Arriving from London on March 10, 1880, Commissioner George Scott Railton and seven "Hallelujah Lassies" landed in New York's Battery Park, posted their flag and claimed America for God and Salvation Army. However, invading a nation, no matter how peacefully or nobly, is ever quite that easy. They were ridiculed by the press, police, and popular Christianity, reviled by many of the destitute, disreputable, and downtrodden they came to save, and resisted by Americans who, still developing their own sense of self as a nation, were skeptical of a movement modeled after the British army that had come from England to wage a war of love and redemption on American shores. In spite of these challenges, it was not long before the sight and sound of the Salvation Army's brass band, a British musical ensemble, on the street corner heralding the kingdom of God became interwoven into the fabric of American culture. While this Army became loved, respected, and accepted as a part of American urban life by the end of the First World War, to most Americans the Salvation Army remained exclusively other. Edward McKinley suggests that through sheer force and omnipresence, "that never did an organization become more closely identified by the public with one part of its activity that did the Salvation Army with its street-meeting bands." (Edward H. McKinley, Marching to Glory: The History of the Salvation Army in the United States of America, 1880-1980 (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 42-43) Having transformed from a reviled iconoclast to a revered urban icon, the commonplaces of its street meetings became devoid of their luster when the Salvation Army band no longer pushed the envelope and challenged accepted social norms as it became a movement that in some way was seen but not heard - known but not understood - inside, but somehow still outside the culture of the nation.

This project will explore how the Salvation Army used music in three distinct periods of its history in the United States. First, its appropriation of lowbrow American popular song as it attempted to identify with poorer working classes. Second, its later rejection of popular music as it attempted to hold on to its place of honor it had won through the service of its donut girls to the soldiers in the First World War. And finally, acculturation, as the Salvation Army assimilated uniquely American elements and created a cultural all its own. Now more focused on services and festivals in Army halls instead of on the street corner, it improved the quality of the proficiency of its bands and the quality of its composers and created its own musical language, both inside and outside of popular American culture.