



A Singing Ambivalence: American Immigrants Between Old World and New, 1830-1930

Victor R Greene

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A Singing Ambivalence is a comprehensive examination of the ways in which nine immigrant groups—Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, Eastern European Jews, Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Chinese, and Mexicans—responded to their new lives in the United States through music. Each group's songs reveal an abiding concern over leaving their loved ones and homeland and an anxiety about adjusting to a new society. But accompanying these disturbing feelings was an excitement about the possibilities of becoming wealthy and about looking forward to a democratic and free society.

Distinguished historian Victor Greene surveys an extensive body of songs of known and unknown origins that comment on the problems immigrants faced and reveal the wide range of responses the newcomers made to the radical changes in their new lives in America. His selection of lyrics provides useful capsules of expression that clarify the ways in which immigrants defined themselves and staked out their claims for acceptance in American society. But whatever their common and specific themes, they reveal an ambivalence over their coming to America and a pessimism about achieving their goals.

A Singing Ambivalence examines the familiar sentiments of new immigrants to the United States, while at the same time conveying from an aesthetic viewpoint how immigrants expressed their hopes and difficulties through song. This is an important volume that will be welcomed by scholars of music and immigration history.

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