. Their supporters sing at each other at an increasingly loud volume ("Opening: Act I").

## SCENE 2, THE WHITE HOUSE

General Adam Snookfield and Miss Trixie Flynn, a member of his entourage, are listening to the election results. Trixie is distressed because an Admiral who was supposed to appear as a date for her friend Daisy calls to say he is not coming. Secretary of the Navy Gilhooley, Secretary of Agriculture Lippman, Senator Carver Jones, Senator Robert E. Lyons, and Secretary of State Fulton enter with their wives. The General explains that his wife was unable to attend, and introduces Trixie as his "collaborator." She continues to fret about Daisy's lack of a date. Mary Wintergreen enters, followed by President Wintergreen. The radio announces a landslide victory for Tweedledee. Wintergreen calls in the Supreme Court and asks them to throw out the election. The Court refuses and goes off with Trixie to be Daisy's date. Fulton indicates that he is already in the Tweedledee camp and leaves. The others plan their futures, observing that the Depression is in full swing. Vice-President Throttlebottom appears, wearing a party hat to celebrate his re-election. He is, as usual, the last to be informed.

John and Mary Wintergreen and the others decide to go into the shirt-making business when everyone becomes excited by the blue shirt Mary has made for 50 cents. The new business will be located on Union Square. Throttlebottom will underwrite the effort with \$5000.

## SCENE 3

The shirt business is established in a store front on Union Square. A sign reads "John P. Wintergreen & Co., Creators of the Original Maryblue Shirt." The two adjoining stores are boarded up. A procession of citizens enter Union Square carrying banners ("Union Square"). A group of radicals, led by a malcontent named Kruger, enters. Kruger presents his agenda, "Down with everything that's up!" A fight breaks out. When Gilhooley, who is now a policeman, appears, the crowd stops being radical, bursts into an idyllic song, and leaves, arm in arm.

Gilhooley stops to chat with Wintergreen, who tells him that business is horrible. Gilhooley says they are lucky to be out of the White House. Nobody is working; even the Post Office has closed. Throttlebottom appears, carrying a sandwich board advertising the shirt company. They are joined by Mary, Jones, Lyons, and Lippman report back from visits to the West, the South, and the bank that help is not on the way. The business is bankrupt. Former newspaper magnate and Secretary of State

Fulton appears dressed as a poor newsboy. Kruger reappears and begins talking about revolution. Wintergreen suddenly has a stroke of genius. He will sell revolution with his shirts. Everyone who buys a Maryblue shirt will be promised a revolution—or get their money back. He says “We’ll give the country back to the people.”

#### **SCENE 4**

Inside the New Store, business is bustling. There are piles and piles of blue shirts. Salesgirls and customers exchange comments about the popularity of the shirts (“Store Scene”). Fulton, Jones, Lyons, and Lippman report that sales are brisk around the country. Gilhooley, still a policeman, enters. Wintergreen says his next step is to involve the army. Kruger, who is helping Wintergreen’s cause, says that as soon as Wintergreen gets back in, he will work to get him out. He’s always against the fellow who’s in. Wintergreen thinks he would like to have the revolution on July 4th.

General Snookfield and Trixie enter. He refuses to join the revolution: he is a member of the Union League Club and knows that they would not approve. Wintergreen learns that Throttlebottom’s uncle is an attendant at the club. He sends his reluctant former Vice President to sell shirts to the club membership, enlisting their support for the revolution.

#### **SCENE 5**

A group of ancient gentlemen are asleep in their easy chairs at The Union League Club. They rouse themselves to sing “Union League.” Throttlebottom and his ancient Uncle William enter with a pile of shirts. After Throttlebottom finally gets the members to wake up, they think he is saying that we are fighting the British again; they immediately buy shirts and enlist (“Come The Revolution”).

#### **SCENE 6**

The General and Wintergreen are leading an army to Washington (“On and On and On”). They stop along the road. Wintergreen and the General plot to overtake the President as he gives a speech at nine o’clock.

#### **SCENE 7**

A Fourth of July celebration is in progress on the White House lawn (“Finale: Act I”). General Snookfield addresses the crowd, followed by President Tweedledee. Trixie signals the General that it’s time to leave for their party with Daisy. Tweedledee drones on. The General indicates to the President that the party is starting and leaves. Wintergreen and the Army seize power from the President with support of the President’s own men. Wintergreen takes power and Kruger begins to rail against him. Wintergreen promises the people not just their daily bread, but cake. The flag of the revolution, a white banner with a blue shirt emblazoned on it, is flown. Rockets burst. Cannons boom.

#### **ACT II, SCENE 1**

The White House has become the Blue House. Even the portraits on the walls now wear blue shirts. The company sings about the new regime (“Opening: Act II”). Wintergreen ordains that there should be a new Mickey Mouse every day, not once a month. He also orders Mae West to replace George Washington on the postage stamp.

It becomes apparent that Wintergreen is becoming more and more of a dictator. He has merged all newspapers into one. The Supreme Court appears in chains, asking to be pardoned. Wintergreen agrees, and orders them to become a baseball team. The General appears, saying that he has lost the army as well as Trixie. Wintergreen says he should look under his bed. Left alone, Wintergreen practices walking like Napoleon. Mary enters. She is meeting with the new D.A.R. she has just organized. The Daughters enter and play a few hands of Revolutionary Bridge. They leave as Throttlebottom appears. Wintergreen and his henchmen are nervous about Throttlebottom. They don't include him in their plans anymore, but Wintergreen feels an allegiance to him. Wintergreen makes him the umpire to the Supreme Court baseball team.

Kruger enters. He has joined the army and wants his share of the war debt. The League of Nations enters with a group of pretty female interpreters ("The League of Nations"). Finland pays its war debt, which Wintergreen hands over to Kruger for the Army. However, the other countries refuse to pay. When Wintergreen realizes that there are nine countries involved, he organizes them into a team. The League Team will challenge the Supreme Court Team. If they lose they pay—double or nothing.

## SCENE 2

The Supreme Court team is outside the Ball Park ("Up And At 'Em"). Kruger tells Throttlebottom that the Blue Shirt Supreme Court team has to win or Throttlebottom will end up dead. Throttlebottom unsuccessfully tries to get out of being an umpire.

## SCENE 3

A trial is taking place in a military courtroom. Wintergreen presides in a judicial robe and wig. Throttlebottom is accused of allowing the enemy to win the ball game ("The Trial of Throttlebottom"). Throttlebottom is convicted and sentenced to be executed by guillotine. The army demands to be paid. Kruger reprises "Union Square," realizing that the army will support him now. He puts on Wintergreen's wig and places the President on trial ("Trial of Wintergreen"). Wintergreen, Gilhooley, Lippman, Jones, Lyons, and Fulton are sentenced to be beheaded. Mary and the wives try to save them by announcing that they are all expecting babies. The ploy fails, and the convicted men are marched off. Trixie appears, followed by sailors. Kruger may have the army, but she has the navy. They decide to rule together ("First Lady and First Gent").

## SCENE 4

A happy crowd, dressed in blue, is forming at the guillotine ("They're Hanging Throttlebottom in the Morning"). Kruger and Daisy review the events of the day. The executions will be followed by a band concert and lunch. The guillotine is unveiled and proves to be painted in bright colors. General Snookfield is to be the executioner. Throttlebottom is first, but Snookfield can't figure out how to work the guillotine. Mary appears with the wives to do a fashion show ("Fashion Show"). The assembled women love the dresses, but can't wear them because the revolutionary color is blue. The women declare the revolution ended. Wintergreen and his cronies decide to retire from revolting to become dress manufacturers. They restore the Republic and

reappoint Tweedledee. They make Throttlebottom Vice President because Tweedledee can't remember the name of his Vice President. But Tweedledee can't be President—after the revolution, he accepted a position as President of Cuba. Therefore Throttlebottom is now President. He promises to give the people pistachio ice cream instead of cake (“Finale Ultimo”).

# Themes and Topics to Explore

Our study guide focuses on a wide-ranging list of themes and topics suggested by *Let 'Em Eat Cake*. Below, you'll find avenues for exploring each theme and topic. They take the form of *Questions* - designed to prompt in-class discussions before and after viewing or reading the show, and *Assignments* - designed to be researched and written out of class.

## Satire

### QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- How do the authors of *Let 'Em Eat Cake* use wit and ridicule to comment on the political and economic evils that surround them?
- What does the satirist gain and lose by choosing to take a darker, angrier approach to satire such as the one in *Let 'Em Eat Cake*?"
- Where can satirists be found in contemporary America? Who are some of the most important satirists of our day? Who are the angry satirists?
- **Caricature** is a form of satire where aspects of a person or circumstance are described in a ludicrous manner. Find an example of caricature in *Let 'Em Eat Cake*.
- **Exaggeration** is a form of satire where words are used to expand the limits of the truth. What is exaggerated in *Let 'Em Eat Cake*?
- The authors spared no one from the sting of their satire. Find an example of satirizing the Far Right and one of satirizing the Far Left in *Let 'Em Eat Cake*.

### ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- Find examples of angry satire in contemporary films, print, or broadcast media. Discuss one of these satirical treatments in depth.
- Write a biting satirical essay about a social or political situation that concerns you.
- Write a biting satire about an incident in your own life.

## America In 1933

### ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- Research 1933 as a year in American history. What events of importance happened in the preceding decade? What events immediately followed?

- List specific events, political trends, social situations, and personalities that you think Kaufman, Ryskind, and the Gershwins are satirizing.
- Pick a year from another decade of American history. List the events, trends, situations, and personalities who could be satirized.

## Let 'Em Eat Cake and the Political Process

### QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- In the opening scene, Wintergreen campaigns with pictures of babies on either side of him. What is being satirized? Tweedledee is surrounded by two question marks. What point is being made? Do the authors seem to favor one candidate or the other?
- Why do you think the authors chose the name Tweedledee for the candidate opposing Wintergreen?
- The two candidates eventually drown each other out by shouting. What does this symbolize?

### ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- The people are looking for change in the election between Wintergreen and Tweedledee. They blame Wintergreen for the status quo. They don't choose Tweedledee because of who he is, but because of who he isn't. In what other elections in American history has economic hardship brought about such a choice on the part of the electorate?
- Explore the defeat of Herbert Hoover by Franklin D. Roosevelt and compare it to the Wintergreen-Tweedledee election.

## Let 'Em Eat Cake, the Depression and Social Change

### QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- What do the boarded-up shops on each side of the shirt shop symbolize?
- What are some of the ways the authors of *Let 'Em Eat Cake* reveal the state of the nation during the depression?

### ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- In *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, the Post Office is shut down. Did this really happen during the Great Depression? What aspects of daily life ground to a stop?
- What steps toward recovery did the Roosevelt government take once it was voted into office?

- Interview older relatives and friends who lived through the Great Depression. Tape record their recollections. Ask them to recall their personal experiences in dealing with the Depression. How did their families deal with the problems of the Depression?
- How would you react if you learned that your family members have lost their savings, their jobs, and their home? How do you think your family would cope with such a crisis?

## **Let 'Em Eat Cake and the Idea of Revolution**

### QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- What aspect of American life during the Great Depression does Kruger represent? Discuss the fact that as soon as someone gets into power, Kruger turns against them.
- Discuss the fact that Wintergreen and his friends “sell revolution.” Think of a comparable situation in contemporary times.
- Discuss how the Wintergreen forces “plan” their revolution. Why do they pick July 4th as the date for their takeover?

### ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- Find some examples of radical leaders upon whom the character of Kruger may have been based. Why did some Americans rally behind radical leaders at this time?
- Examine the history of socialism and communism in America prior to the Depression. What is anarchism?
- Research the history of revolution in the United States. Discuss one armed rebellion from American history in detail. What were its causes and consequences?
- Explore the Socialist and Communist candidates who ran for office in 1932. How many votes did they receive?

## **After the Revolution in Let 'Em Cake**

### QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- Wintergreen initially makes a number of decisions that seem very superficial and foolish. What do you think the authors are satirizing?
- Wintergreen rather quickly becomes the very thing he claimed to hate—a dictator. Why do you think this happened? Can you think of a similar contemporary situation? How do we know Wintergreen is becoming a dictator?

- Wintergreen becomes both the executive and judicial branch of government by assuming control of the tribunal. What is the danger when this much power is concentrated in one branch of government? What safeguards does our system have against such occurrences?
- Why is the Army rebelling at the end of *Let 'Em Eat Cake*?

### ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- What were some of the initial actions taken by President Franklin D. Roosevelt when he took office?
- Read *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. Compare the events in *Animal Farm* to the events in *Let 'Em Eat Cake*.
- Mrs. Wintergreen associates herself with Daughters of the American Revolution. Explore the history of the DAR; comment on why the authors made this choice.
- What are some examples of Army rebellions in American history? Learn about the Bonus Army that marched in 1932.

## The League Of Nations

### ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- What was the League of Nations? Research the organization and trace its importance in American history. Discuss the specific aspects of the League that the authors of *Let 'Em Eat Cake* are satirizing.

## Let 'Em Eat Cake as Popular Entertainment

*Let 'Em Eat Cake* did not enjoy the popularity of the show *Of Thee I Sing*, to which it is a sequel. The show's dark and disturbing subject matter was, no doubt, partly responsible.

### QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- Do you think people want to be forced to see the truth about the world around them? Do you think people prefer theatre artists to hide the truth from them and provide an escapist environment?
- What role do you think that theatre has to play in educating about and commenting on social problems?
- In *Of Thee I Sing*, Mary Wintergreen is able to re-focus public attention on the fact that she and her husband are expecting a child. She is unable to do so in *Let 'Em Eat Cake*. Why? How has the world changed since 1927?



## ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- Explore American theatre history. Learn about theatres and theatre movements that were devoted to educating and commenting about social issues.
- Explore the role theatre played in the Great Depression. What were some of the important socially conscious plays of the era?
- Explore how theatre functions in other countries as a device for social comment.
- Hitler's Brown Shirts had come to power in Nazi Germany immediately before *Let 'Em Eat Cake* was written. Investigate the meaning of that event in world history. What impact may that news have had on the writing team who were Americans of Jewish descent?

## Quick Takes: Further Prompts for Writing and Discussion

- What is the source of the show's title? What are similarities between the phrase's original use and its use in *Let 'Em Eat Cake*?
- What are the authors trying to satirize by including the General's female friend Trixie in the show? Should leaders be held accountable for their values?
- John P. Wintergreen and his friends are at a loss for a future when they have to leave the White House. What have American Presidents done after they left office?
- Track the character of Gilhooley through the show. He becomes a policeman and remains a policeman. What do you think the authors use him to symbolize?
- What kinds of American organizations are the authors spoofing by portraying the members of the Union League as they did?
- What kinds of comments are the authors making about the Supreme Court in *Let 'Em Eat Cake*?

## Let 'Em Eat Cake as Musical Theatre

### QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- Would *Let 'Em Eat Cake* have been as effective as a straight play without music?
- What other kinds of subject matter like *Let 'Em Eat Cake* do you think can be effectively presented through the medium of musical theatre?
- In what ways do the Gershwins use music and lyrics to heighten the meaning of Kaufman's book? The score for *Let 'Em Eat Cake* is so completely integrated with the book that very few songs can be performed outside the context of the musical. Can you find any musical excerpts that you think can stand alone? Do you think this is a strength or weakness of the score? Why?

## ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- Look for other politically oriented works in American musical theatre history. Compare those you find with *Let 'Em Eat Cake*.
- Look for other American musical theatre works written in 1933. How do they compare to *Let 'Em Eat Cake*?
- Compare *Let 'Em Eat Cake* to *The Threepenny Opera* by Brecht and Weill.
- Select one of the following musical excerpts from *Let 'Em Eat Cake*:

"Tweedledee For President"  
 "Union Square"  
 "Store Scene"  
 "Union Square"  
 "On and On and On"  
 "League of Nations"  
 "Up and At 'Em"  
 "First Lady and First Gent"

Summarize the contents of the song. Discuss:

- What do we learn about the world in which *Let 'Em Eat Cake* takes place from this song?
  - What do we learn about the character or characters who sing the song and their personal philosophies?
  - What do we learn about the larger themes of the show from the song?
- Can you think of another place in the show where a song might fit? What would a title for the song be? Who would sing it? What would it be about? What kind of music would it have? Try to write a few lines of the song lyric or music (or both!).
  - The final moments of *Let 'Em Eat Cake* seem to revert to classic musical comedy convention. Is this jarring to you after the scene at the guillotine? Why or why not? How else could the show have ended? Write your own new ending.

## Plan Your Own Satirical Musical

- Select a contemporary current event or political issue and plan your own angry satirical musical theatre work around it.
  1. Tell a story that you think needs telling now. Set your story in the present, the past, or in the future. Set it anywhere in the world or in another universe.

2. Decide what kind of music your characters will sing. How will their music be influenced by your setting? Would the characters dance? How and why?
3. Outline the story of your musical. Write some dialogue for the characters. Try to write the opening scene of your show.

—Or—

- Plan an updated treatment of *Let 'Em Eat Cake*. How would you tell this story in the present? How would you update the characters? What social issues would still be relevant? What social issues would you add? What kind of music would you use to express the ideas in the score?

## Critical Analysis

### ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH AND WRITING PROJECTS

- Write a review of a performance of *Let 'Em Eat Cake*. You may wish to include any combination of the following elements in your review:
  1. Did the show hold your interest? Why or why not?
  2. Describe the manner in which the story was presented to the audience? What was the dialogue like?
  3. What was the structure of the story? Was there a single story or multiple stories? How did the multiple stories connect? Was anything about the story unexpected? How did the story begin and end?
  4. Describe the way music and lyrics worked in the show.
  5. Describe the sets, costumes, lighting, and musical accompaniment. How did these elements add to the meaning of the show?
  6. Discuss the effectiveness of the performers.
  7. Discuss the ideas presented in the show. Analyze their importance to your reader.
  8. Explain why your reader should make an effort to see the show.

## Appendix

By Deena Rosenberg, author of *Fascinating Rhythm: The Collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin* (Dutton, 1991).

The following background material on the authors of *Let 'Em Eat Cake* and resource lists are designed to enrich your exploration of the Themes and Topics.

### About the Creators

GEORGE GERSHWIN was born in Brooklyn on September 26, 1898, and began his musical training when he was 13. At 16 he quit high school to work as a “song plugger” for a music publisher, and soon he was writing songs himself. “Swanee” (lyrics by Irving Caesar), as performed by Al Jolson, brought George his first real fame and led to his writing a succession of 22 musical comedies, most with lyrics by his older brother, Ira. The Gershwins’ shows include *Lady, Be Good!* (1924), their first hit, and also Fred and Adele Astaire’s first Broadway hit; *Oh, Kay!* (1926), Gertrude Lawrence’s first star vehicle in which she introduced “Someone to Watch over Me”; *Girl Crazy* (1930); a political trilogy, *Strike Up The Band* (1927; revised, 1930); *Of Thee I Sing* (1931; the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize) and *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933). With Ira, George also wrote four film scores, including *Shall We Dance* (1937) for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. In the late twenties George read DuBose Heyward’s novel *Porgy*, and immediately saw it as the basis of an opera using jazz and blues idioms. *Porgy And Bess*, with a libretto by Heyward and lyrics by Heyward and Ira, opened in New York in October 1935. Besides writing for the theater and films, George was a composer of major concert hall works including *Rhapsody In Blue*, *Concerto In F*, *An American In Paris*, *Second Rhapsody*, and *Three Preludes For Piano*. George played his piano works in numerous national tours with major symphonies. He died suddenly of a brain tumor on July 11, 1937, when he was not quite 39.

IRA GERSHWIN, the first songwriter to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, was born in New York City on December 6, 1896. In 1917 *The Evening Sun* published his first song lyric (“You May Throw All the Rice You Desire, But Please Friends, Throw No Shoes”). Four years later Ira enjoyed his first major stage success, *Two Little Girls In Blue*, written with another Broadway newcomer, Vincent Youmans. In 1924 Ira and his brother, George, created the smash hit, *Lady, Be Good!*, and went on to continue their remarkable collaboration through a dozen major stage scores and four film scores, producing such standards as “Fascinating Rhythm,” “The Man I Love,” “S Wonderful,” “Embraceable You,” “I Got Rhythm,” “But Not for Me,” “They All Laughed,” “A Foggy Day,” “Love Is Here to Stay,” and others far too numerous to mention. Ira was proudest of his lyrics to the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), the middle work of a trilogy of satiric operettas written with George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, which also included *Strike Up The Band* (1927; revised, 1930) and *Let 'Em Eat*

*Cake* (1933). During his long career, Ira also enjoyed productive collaborations with such composers as Harold Arlen (“The Man That Got Away”), Vernon Duke (“I Can’t Get Started”), Kurt Weill (*Lady In The Dark*), Burton Lane, and Jerome Kern, with whom he created his greatest song hit of any one year, “Long Ago and Far Away.” Ira Gershwin died on August 17, 1983, in Beverly Hills, California, at age 86.

GEORGE S. KAUFMAN, the prolific American playwright, director, screenwriter and newspaper columnist, was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on November 14, 1889, and began his writing career as a columnist for various papers. Along with such celebrities as Dorothy Parker, Ring Lardner, and Robert Benchley, he was one of the famous participants in the Algonquin Round Table of the 1920’s. Before teaming with the Gershwins for the political trilogy, he was the author of such Broadway plays as *Merton Of The Movies*, *Dulcy*, *Beggar On Horseback*, *The Coconuts* (starring the Marx Brothers) and a musical, *Be Yourself* (with some songs by Ira Gershwin). Kaufman also directed many of his own scripts. After writing *Strike Up The Band* with the Gershwins in 1927, he went on to write the Marx Brothers’ film *Animal Crackers* (he also wrote the Brothers’ 1935 classic *A Night At The Opera*). On his revision of *Strike Up the Band* in 1930 and for two more political operettas with the Gershwins, *Of Thee I Sing* and *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, he collaborated with Morrie Ryskind. Kaufman also directed the latter two works. Other books for musicals include *The Band Wagon* (1931) with composer Arthur Schwartz and lyricist Howard Dietz, and *I'd Rather Be Right* (1937; co-written with Moss Hart and with composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Lorenz Hart). His Broadway hit *Dinner At Eight* (co-written with Edna Ferber) was made into a now-classic movie. Forty-eight movies have been made from plays he wrote or directed, including *You Can't Take It With You*, *The Man Who Came To Dinner*, and *The Solid Gold Cadillac*. He worked again with Ira Gershwin as co-bookwriter (with Nunnally Johnson) for the musical *Park Avenue* (score by Arthur Schwartz) in 1946. His last contribution to Broadway was the book for the 1955 musical *Silk Stockings*, with music by Cole Porter. He died in 1961.

MORRIE RYSKIND, like his collaborator George S. Kaufman, was a newspaper columnist as well as a playwright. He was born October 20, 1895, in New York City, and graduated from Townsend Harris High School (the same school attended by Ira Gershwin) in 1912, and from Columbia University in 1917. With Ira, he was one of the youngest contributors to F.P.A.’s famous newspaper column. He knew both Gershwin brothers well from the early twenties on. He wrote sketches and lyrics for the first *Garrick Gaieties*, a famous series of revues of the twenties, and co-wrote five plays and one film. With George S. Kaufman, he helped re-write the book for *Strike Up The Band* when it was revived in 1929. His familiarity with wartime hysteria qualified him for the job: he had been expelled from Columbia six weeks before his graduation for writing anti-war articles for the school paper (the U.S. entered the First World War that spring).

After his work on the political operettas, he went on to write the screenplays for such classic films as *My Man Godfrey* and *A Night At The Opera* (with Kaufman). He also wrote the screenplay for the Ira Gershwin-Kurt Weill movie musical *Where Do We Go From Here?* in 1945. Ryskind was the most overtly and combatively political of Kaufman's co-authors; ironically, he ended his writing career as a vehemently right-wing political columnist. The switch from left to right occurred in the Forties. In the years of his collaboration with Kaufman, however, his inclinations were to bolster Kaufman's liberal-left political views.

## Let 'Em Eat Cake in it's Cultural Context

*Strike Up the Band* had made the Gershwins eager to do more unconventional and challenging musicals. Songs in the musical comedies of the Twenties were almost all of the same length—verses of around 16 bars, refrains of 32, lasting two to four minutes—and were mostly used to heighten emotional moments or to create atmosphere. The plots, such as they were, usually stopped when the characters sang. In *Strike Up the Band*, the Gershwins used many other forms besides 32-bar songs. In *Of Thee I Sing* they went further. The show has more sung scenes than spoken ones. The songs have diverse lengths and styles that carry the action forward, giving color and dimension to the characters. Even the few songs in the score that can stand alone are also integral to the dramatic structure of the show.

"If *Strike Up the Band* was a satire on War, and *Of Thee I Sing* one on Politics, *Let 'Em Eat Cake* was a satire on Practically Everything," Ira wrote in 1959. "Straddling no fence, it trampled the Extreme Right one moment, the Extreme Left the next. Kaufman and Ryskind's libretto, a sequel to *Of Thee I Sing*, was at times wonderfully witty—at other times unrelentingly realistic in its criticism of the then American scene." Ira goes on, "Possibly the following short musical speech (unused), written for the professional agitator Kruger, gives an indication of what *Let 'Em Eat Cake* strove for:

Conditions as they were  
Must nevermore recur.  
Whatever is, shouldn't be;  
Whatever isn't—should.  
Whatever wasn't, will be;  
And I'm arranging it all for your good.

*Of Thee I Sing* is concerned with the inadequacy of American politics. The specter that haunts *Let 'Em Eat Cake* is revolution—actually, several seemingly antithetical revolutions. The show directs its fire at Wintergreen's proletarian revolution and the world of agitators who held forth in New York's Union Square—but Wintergreen's legions wear blue shirts (and even paint the White House blue). Communism and fascism—each of which was seriously predicted to be America's future by political pundits in 1933—loom over *Let 'Em Eat Cake*. The point is not the triviality but the dead seriousness of fools, zealots, and scoundrels.

In *Let 'Em Eat Cake's* world, the army is threatening coups. They mobilize to win back the bonus the government owes them—much like the Bonus Army that marched on Washington in 1932, and somewhat like the federal army, under Douglas MacArthur, that dispelled it. Indeed, as Harold Meyerson has pointed out, Kruger seems a bizarre combination of Douglas MacArthur and Communist leader William Z. Foster.

It was at this complex target, much more somber and futuristic than that of *Of Thee I Sing*, that the authors directed another Gilbert-like libretto, with its undertones of Bertolt Brecht.

*Let 'Em Eat Cake* opened in October 1933. It lasted only 46 performances. *Let 'Em Eat Cake* was written immediately after Hitler's Brown Shirts had come to power in Germany, and Ira's handwritten notebook for the work-in-progress (this was the only show with George for which he kept one) shows Hitler much on the minds of the show's creators. Kaufman's initial outlines, included in Ira's workbooks, are replete with plot-turns that are musings on totalitarianism: Wintergreen is condemned to death for teaching his children to believe in Santa Claus; the DAR becomes enamored of decapitation, and so on. Ira's notebook includes the following dark passage:

Song for Nazi Musical Comedy

Hitler Puts Ban on "Negro" music and calls for the return of the Waltz

Opponents we griddle  
We cut up the Yiddle  
In 3/4 time

Later that year, Ira authored a short verse that FPA printed in the Herald Tribune's "Conning Tower" column of October 23, 1933:

"My Battle" [Mein Kampf]  
Of Germany  
And her many  
Well—minds,  
None's littler  
Than Hitler  
One finds.

And in notes for the patter song, we find:

Who's the man can muscle in on Mr. Mussolini?  
I'm the man I mean  
Nobody else but Wintergreen.

And later in the notebook:

WINTERGREEN: Tell me who's a dreamer, but with two feet on the ground?  
ENSEMBLE: Rudy Vallee  
WINTERGREEN: Well, not quite  
ENSEMBLE: Wintergreen!

WINTERGREEN: Right! And who's the greatest horse's neck historians have found?

ENSEMBLE: Wintergreen

WINTERGREEN: Wrong

ENSEMBLE: Tweedledee (Hitler)

WINTERGREEN: Right!

Oscar Levant praised the vocal counterpoint in "Mine," which Ira also found notable: "The counter-melody of 'Mine' was different [from that of *Of Thee I Sing's* 'Some Girls Can Bake a Pie,' in which all the words were lost in the shuffle]. When the boys and girls came down to the footlights to point up the absolute togetherness of the Wintergreens, the happily married pair sang their refrain softly, and—most unusual for this sort of thing—the counter-lyric could be understood."

"I've written most of the music for this show contrapuntally," George told an interviewer while working on *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, "because it's that very insistence on sharpness of form that gives my music the acid touch it has—and which points [up] the words of the lyrics and is in keeping with the satire of the piece." Not only is *Let 'Em Eat Cake's* score contrapuntal, but often its clashing themes are specifically associated with four of the major characters. Wintergreen's and Tweedledee's themes are set against each other at the outset. They are joined by Throttlebottom's ("Comes the Revolution") and Kruger's ("Down with Everything That's Up"), and all four recur through the show. *Let 'Em Eat Cake* carries even more of its action in musical sequences than *Of Thee I Sing* does. With its well-constructed musical design, its expanded and subtle harmonic vocabulary, and its character motifs, it marks for George a step toward *Porgy And Bess*.

By writing so ambitious a series of works; *Strike Up the Band*, *Of Thee I Sing* and *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, which they could not toss off as quickly as their earlier musical comedies, the Gershwins ensured that in the early Thirties they would no longer have three or four musicals on Broadway each year, as they had had in the Twenties. This may have proved a shrewd adaptation, however inadvertent, to the times; with the advent of the Depression, the theater-going audience contracted sharply, and the amount of money available for musical productions dwindled even more.

The political trilogy was a departure both in the Gershwins' work and more generally in American musical theater. *Of Thee I Sing* is often cited, along with Kern and Hammerstein's *Show Boat*, as a precursor to *Oklahoma!*—one of the rare pre-1943 shows that closely integrated its score into its action. Indeed, the music in the trilogy does more than advance the action. It comments upon it, mocks it, deflates it; often, it *is* the action.

In fact, the satiric operettas of the Gershwins, Kaufman, and Ryskind stand alone. No other Broadway musicals of the time ever truly adopted that form, much less the subject matter, or juxtaposed the score in so rich and complex a way with the book and libretto.



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Sarah Schlesinger, author of this **MTI STUDY GUIDE**, is Program Coordinator and the Faculty Lyricist-Librettist for the Musical Theatre Program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Before joining the NYU faculty, she taught at Pace University and Towson State University as a specialist in mass communications and group discussion processes.

She has a string of musical lyricist-librettist credits: *On the Swing Shift* (Manhattan Theatre Club), *Heidi* (Theatreworks USA) and *Follow the Sun* (Hudson Guild), among others. She just completed work on *Love Comics*, a musical interpretation of the romance comics of the 1950's and '60's, with David Evans. Ms. Schlesinger also is working on *O'Henry's New York*, as well as writing lyrics for a new musical based on Frank Baum's *Queen Zixi of Ix*.

She is also the author of recent non-fiction works published by Random House/Villard, William Morrow, Avon Books and the Princeton Book Company.

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