Inside Outside:
The Cultural Paradox of Salvation Army Brass Bands in America
During the Age of Nationalism
(research director: Ron Pen)

Abstract

By the turn of the twentieth century, the sight and sound of a little brass band of uniformed evangelists on street corners declaring war on sin became ubiquitous in American cities. Although Salvationists came to hold a cherished place in society, Americans greeted their initial invasion with contempt. They came with a message of transformative redemption for the poor and disenfranchised, loudly declaring that anyone and anything could be made holy and fit for God’s Salvation Army. This included minstrel tunes and other rough musics appropriated from the working-class Americans. However, eventually their music had less in common with poor Americans and more in common with British Salvationists.

Having adopted brass bands in Britain that reinforced a working-class image, American Salvationists also began commissioning brass bands for service. However, in the United States, brass bands were not associated exclusively with the working-class, but instead conjured a nostalgic image of brass bands of the American Civil War.

This project considers how Salvation Army brass bands reinforced a distinctively Salvationist identity and helped transform their image in society from reviled iconoclast to revered cultural icon, somehow both inside and outside American culture.