

McAvoy, Mary, University of Wisconsin-Madison. “Experiments in Democracy: *Abe Lincoln*, Dollar-Top Tickets, and the Recruitment of Young Audiences in Professional Theatre after the Federal Theatre Project”

Through an investigation of young theatre audiences in the United States in the late 1930s at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research, I uncovered documents related to The Playwrights Producing Company’s production of Robert E. Sherwood's 1938 Pulitzer-prize winning play, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois (ALII)*. After an incredibly successful run at the Plymouth Theatre in 1938, The Playwrights Company selected *ALII* for the first play produced as part of the Popular Price Campaign (PPC) experiment, an initiative designed to drastically lower ticket prices of “highly successful” Broadway plays in order to attract a broader cross-section of New York City’s residents. The PPC experiment not only reflected anxieties over theatre's future after the controversial demise of the FTP, but also spoke to the ways in which professional theatre in New York City negotiated the economic and ideological realities of the United States’ theatrical landscape post-FTP.

The FTP’s theatre-for-all ideologies challenged professional theatre to reconsider performance paradigms, and through these experiments, the previously untapped school group emerged as a viable audience for professional theatre. Since little previous scholarship exists in regards to the topic of young people attending professional theatre, let alone school audiences at commercial performances, for this research, I provide a deep reading of archival documents associated with The Playwrights’ Company's Popular Price Campaign for *ALII* to produce a case study of one commercial theatre's process of engaging young audiences for their production.

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