

The College of Wooster

An Eye for the Everyday:

Don Freeman's New York City Sketches in Historical Context, 1928-1945

by

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INTRODUCTION

In 1968, Don Freeman published a short children's book about a stuffed bear who loses a button on his overalls. The bear sits in the department store until a young girl picks him up and brings him home despite his imperfections. The story of this bear, *Corduroy*, is cherished by children and parents around the world, and its protagonist continues to be a recognizable name almost fifty years later. Freeman, the author and illustrator of *Corduroy* (1968), dedicated part of his life to writing children's literature. His books such as *Chuggy and the Blue Caboose* (1950) and *Quiet! There's a Canary in the Library* (1969) tell charming stories that many young children find entertaining.

Don Freeman's career did not start with children's literature. In 1928, at twenty years old, Freeman moved to New York City, chasing his childhood dream of living in the hustle and bustle of the city. Freeman wanted to play trumpet in a symphony. But it was his hobby of sketching New Yorkers in their everyday routines that led to his full-fledged career. Freeman illustrated for various magazines, theater pamphlets, and authored a magazine of original lithographs that spanned almost ten years. These early works, coming about during the Depression Era and extending through the outbreak of World War II, allow us to see who Freeman was as an artist and as a person, much before his children's books hit the stands.

What makes these early sketches so notable, especially since Freeman himself had originally seen his trumpet as his key to success? Perhaps his early techniques provide insight into his illustration style of the 1950s and 1960s. Without a doubt, there are common themes and style choices that Freeman consistently employs through the years. However connected his

children's literature and New York City sketches may be, Freeman's early art deserves attention because it tells lighthearted stories about a struggling metropolis. His "fortitude and good humor" towards humanity is visible in every sketch.¹ His high spirits bring liveliness to his images of plain city dwellers. It is Freeman's commitment to empathy during a trying decade that distinguishes his artistic style and makes him an important twentieth-century American artist.²

Despite the continuing popularity of Freeman's children's literature and his fascinating biography, the historiography on him is almost non-existent. His art has barely been written about, except for a few pieces published by close friends and family. The politics and culture of New York City are central to his early art, yet historians of the city have never studied his work in this context. This study seeks to develop scholarship on Freeman's work by examining his art and his life in New York City between 1928 and 1945.

In this study, I focus on situating Freeman's New York City art in a historical context. The scarceness of scholarship on his art allows for plenty of space to develop analysis. I examine twenty-two sketches in this paper, some analyzed to a greater extent than others. All serve to show that Freeman's uniquely spirited style made him an important twentieth-century American artist. Because this study has a historical focus, I stay away from discussing specific artistic techniques or using artists' vocabulary. I make generalizations about the aesthetics of Freeman's art and consider its relation to certain art movements, but I keep this analysis historical instead of artistic.

¹ Edith McCulloch ed., *The Prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 2.

² Al Hirschfeld, "Newsstand," in Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*, 114.

This study draws upon a wide range of primary sources. A central primary source is Freeman's illustrated magazine *Newsstand*, which ran quarterly from 1936 to 1945 with additional issues put out some years. This magazine is, in Freeman's own words, "A Journal of One Man's Manhattan," and is filled with original lithographs.³ I looked at about fifteen issues of *Newsstand*, both hard copies and those provided on microfilm through Interlibrary Loan. All issues span the nine years of its run. Included in this study are reproductions of images from original hard copies and from microfilm from the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. Another important source that I refer to is Freeman's autobiography, *Come One, Come All!* This book, first published in 1949, tells Freeman's own story of growing up in Southern California and pursuing a career in art once moving to New York City. His writing is just as animated as his art, and littered throughout are original sketches, some produced exclusively for the book. This autobiography narrates Freeman's transition from an amateur musician to an experienced artist and allows any reader to experience Manhattan through his eyes. Finally, a primary source that has influenced my studies, and one that I hope to expand upon in future research, is the collection of Freeman's letters to his then-girlfriend, Lydia. Before they were married, Don Freeman and Lydia Cooley wrote each other for years, telling stories of their respective art classes, new apartments they had rented, and run-ins with celebrities. These correspondences provide insight into Freeman as an artist and as a person.

Secondary sources on Freeman's art are limited; however, I have consulted a number of texts that provide artistic and historical context of his work. In terms of sources on art, I frequently refer to a catalogue published for the University of Virginia Art Museum, authored by

³ This line appears as a subtitle on several issues of *Newsstand*, beginning in January of 1941.

Edith McCulloch. This book, compiled after the University of Virginia Art Museum added several Freeman lithographs to its collection, includes reproductions of lithographs from *Newsstand*, along with brief pieces by two close friends, John Beauford and Al Hirschfeld, and an art critic, Marjorie P. Balge. These essays capture the spirit of Freeman's art and relate it to the culture of New York he loved so deeply. Balge critiques Freeman's sketches and comments on artistry, while Hirschfeld and Beauford show Freeman to be as vibrant a person as he was an artist. Another secondary source that I consult is Erika Doss's *Twentieth-century American Art*. Doss's book provides an overview of the Ashcan School and Social Realism, both of which are important factors in contextualizing Freeman's 1930s art.

For historical context of Freeman's work, I referred to Richard F. Welch's *King of the Bowery*, and Thomas Kessner's article titled "Fiorello H. La Guardia." Welch and Kessner write about the politics of the city during the Depression Era, namely the transition from the corrupt municipal government of Tammany Hall to the spirited, congenial mayor that was La Guardia. To gain a wider perspective on New York City culture during these years, I consulted George J. Lankevich's *American Metropolis: A History of New York City* and Jules Stewart's *Gotham Rising*. These books expand upon important parts of New York City culture, such as waves of immigration and Broadway. All of the sources I have mentioned offer valuable context for understanding Freeman's art.

In this study, I begin with contextualizing the New York City that Freeman came to know and love. Its political and cultural atmosphere is crucial to understand his sketches. Next, I delve into analysis of Freeman's drawings of Broadway shows. These sketches were some of the first of Freeman's published works, from which Freeman came to develop his own artistic style and

stay afloat financially. I then look at Freeman's sketches that allude to New York City politics, and I situate them in the context of the city's political climate. Finally, I analyze a number of sketches of commonplace New Yorkers, especially images in which race, class, and ethnicity are central. Freeman's depictions of African Americans, poor Eastern European immigrants, and everyday working-class folk are frequent in *Newsstand*, and the ways in which they are portrayed speak volumes about Freeman's enthusiasm for human life. By assessing a breadth of sketches and their subjects, I hope to construct a fuller picture of Freeman's 1930s and 1940s art. This study aims to name Don Freeman as an important, engaged American artist by showing how his work exhibits the joy and resilience of everyday New Yorkers during a time in which few saw the beauty of the American metropolis.

CHAPTER ONE:
DEPRESSION-ERA NEW YORK CITY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nothing was more enchanting to young Don Freeman than the prospect of one day living in a big city. His childhood caretaker, Mrs. Blass, indulged him with his first “dizzy whirl” of a trip to the nearest big city, Los Angeles, when he was about six or seven.⁴ The train ride from his hometown of Chula Vista to the city was magical, and his “crayons could hardly keep pace with the sights outside the train windows.”⁵ Equally as magical was the movie set he and Mrs. Blass stumbled upon, with scenes of “wilds of the frozen North” and “mountains made completely of salt” seeming quite out of place for Southern California. It was this trip, Freeman states in his autobiography *Come One, Come All!*, that made him realize, “small town life was not for me!” Upon graduating high school and jumping from job to job, Freeman decided to follow his childhood dream and move to the great metropolis of New York City. He arrived in 1928, and with his trumpet and sketchbook in hand, Freeman quickly became acquainted with a city on the verge of significant economic and political change.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, New York City had functioned as a powerful machine. Economically, the metropolis’s middle class had created a booming manufacturing sector. Tammany Hall, an organization formed by Democrats during the late 18th century, dictated all city politics. New York’s large immigrant population played an important role in both economics and politics. Immigrants took many manufacturing jobs and contributed to the massive growth of industry. Tammany Hall offered immigrants many opportunities: “jobs, legal support, social

⁴ Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1949), 7.

⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

events, and food, fuel, and shelter if necessary.”⁶ The organization “was itself a profession, offering young men opportunities for advancement and power.”⁷ In exchange, Tammany Hall received immigrants’ votes.

The machine-like structure of New York City gradually began to crumble with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 and the revelation of a corrupt Tammany Hall months after. When the stock market plummeted in October of 1929, thirteen million Americans lost their jobs.⁸ In New York City, two-hundred and thirty thousand people were suddenly jobless, and their municipal government was beginning to crumble before their eyes. The investigations of Mayor Jimmy Walker and the exposure of Tammany Hall politicians’ use of bribery left the city in despair .⁹

With feelings of utter hopelessness both in New York and across the country, Americans began to shift their efforts toward reform. New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt began his campaign for President in 1930 and vowed to “advance the public good” by expanding the role of the government.¹⁰ Roosevelt’s New Deal instituted federal programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration, which created thousands of jobs in environmental conservation, theater, and the arts. Also during the Roosevelt administration, Congress passed a national minimum wage and standardized the work week.¹¹ Social reform on a

⁶ Richard F. Welch, “The City and The Machine,” Chap. 1 in *King of the Bowery* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), ProQuest ebrary, 27.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John Garraty, *A Short History of the American Nation*, Second ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 422.

⁹ Richard F. Welch, “Legacies” Chap. 11 in *King of the Bowery*, 193. For more on the demise of Tammany Hall, see Chap. 11.

¹⁰John Garraty, *A Short History of the American Nation*, 422.

¹¹ Ibid, 431.

national level created an almost tangible “New Deal Spirit”--a sense of community and the “revitalized national energies” that defined 1930s America.

New Yorkers cultivated this spirit by electing the city’s first anti-Tammany Hall Mayor in decades. In 1934, former Republican congressman Fiorello La Guardia took office and restructured city politics in a drastic way.¹² As a congressman years prior, he had backed the New Deal and believed that the efforts required to revitalize New York City “must be national.”¹³ He came into the municipal office with five goals, which included the restoration of the city’s financial health, new relief programs, the elimination of municipal corruption, “merit-based civil service,” and the revival of the city as an aesthetically nice place to live.¹⁴ With great help from Washington, La Guardia accomplished the majority of these goals and gained the great support from the city’s working class along the way.

La Guardia was also quite familiar with the sense of hardship that crippled New York. As the son of immigrants, La Guardia had a poor upbringing. His travels out west throughout his childhood exposed him to the nation’s racist attitudes towards African Americans and Native Americans. Years later, his wife and baby both contracted tuberculosis and died within six months of each other. Unlike Tammany Hall politicians, La Guardia was “common with the people he represented.”¹⁵

With the demise of the nation’s economy and New York City’s machine-like power also came a gradual demise of high culture. The height of Tammany Hall’s power coincided with

¹² Thomas Kessner, "Fiorello H. La Guardia," *The History Teacher* 26, no. 2 (1993), accessed February 15, 2017, 153.

¹³ A November 1935 *New York Times* article titled “La Guardia Insists Federal Aid Go On” details La Guardia’s call to the federal government to assist with the revival of the economy on a national scale instead relying on local governments. From ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁴ Kessner, "Fiorello H. La Guardia," 154.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 152.

America's Gilded Age--a time in which great prosperity created a sense of American exceptionalism. But with a weakened political machine and a devastated national economy, artists were less inclined to deliver messages of American greatness through their work. Some artists began rejecting the neoclassical tendencies of the Gilded Age and embracing more modern styles, many of which put humanity and its grit at the forefront.¹⁶

One of the artists who helped to "set the twentieth century on the course of modern art" was Freeman's future teacher, John Sloan.¹⁷ Sloan, along with seven other independent artists, held an art exhibition at the Macbeth Gallery in New York City in 1908--the very year Freeman was born. Together, these artists received the name "the Eight Rebels" by *The New York World* magazine because they strayed from tradition by painting what urban life was really like.¹⁸ The subjects of their paintings--bustling, unremarkable New Yorkers--along with their purposely unperfected techniques combined to create a new style of art decided as Ashcan art. Critics illegitimized the style through its nickname and denounced the artists for painting nothing but garbage. However, the recognition Ashcan artists received, albeit critical, led artists like Sloan, George Bellows, and Robert Henri to become more prominent on a local and national scale.¹⁹

By the time Freeman was enrolled in art classes in New York City with John Sloan, the Ashcan school had given way to a more organized art movement that was a direct response to the Great Depression. Social Realism formed as a movement in the 1930s when many artists found themselves without moneyed audiences to buy their work. Through various New Deal programs,

¹⁶For a survey of twentieth-century American art, see Erika Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 20.

¹⁷Doss, *Twentieth-century American Art*, 35.

¹⁸Ibid, 36.

¹⁹Ibid.

the federal government became a “major patron for American art.”²⁰ Many Social Realists took advantage of these programs, and their public works projects, such as city murals, brought their names to prominence. Just as the Ashcan school focused on the grit of urban life, Social Realism put humanity at the forefront. Artists like Reginald Marsh and Isabel Bishop had echoes of the Ashcan school in their scenes of “jobless drifters” and “hobo children.”²¹ Often, Social Realists had much more overt political statements in their work. Diego Rivera, for example, conveyed explicit political messages through his depictions of tired, blue-collar workers. Even if their images of Americans differed, all Social Realists had one message in common: Americans were struggling. Social Realist Moses Soyer had specific instructions for artists: “Do not glorify Main Street. Paint it as it is--mean, dirty, avaricious.”²²

It would misjudge Freeman’s work to say that he took Soyer’s advice. He drew “Main Street” and he drew its dirt and grime.²³ But with a closer look, it becomes obvious that Freeman’s art differed from that of Social Realists and Ashcan artists. His art was uniquely bubbly and dynamic. Freeman sketched in the contexts of total economic devastation, a shift in municipal politics, and an eagerness in artists to tout their political beliefs with their paintbrushes. His art may echo these themes; however, Freeman is distinct in the way he sketched “with quiet ardor what most interests him.”²⁴ His enthusiastic, empathetic view of humanity brings each sketch to life.

²⁰ Erika Doss, *Twentieth-century American Art*, 98.

²¹ *Ibid*, 101.

²² *Ibid*, 102.

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ R. L. Duffus, "Life With Don Freeman: Come One, Come All!," *The New York Times*, November 19, 1949. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

CHAPTER TWO:
BACKSTAGE STRUCK

Freeman's love for sketching transformed into a paying job one evening in 1929 in an unlikely alley between 5th Avenue and Broadway. After a popsicle salesman caught Freeman drawing him, he led Freeman to Shubert Alley, a place where he knew Freeman could get a good sketch. Broadway actors and

actresses flooded the alley during intermission to get some fresh air and buy some popsicles. While the popsicle man began his nightly sales to the actors, Freeman busily sketched away, capturing a chaotic



Fig. 1: *Shubert Alley Intermission*, undated, printed in Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonne*, 57.

scene of actors, doormen, and even shoeshiners, mingling in the street during intermission (Fig. 1).

The following Monday, Freeman brought the sketch to the editor of the *New York Herald Tribune* but was simply told to leave it on a pile of drawings. It wasn't until weeks later, on his way home from seeing *Broken Dishes* that he stopped by a diner and saw a man skimming

the Sunday paper: “As sure as I was sitting at the counter choking on a bowl of chili, there was my drawing...on the front page of the drama section of the New York *Herald Tribune!*”²⁵

Luckily for Freeman, his career as an artist began to unfold during Broadway’s height. Show business had long been an important cultural aspect of New York City, as nineteenth century historian William L. Stone said in 1872, “Broadway, ever changing, and yet the same old road, is perhaps our great historical monument.”²⁶ During the 1930s, in the depths of economic depression, New Yorkers rushed to the theaters seeking a “magical world of escapism, a powerhouse of glamour,” that could allow them to momentarily forget their woes.²⁷

Freeman found the theater world enticing, but not for its over-the-top glamour. Rather, he was what theater critic and long time friend John Beaufort called “backstagestruck.”²⁸ His depictions of Broadway stars and no-name actors coming together in the chaos behind the curtain showed his audience that the theater was a place of craftsmanship. All theater personnel had talents worth sharing. Sketches of doormen, curtain crew, and stagehands in *Newsstand* stood beside drawings of famous New York playwrights. Freeman’s work shows us that Broadway was more than a dazzling world of famous celebrities. Instead, it was where the skills of actors, dancers, musicians, and crewmen combined to create art and to entertain the public.

Freeman regularly sought out this entertainment, whether or not he had been hired to cover shows. A self-proclaimed “Broadway beachcomber,” Freeman would sneak past doormen and scour the lobby floor, looking for dropped ticket stubs, until the man at the booth became fed

²⁵ Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!* (Rinehart, 1945), 141

²⁶ William L. Stone, *History of New York City* (New York: Virtue & Yorston, 1872), 657 quoted in Jules Stewart, *Gotham Rising* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 89.

²⁷ Jules Stewart, *Gotham Rising*, 89.

²⁸ John Beaufort, “Pageants and People,” in Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*, 3.

up and allowed him to watch the show from the balcony for free.²⁹ For Freeman, this solved the only problem with Broadway: steep ticket prices. The price to see a Gershwin show could be ten percent of a businessman's weekly earnings, and during the Depression, it was especially hard to depart with that much money.³⁰ Yet the entertainment Broadway offered--from the high-spirited numbers of *Anything Goes* to the political satire in *Of Thee I Sing*--enchanted audiences during times of hardship. Freeman was one of the enchanted, and he could not believe his good fortune: that sketching Broadway shows "could also be a way of earning a living--seeing the plays and being paid for it at the same time!"³¹

Though Freeman began sketching no-named actors of Broadway, he also sketched some of the nation's most beloved playwrights and directors: George Gershwin, Alfred Hitchcock,

Orson Welles to name a few.

Tasked with sketching celebrities

could lead one to become

self-important, yet Freeman

refused to see them as anything

but "people with a coating of

greasepaint."³² His emphasis on

their artisanship is beautifully

evident in many of his sketches.

Fig. 2: *Dress Rehearsal, Of Thee I Sing*, 1931, printed in Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonne*, 47.

²⁹ Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 133.

³⁰ Jules Stewart, *Gotham Rising*, 90.

³¹ Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 142.

³² *Ibid*, 156.

Freeman's 1931 sketch In his sketch of a rehearsal of Gershwin's *Of Thee I Sing*, actors, dancers, directors, and choreographers, are all busy putting the show together (Fig. 5). While one would expect George Gershwin to be the focus of this lithograph, considering this production was the first play to win a Pulitzer Prize for drama, he is simply another part of the team trying to make the most of dress rehearsal. In fact, there is no one focus of this lithograph. Gershwin conducting, the conversations between onlookers in the audience, and even the man adjusting an actress's costume are all given equal attention. "Dress Rehearsal" is characteristically backstage Freeman: the personalities of various individuals come together in a lively scene, and in this case, it is the production of one of the country's most iconic Broadway shows.



Fig. 3-5 (left to right): Alfred Hitchcock Directing *Foreign Correspondent*, 1940, printed in Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonne*, 100. Don Freeman sketches Orson Welles as Tybalt, date unknown, printed in *Come One, Come All!* 173. Don Freeman sketches Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* radio production, date unknown, printed in *Come One, Come All!* 175.

One of Freeman's frequent celebrity subjects, Orson Welles, is portrayed with a lightheartedness that one may not expect, given his "naturally unnerving" persona.³³ Freeman himself called Welles a "dynamic hotfoot," but his sketches exhibit a more playful Welles

³³ Twentieth century American writer Alfred Kazin's commentary on Welles as an artist is quoted by Michael Denning in Chapter 10 of *The Cultural Front* (London: Verso, 1998), 362.

through Freeman’s characteristically upbeat style.³⁴ One sketch in *Come One, Come All!* illustrates the moment in which Welles’ famous dramatization of *The War of the Worlds* and a so-called martian invasion “scared half the nation out of its skin” (Fig. 2.3).³⁵ Freeman’s sketches show Welles’ intensity and power that made him such a famous actor and director. Yet Freeman also captures Welles’ backstage essence through his lively, animated artistic style. Perhaps this style stems from how Freeman got his start: sneaking past doormen, peeking through stage doors, and sketching inconspicuously in the balcony.



Fig. 6-8 (left to right): *Electrician*, 1932, printed in Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonne*, 48. “Dad” Collins, 1932, reproduced in McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman*, 44. *Intermission Siesta - backstage*, printed in *Newsstand*, 1939, Vol. 2 No. 8, 14.

Backstage was a recurring theme throughout Freeman’s career as an artist in New York. His first sketch done for the *Herald Tribune* was a scene from behind the stage door. In an issue *Newsstand* published seven years after the start of his career, six lithographs pertain to theater

³⁴ Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 174.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

out of the thirty-six lithographs in total.³⁶ Freeman loved the clandestine nature of backstage: the “toughest part,” tougher than getting the *Herald Tribune* editor to pick up his work, “was getting past the doormen.” But once he did, he was a “goner, given over completely to the fantastic backstage world of scene shifters, electricians, seamstresses, chorus girls, and stars.”³⁷

But backstage was exciting for reasons more than just its illicitness. Behind the curtain was where famous actors and directors came together with makeup artists, seamstresses, and the men drawing the

curtains, each equally crucial to the show’s success. Freeman captured this spirit, along with a sense of liveliness and haste, in each of his sketches of backstage.



Fig. 9: *Up On the Fly Rail*, printed in in Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 160-1.

The lithograph “Up On the Fly Rail”

shows the crew in charge of curtains, some working hard to time the drawing of the curtains with the show, and others sitting back and playing cards (Fig. 4). The scene on stage is visible, yet the male and female leads are just about as prominent as the sandbag weighing down the curtains. Some of the crew appear to be watching the show, while others simply could not be bothered.

³⁶ Gathered from Don Freeman’s Winter 1941 issue of *Newsstand*.

³⁷ Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 142.

Freeman draws viewers into a realm that most Broadway-goers would not give a second thought to. He brings excitement to the non-glamorous jobs of these men, allowing his audiences to get a glimpse into the inner workings of Broadway.

As John Beaufort said, Freeman “was equally at home amid the sable sand top hats of the first-night elite or the bargain hunters at the cut-rate Leblang ticket agency.”³⁸ Through his sketches, Freeman opened the eyes of New Yorkers to the craftsmanship that made Broadway.³⁹ He took a world that had already enchanted New Yorkers with its glitz and glamor and portrayed the “teeming humanity” of it all.

³⁸ John Beaufort, “Pageants and People,” in Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER THREE:

CITY POLITICS AND MAYOR LA GUARDIA

In *Come One, Come All!* Freeman tells the story of how he came to sketch one of the city's most cherished political figures. One day, an "out of breath character" showed up at his



Fig. 10: Don Freeman sketch of Mayor La Guardia, printed in Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 191.

door, notifying him that Mayor Fiorello

La Guardia wanted a sketch of himself.

The mayor had supposedly seen one of

Freeman's sketches that satirized his mayoral duties and wanted to see more.⁴⁰

Freeman ventured to City Hall, "excited

beyond words thinking I would be

meeting a man who was truly the people's

choice."⁴¹ From the instant he stepped into

the office, he could see just how

dynamic La Guardia was. For Freeman,

drawing him was not easy: "He swiveled

around in his chair, jumped up, shouted, plumped down again, leaned back, looked up at the

ceiling..."⁴² But with ten minutes in his office, Freeman saw just how New York City

government operated. "I felt as if I were in the engine room of the city," Freeman says, and the

five-foot-two-inches tall La Guardia "was the dynamo."⁴³

⁴⁰ Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 186.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 191.

Freeman always had an engaged eye when it came to sketching New York City politics. He had arrived in New York just before the beginning of the Great Depression, and by the time he had started making money from his drawings, there were more than enough scenes of enraged jobless New Yorkers to sketch. But Freeman never sent angry political messages about the state of the nation through his work, as many other artists were inclined to do. Critics have come to see Freeman as politically uninterested for this very reason, and some have even noted a lack of “social consciousness” in his work.⁴⁴ What lacked, as *New York Times* editorial writer R. L. Duffus said, was a “good, lively hatred of the human race.”⁴⁵ By creating lighthearted, cartoonish drawings, Freeman captured the morsels of hope his subjects still had during political and economic struggle and communicates it to his audience. No matter how tense relations were between strikers and scabs, nor how many tiring hours La Guardia tending to the needy, Freeman portrayed his city dwellers as buoyant and resilient. He provides us with a genuine look into the city’s political climate during its most trying decade while assuring us that New Yorkers had not lost their upbeat spirit.

The Great Depression hit New York City the hardest in 1932 when the metropolis’s \$1.9 billion of debt, combined with Mayor Jimmy Walker’s regime of cuts and corruption, left many people feeling completely hopeless. Walker had been forced to fire eleven thousand teachers, one third of factories had been shut down, and 1.6 million New Yorkers were receiving government relief of some kind.⁴⁶ All the while, Tammany Hall was slowly crumbling, wrought

⁴⁴ Balge, "Don Freeman: A Critical Appreciation," In Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*, 11.

⁴⁵ R. L. Duffus, "Life With Don Freeman: Cone One, Come All!," *The New York Times*, November 19, 1949.

⁴⁶George J. Lankevich, *American Metropolis: A History of New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 162-163.

with corruption and scandal. Without a doubt, the city had never experienced such economic and political turmoil.



Fig. 11-12: Don Freeman sketches strikers and scabs, printed in *Newsstand*, June 1937. Don Freeman sketches young woman on strike and policemen, printed in *Newsstand*, September 1936.

Freeman's depictions of struggling, working-class New Yorkers portray the political and economic troubles of the time, yet they still possess a human energy that resists any real political sloganeering. One image printed in the June 1937 issue of *Newsstand* shows people harassing a woman who is selling jewelry on the street. The sign one man holds reads "DON'T BE A SCAB!" implying that this woman still works while many laborers are on strike (Fig. 11). Another image, printed in the September 1936 issue of *Newsstand*, shows a young woman holding a sign that reads "THIS STORE IS UNFAIR," while angry police surround her on all sides (Fig. 12). Scenes like these give a look into a tense political and economic climate in the city, yet they do not comment explicitly on the nature of working-class picketers, nor on the

complexities of New York's municipal politics. Freeman captured the city's political atmosphere in the same way he sketched most things: with an emphasis on humanity. No matter striker, scab, policeman, or clerk, these working-class New Yorkers were all human. Freeman sketched with an empathy towards his subjects, no matter their politics. He seemed to understand them all, perhaps due to the fact that he was a working-class artist who sought government-funded relief during the Depression Era.

One way in which working-class writers, musicians, and artists sought relief from the Great Depression was through the Works Progress Administration (WPA). This federally-funded organization, part of President Roosevelt's New Deal, paid people in the arts to create, whether their products were music, magazines, or murals. This "unprecedented involvement of the federal government in culture" allowed artists to stay financially afloat.⁴⁷ Even as he was being paid to sketch for the *Herald Tribune*, Freeman signed up for WPA projects. The state funded his sketches for theater magazines like *Living Newspaper* and the his demonstrations of how he created the lithographs that would be printed in *Newsstand*. In a 1965 interview for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Freeman expresses his appreciation towards the WPA and the fact that "art was nourished during the worst time."⁴⁸

While Freeman approached city politics from a very human angle when he drew New York's working class, he addressed politics more directly when sketching a certain political subject: New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. La Guardia was not only one of Freeman's

⁴⁷ Michael Denning *The Cultural Front: the Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1998), 44.

⁴⁸ Betty Hoag McGlynn, *Oral history interview with Don Freeman, 1965 June 4*. Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

favorites, but he was beloved by working-class New Yorkers. They saw La Guardia as one of them: an Italian-American Jew who came from a poor immigrant family and had worked hard to earn his place as an influential politician. This contagiously charismatic, “fiercely ambitious” man proved to be a the juxtaposition to corrupt Tammany Hall politicians that New Yorkers were looking for.⁴⁹

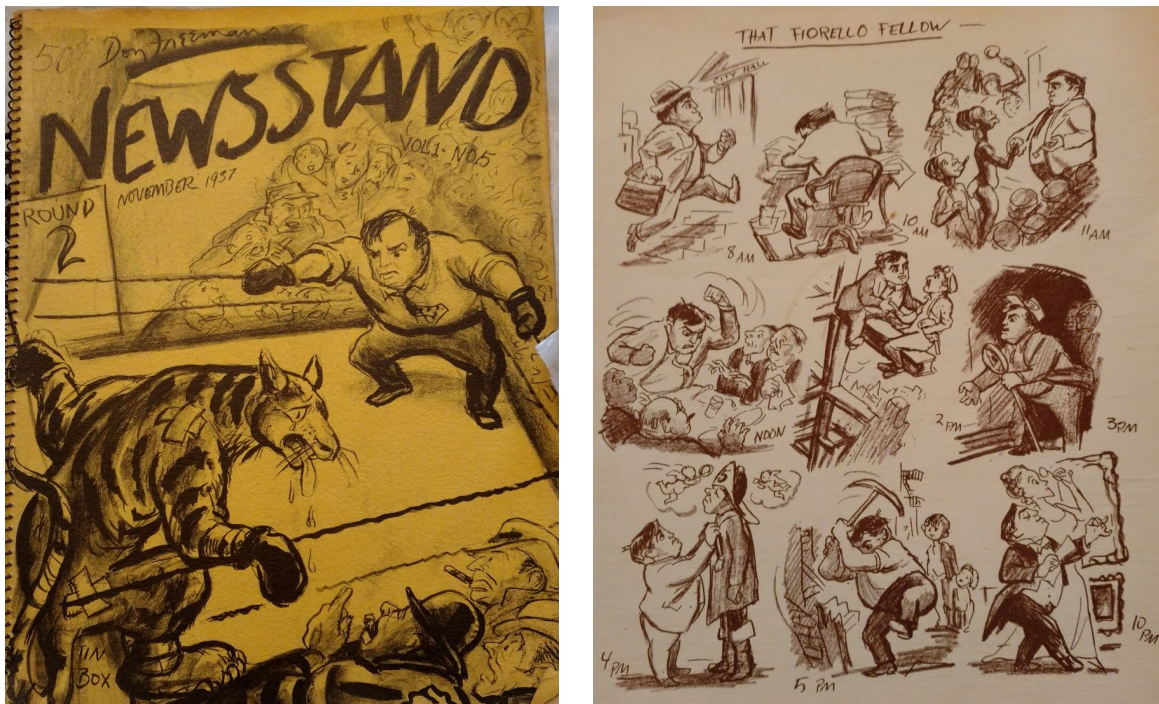


Fig. 13-14: Don Freeman sketches La Guardia fighting Tammany Hall tiger on the cover of *Newsstand*, November 1937. *That Fiorello Fellow*, printed in *Newsstand* November 1937.

When drawing La Guardia, Freeman struck a balance between showing his politics and his personality. The cover of Freeman’s November 1937 issue of *Newsstand* pictures La Guardia in a boxing ring being cheered on by an eager crowd. Also in the ring is weary, bandaged Tammany Hall tiger, sitting on a tin box. The image, published during the month of La Guardia’s re-election, symbolizes the Mayor’s opposition to the city’s history of corruption with Tammany

⁴⁹ Thomas Kessner, "Fiorello H. La Guardia," 158.

Hall and its city bosses. The labeled tin box alludes to the nickname of an old New York County Sheriff who, when testifying during a citywide investigation of municipal corruption, said he kept his earned money in a “tin box.”⁵⁰ The tiger, obviously worn out and defeated, leans over the side of the ring, begging other politicians for help. La Guardia defends his corner, and instead of being prideful of his feat, he exhibits intense concentration. Freeman’s depiction of the mayor and the despised Tammany Hall is true to La Guardia’s own view of his administration: “When it’s time for me to step down, the people will say, ‘Well, the little fellow played square.’”⁵¹

The lithograph “That Fiorello Fellow,” features Freeman’s interpretation La Guardia’s busy schedule. At eight o’clock in the morning, Fiorello arrives at City Hall with a spring in his step. Throughout the day, Fiorello performs a number of duties. He reaches out to the city’s African American population⁵², talks with construction workers, and lashes out at bankers. He even sports a CIO hat. At the end of the day, he goes to the theater dressed in a tuxedo with his woman’s arm in hand. Freeman’s depiction of La Guardia and his various activities shed light upon 1930s New Yorker’s views of their beloved mayor.

Freeman originally printed the lithograph of La Guardia in his December 1936 *Newsstand* but reproduced it as a “request reprint” in November of the following year.⁵³ Freeman’s audience loved this sketch, and Freeman loved sketching La Guardia. The mayor is a frequent character in Freeman’s work and is generally portrayed in a positive light. In this lithograph, readers see La Guardia’s dedication to the city. He makes time to complete paperwork and fight with bankers, but he also makes the working class part of his schedule. One

⁵⁰ For more on the tin box symbolism, see Herbert Mitgang, “In Scandal of 1930’S, City Shook and a Mayor Fell,” *The New York Times*, June 13, 1986.

⁵¹ S.J. Woolf, “Mayor Two Years and Still Optimistic,” *The New York Times*, January 5, 1936.

⁵² For more on Freeman’s depiction of African Americans, see Chapter 4 “Everyday New Yorkers,” page 32.

⁵³ Don Freeman, *Newsstand*, November 1937.

can also see La Guardia's stamina--he is busy with mayoral tasks from eight in the morning to ten at night. Freeman's portrayals of La Guardia's energetic commitment to his people are apt representations of how New Yorkers viewed the mayor at the time.

Whether his art gave brief glimpses into the politics of working-class New Yorkers or confronted politics directly by centering a sketch around "the greatest mayor New York ever had," Freeman portrayed the political climate of a struggling city in a human way. None of his audiences paying fifty cents for the latest *Newsstand* needed a reminder of Tammany Hall's corruption or the city's bleak economy.⁵⁴ What rang true to them were upbeat images of fellow city dwellers on strike, or sketches of the "dynamo" that was La Guardia.⁵⁵ Freeman prioritized this human aspect over the complexities of New York City's politics.

⁵⁴ Price of an individual copy of Freeman's *Newsstand* appears on front cover of November 1937 issue.

⁵⁵ Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 191.

CHAPTER FOUR

FREEMAN AND EVERYDAY NEW YORKERS

Back when he still had his trumpet and sketching was just a hobby, Freeman was hired for a band gig at a club in New York’s Little Italy. On his way to the gig, he suddenly became



Fig. 15: *Mulberry Street festival*, printed in Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 1945.

distracted by the “heavy aroma of cheese and bologna” that filled the air. A “strenuous band blared forth” with Italian-Americans of all ages filling the decorated street.⁵⁶ Freeman had run into Little Italy’s All Saints’ Day parade. Just as Freeman pulled out his leather-bound sketchbook to capture the scene

in all of its vibrance, a little boy invited him up to his family’s apartment to sketch the scene from above. Before long, Freeman found himself surrounded by members of the boisterous Italian family, all of whom were thrilled to see the sketches he had made of the festival and of the “bambino.”⁵⁷ To his delight, he was immediately offered “grapes, cheese, and mountains of spaghetti,” and suddenly had become “one of the family.”⁵⁸ Freeman’s evening with this Italian

⁵⁶ *Don Freeman, Come One, Come All!*, 87.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 90.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

family came before he had ever submitted a sketch for pay. But he had already become an artist by capturing the experiences of everyday New Yorkers.

Throughout the span of his art career in New York, Freeman drew hundreds of pieces that had ordinary people as their subjects. Sometimes these were people Freeman knew personally, such as his laundry man. Other times, they were completely anonymous. In some drawings, he created lively backstories to accompany his sketches of acquaintances. Freeman was one of many artists who during the 1930s made people of different ages, classes, races, and ethnicities the focus of their artwork. Yet he managed to distinguish himself from ideologues and Social Realists by refusing to get seriously tangled up in politics and keeping the human essence at the core of his work. One could easily say there is nothing special about the fact that he drew nameless people, or that there is nothing special about the subjects themselves. What is special, though, is the way that Freeman illustrated these individuals “inventing lives for themselves out of nothing” during a time in which many New Yorkers had nothing but the shared experience of living in a bustling metropolis.⁵⁹

By the 1930s, New York had experienced nearly sixty years of large waves of immigration. More than two and half million people came to New York City during the 1870s, most from England, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia and were “determined to improve their economic status.”⁶⁰ These groups constituted “old immigration,” as to be compared with “new immigration”: immigrants from Italy, Russia, Greece and the Balkans who came to the U.S. in huge numbers during the 1880s.⁶¹ Decades later, the Great Migration movement brought an influx of African Americans to city centers, and by 1930, over three hundred thousand African

⁵⁹ Don Freeman, *Come One, Come All!*, 84.

⁶⁰ George J. Lankevich, *American Metropolis: A History of New York City*, 119.

⁶¹ *Ibid* 119-122.

Americans had come to New York City. Immigrant groups claimed various sections of the city for themselves: Eastern European Jews settled on the Lower East Side, Italians in the Fifth Ward, and African Americans in Harlem.⁶² With so many different ethnic and racial groups settling in a geographically small area in a relatively short timespan, New York had quickly become defined by an amalgamation of cultures.



Fig. 16-18 (left to right): *Eviction of the Gypsies*, date unknown, reproduced in *Newsstand*, March 1937. Don Freeman sketches a cheese seller and two young children, printed in *Newsstand*, March 1937. Sketch with caption “They’re mates! What more d’ya want?” printed in August 1939 *Newsstand*, August 1939.

For Freeman, this coming-together of cultures was exciting, and he exhibited a sensitivity to race, ethnicity and class in his sketches. Freeman transported his audience to different neighborhoods, each with an interesting story to tell. Images of Eastern European families being evicted from their homes stand alongside sketches of children asking to “jus’ smell aroun’” in Italian groceries (Fig. 2 and 3). He drew children rummaging through piles of garbage by the train tracks, one holding two shoes in the air and exclaiming “They’re mates! What more d’ya

⁶²For more on the geographic layout of Jewish and Italian populations, see George J. Lankevich, *American Metropolis*, 122-124. For more on African Americans in Harlem, see p. 168.

want?”⁶³ Freeman represented an array of ethnicities and classes in his work, not to make overt statements about his subjects, but for reason he provided in his August 1939 issue of *Newsstand*: “I am enthusiastic about the life around me, not able to keep from making graphic remarks about every human incident in this city.”⁶⁴

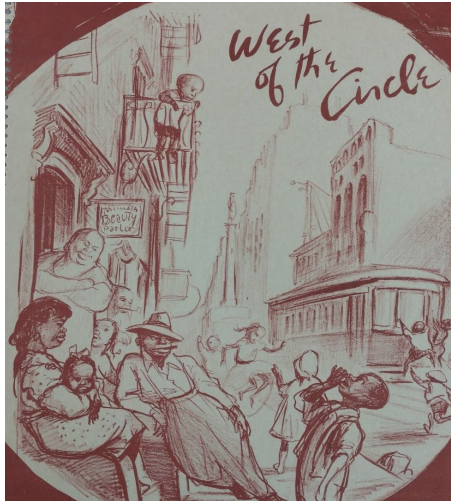


Figure 19: *West of the Circle*, printed in *Newsstand*, Summer 1941. Figure 20: Selection from *That Fiorello Fellow*, printed in *Newsstand*, November 1937.

For all of his sensitivity and enthusiasm for life, Freeman was not always able to escape the stereotypes of his time. His drawing of a primarily-black neighborhood west of Columbus Circle exhibits African Americans of several generations: an older woman peeking out of her beauty parlor, kids hitching a ride on a streetcar, and a middle-aged man taking a smoke break (Fig.4). Another sketch of Mayor La Guardia meeting with African American women exhibits exaggerated racial stereotypes (Fig. 5). Sketches like these are signs of the limits of the world in which Freeman lived--one of frequent racial discrimination.

⁶³ Caption accompanied with sketch from *Newsstand*, August 1939.

⁶⁴ Don Freeman, “To You,” in *Newsstand*, August 1939.

Freeman drew a common trope among “his fellow city dwellers”: good-naturedness.⁶⁵

The vibrant spirits of recession-struck are visible in many of his sketches. This lightness amidst hardship is especially evident in his images of working-class New Yorkers. A subsection of his Winter 1941 issue of *Newsstand*, titled “Some Important People,” does not feature sketches of Freeman’s favorite New York celebrities like one may expect. Instead it highlights everyday people Freeman had made acquaintances with: his laundryman, a seafood vendor, and an eccentric elderly woman.



Fig. 21-23 (from left to right): *Mr. Jaffe*; *Sea Food Papa*; *Miracle on Cherry Street*, all printed in Winter 1941 issue of *Newsstand*.

These three sketches are accompanied by brief descriptions of their subjects, and each description encapsulates Freeman’s love for watching people invent themselves. Mr. Jaffe, Freeman’s laundryman and “severest critic” irons his clothes with his right hand “and leads the

⁶⁵ Marjorie P. Balge, “Don Freeman: A Critical Appreciation,” in Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*, 12.

Philharmonic with his left.”⁶⁶ Oyster vendor Gus does not just shuck and shell oysters in one of New York’s smallest restaurants; he also creates design plans for a “mackerel shaped” ship, “the world’s largest...which can both float and fly.”⁶⁷ A nameless woman on Cherry Street is not just the crazed cat hoarder she may appear to be. She is also a piano teacher--one who played for Freeman with such talent that she made it seem “Chopin was there with us.”⁶⁸ Perhaps Freeman exaggerates the degree to which these people expressed their alter egos. But without a doubt, Freeman brings these ordinary New Yorkers to life. He does not make their working-class struggle his focus. He brings the light that keeps them going during difficult times to center stage. This ability to highlight the human spirit above all else is exactly what distinguishes Freeman from his 1930s artist counterparts.

John Beaufort, a former theater critic for the *Christian Science Monitor* and Freeman’s long time friend, places Freeman as part of the “great tradition of the artist as social commentator.”⁶⁹ Yet in this tradition, Freeman sets himself apart, for his artwork comments on the light of the human essence during hardship. No matter how little “Sea Food Papa” Gus is paid for shucking oysters, nor how dim the future for the evicted Eastern European family may seem, Freeman reassures us that something will keep their spirits high. He convinces us that that something is the beauty in shared experience.

⁶⁶ Quoted from caption of *Mr. Jaffe* in *Newsstand*, Winter 1941.

⁶⁷ Quoted from caption of *Sea Food Papa* in *Newsstand*, Winter 1941.

⁶⁸ Quoted from Freeman’s short essay about this subject on page opposite of *Miracle on Cherry Street*, in *Newsstand*, Winter 1941.

⁶⁹ John Beaufort, “Pageants and People,” in Edith McCulloch, *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*, 6.

CONCLUSION

In a 1930 letter to his then-girlfriend and later wife, Lydia Cooley, Don Freeman writes about what he loves most about being an artist in New York City: “I feel I would be satisfied to be any place, any town, city--to learn its history--its people--their dwellings & to understand it...and yet here I am in this great city where there is a story with each person--and more persons than any other place!”⁷⁰ As we can see through his art, Freeman had a love for drawing people and telling their stories. He was no ideologue. He did not choose to “philosophize or propagandize in paint.”⁷¹ Rather, he was a storyteller, one who shed light upon the lives of some not-so-glamorous city dwellers and appreciated them for their humanity.

This study seeks to name Don Freeman as an important 20th century American artist through his art depicting New York City from 1929 to 1941. His hundreds of images of Broadway stars, city politicians, and commonplace people told an array of stories about what it meant to be a New Yorker during this time. Rather than focusing on American hardship as many Social Realists did, or boasting certain political views, Freeman simply sketched the human essence in all of its upbeat spirit.

Freeman would continue his love for storytelling after moving back to Southern California and writing children’s literature with his wife. The publication of dozens of children’s books, from the *Pet of the Met* (1953) to *Corduroy* (1968) would bring more recognition to Don Freeman’s name. In reading these lighthearted tales about animals, one may see images with

⁷⁰ Don Freeman to Lydia Cooley, May 8, 1930, on Dropbox.com.

⁷¹ Edward Alden Jewell, “On the Local Horizon: Reginald Marsh states a point of view,” *The New York Times*, Feb 18, 1940.

familiar themes: high-spirited protagonists enjoying the adventures of everyday life. We must remember how this love and talent for storytelling began, forty years prior to the publication of *Corduroy*, when Freeman embarked on a journey to a struggling city with millions of stories to tell. Freeman encountered these stories in alleys, laundromats, City Hall, and backstage and drew them, each brimming with more enthusiasm and empathy for humankind than the next.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Duffus, R.L. "Life With Don Freeman: Come One, Come All!," *The New York Times*, November 19, 1949. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

This piece reflects on Don Freeman as a New York City artist, since at the time, he was living back in Southern California. Duffus commends his unprejudiced eye when it came to drawing a wide array of New Yorkers. Duffus focuses on Freeman's sketches of Broadway and explains the dynamics of drawing both the rich theater-goers and the commonplace ticket booth operator. He says Freeman falls short in being a satirist due to his empathy and genuine enthusiasm towards city life. This piece provided me with another perspective on Freeman's art a couple years after his time in New York City.

Freeman, Don. *Come One, Come All!* 1st ed. Rinehart, 1945.

Freeman's autobiography tells a colorful story of how leaving Santa Barbara, California as a young adult with only a trumpet in his hand led him to a life as an artist. Freeman begins with stories about his childhood, being raised by a distant relative and constantly dreaming about the bustle of New York. He charts his early days in the city, spent trying to find band gigs and symphony openings. Upon falling in love with the city and with sketching the city, Freeman found a career in art. The rest of his book tells his story of encounters with other artists, his self-published magazines, and the artistic influence of his wife, Lydia Cooley. This autobiography is the only thorough biographical account of Freeman, and it offers insight into his own views of his most important life events.

Freeman, Don. *Newsstand*. New York City, self-published, September 1936 - August 1939, except November 1937 ed., Nordlaw, Inc., 1937, and 1941 ed., Associated American Artists, Inc., 1941.

This self-published magazine of Freeman's lithographs spanned nine years in total, with most issues being published between 1936 and 1941. *Newsstand* exemplifies the type of art Freeman did during the 1930s and early 1940s. The pages are filled with primarily black and white sketches of New York City, with everyday people as the main focus. Settings vary from theaters to tenant houses to polling places. Some lithographs are

connected by some overarching theme within an issue, and others are just reproduced with no real underlying thread. *Newsstand* holds hundreds of examples of Freeman's early art and his personal artistic style. A complete collection of *Newsstand* can be found in his family's private archives in Lucerne, Switzerland. I referred to part of the collection via printed copies from Amazon.com and microfilm provided by the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

Freeman, Don to Lydia Cooley, 1920-1942, the personal papers of Don Freeman, courtesy of the Freeman Family, Lucerne, Switzerland.

This collection of letters, compiled largely by Don Freeman's son, Roy Freeman, and others, is a valuable source that lends a lot of insight into Freeman's experience in New York City and his relationship with his then-girlfriend and later-wife, Lydia Cooley. Some of the letters are simply confessions of his love, while others explain interesting shows he has seen, his latest jobs, or what he has learned in art school. These letters are still in the process of being organized, compiled, and scanned electronically. Upon the completion of this enormous project, the letters will become even more useful to researchers and academics interested in the more private life of Don Freeman.

Jewell, Edward Alden. "On the Local Horizon: Reginald Marsh States a Point of View." *The New York Times*, Feb 18, 1940. Accessed February 23, 2017. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

The focus of Jewell's article is a conference on nationwide expressions of art that occurred in Washington, D.C. the previous fall. He goes on to mention Don Freeman when he contrasts him with an artist who had work on display at this conference, William Gropper. He highlights Freeman's simplistic, animated, graceful tone and compares it to the idealistic artists of the time. Jewell seems to convey a sense of respect for Freeman's work because of its pleasantness. I referred to this article to get a sense of how art critics were perceiving Freeman's art at the time. It proved to be quite valuable in seeing the ways people appreciated Freeman's early art.

McGlynn, Betty Hoag. *Oral History Interview With Don Freeman, 1965 June 4*. Smithsonian Archives of American Art. Accessed February 9, 2017.

In this oral history interview, Freeman gives a brief overview of his career as an artist in New York during the 1930s up until the time of this interview, which is several years into his work as a children's book author and illustrator. First, he discusses his studies with John Sloan, his transition from music to art, and his various influences. Then he moves

on to talk about children's literature--something he and his wife started doing just for the fun of it. The interview gives a good look into how Freeman views his own work and how his life has affected it.

New York Times. 1934-1940. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

This database of New York Times papers spans from 1923 to the present. The collection is especially useful in looking at important stories in the city during the years in which Freeman was living there. Stories about La Guardia are extremely prevalent and they offer insight into how he was viewed as Mayor from 1934 on. This is helpful because many of Freeman's issues of *Newsstand* depict La Guardia several times throughout. Also, the database contains some information on Freeman, especially his gallery exhibitions in 1940.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Freeman's Art

Balge, Marjorie P. "Don Freeman: A Critical Appreciation." In *The Prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*, edited by Edith McCulloch, 10-17. Charlottesville: Published for the University of Virginia Art Museum by the University Press of Virginia, 1988.

In her critical look at Don's art, Balge examines Don's place as an artist in the twentieth century and the transformation of his artistic technique over time. She claims that Don's work as an illustrator for magazines and newspapers fit a larger context of the twentieth-century "American tradition" of illustration. She also notes Don's "apparent lack of social consciousness" came from his desire to be empathetic with his subjects and not from any actual disinterest towards social concerns. Balge looks at the influences of John Sloan, Charles W. Locke, and George C. Miller on his sketching and lithography, as well. Also mentioned is the revival of interest in Don's work during the 1977 Bicentennial.

Beaufort, John. "Pageants and People." In *The Prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*, edited by Edith McCulloch, 3-6. Charlottesville: Published for the University of Virginia Art Museum by the University Press of Virginia, 1988.

Beaufort, a theater critic for the *Christian Science Monitor* and a long-time friend of both Don and Lydia, writes an overview of Don's work, primarily focusing on the 1930s sketches. His perspective, as a close friend, offers interesting insight into Don as a person. He notes Don's art was never overtly political, and he just enjoyed capturing the daily lives of common people. Whether those people were affluent theater-goers or poor immigrant families did not matter to Don--he simply sketched the humanity of the city.

Hirschfeld, Al. "Newsstand." In *The Prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*, edited by Edith McCulloch, 113-14. Charlottesville: Published for the University of Virginia Art Museum by the University Press of Virginia, 1988.

Hirschfeld writes a brief introduction to the segment of the catalogue that contains sketches for Freeman's self-published magazine, *Newsstand*. As a close friend of Don and his wife Lydia, Hirschfeld elaborates on just how special Freeman's art was. He calls Freeman a "frontiersman in art," and explains that he as an artist was different because he depicted city people from all walks of life. Hirschfeld himself was a caricaturist, so his

perspective on a fellow artist's and friend's work is valuable to the collection of writings on Freeman.

McCulloch, Edith, ed. *The prints of Don Freeman: a Catalogue Raisonné*. Charlottesville: Published for the University of Virginia Art Museum by the University Press of Virginia, 1988.

This collection of Freeman's sketches and lithographs spans from the 1930s-1960s. McCulloch writes an introduction for the book that describes Don's interest in sketching the streets of New York City, but not for the urban architecture--for the people. Her overview of his work and his artistic influence reflects many who have written about him: he was most interested in drawing the common man and did not seek to be political or idealistic about it. She mentions more archaic artistic influences from which Don gained inspiration--William Hogarth and Honore Daumier being two. She also writes briefly about Lydia Cooley Freeman, who influenced much of Don's later art. Her introduction serves to set up a context in which readers can view the collection of his sketches.

Political Context

Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: the Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London: Verso, 1998.

Denning evaluates the longevity of the Popular Front--the unique culture created by groups of artists, writers, labor organizers, and Communists in the 1930s and 1940s. He argues that the Popular Front did not completely die with the onset of the Cold War, and instead, the socially-democratic ideals of the Popular Front continued to permeate aspects of culture through the Cold War. Denning names this phenomenon the Cultural Front. Don Freeman's artistic shift could be considered part of this Cultural Front in that his art became less overtly political but still reflected the common man.

Garraty, John A. *A Short History of the American Nation*. Second ed. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975.

This textbook provides a survey of American History, and the chapter on the New Deal and President Roosevelt proved to be the most useful. The chapter goes into depth about economic factors that led to the Depression, the aftermath, and the general spirit of the New Deal. The chapter skews more towards political history than social history and focuses more on the impact of President Roosevelt's politics than painting an image of

1930s American society. The textbook offers background information that is essential to understanding the political environment in which Freeman was an artist.

Kessner, Thomas. "Fiorello H. La Guardia." *The History Teacher* 26, no. 2 (1993): 151-59.

Kessner's journal article is a brief biography of the New York City Mayor La Guardia, and it focuses on the interconnectedness of La Guardia's politics and his charisma. La Guardia was a beloved mayor in New York in the 1930s and 1940s, and Kessner goes into depth about why. The mayor came from hardship, and the way his background paralleled those of New Yorkers made him an admired authority. This overview of La Guardia as a figurehead and as a person gives insight into the numerous lithographs of him that Freeman made in the 1930s.

Mitgang, Herbert. "In Scandal of 1930'S, City Shook and a Mayor Fell." *The New York Times*, June 13, 1986.

This article offers very specific information into the history of municipal corruption in New York City. The essential part of this article is its description of the term "tin box" in reference to the deeply seeded municipal corruption of the early 1930s. Freeman explicitly labels a tin box on the cover of his November 1937 *Newsstand*, and without historical context, this detail could be easily overlooked or dismissed as unimportant. However, it deserves attention, and this article is one of the few that describe what the term comes from and why it is important to understanding New York City politics during the 1930s.

Welch, Richard F.. *King of the Bowery*. Albany, US: SUNY Press, 2009. ProQuest ebrary.

Richard Welch offers a look into New York City politics around the turn of the century with a focus on Tammany Hall. The first chapter, titled "The City and the Machine" explores just that idea: the city as an industrial superpower that functioned in a machine-like way. Welch analyzes economical, political, and cultural factors that contributed to New York's power, and the corruption that eventually tore it down. I referred to this book for information about Tammany Hall and the ways in which it functioned. It allowed me to analyze some of Freeman's politically-tinged art with a more informed eye.

Woolf, S.J. "Mayor Two Years and Still Optimistic." *The New York Times*, January 5, 1936. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

This article acts as a snapshot of a day in the life of Mayor La Guardia. Woolf interviews the mayor about his first few days in office and then follows him around to see what kind of functions he serves. La Guardia talks about the importance of the fusion ticket, and that refusing to be tied to parties allows him represent the people more fully. Woolf notes how modest La Guardia's office is and relates it to his being over all: a man of the people. I referred to this article to get a look into La Guardia as a mayor from someone other than Freeman. It provided me with the perspective of a commonplace New Yorker towards the mayor.

Cultural Context

Stewart, Jules. *Gotham Rising: New York in the 1930s*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016.

As a native New Yorker and former taxi driver, Stewart offers an interesting look into the culture of New York City during its most trying decade. His focus is mostly sociocultural, though he touches on politics and economics at times. I referred to his chapter on the cultural importance of Broadway. The argument that Broadway offered an escape for Depression-hit New Yorkers is a compelling one, and relates to a lot of the art Freeman was creating during this time. Stewart's focus on how Broadway functioned behind the scenes mirrors the sort of sketches Freeman did during the Thirties. This source informed much of my writing about Broadway.

Lankevich, George J. *American Metropolis: A History of New York City*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Lankevich's survey on New York's history starts before the founding of the country and ends with the contemporary city. For my research, I focused on his chapters about waves of immigration during the turn of the century and La Guardia as mayor during the 1930s and 40s. Lankevich notes the importance and influence of New York's history on a national scale, and this view is at the core of his book. I referenced this book for context about the New York in which Freeman lived, especially when writing about Freeman's sketches of people of different races and ethnicities. Lankevich offers many statistics about immigrant populations and the neighborhoods they settled in, which also informed the context I provide.

Artistic Context

Doss, Erika. *Twentieth-Century American Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Doss presents a survey of Twentieth-century American Art beginning with the Chicago World's fair in 1893. She goes into depth about the Ashcan School and its place in the Social Realism art movement. Freeman, who studied under some of the Ashcan School's most prestigious artists, like John Sloane, portrayed some Social Realist aspects in his 1930s work, such as sketching struggling immigrant families or showing New York mayors as monstrous pigs. Doss also follows the transition from Social Realism to Abstract Expressionism.