realized. Though there was great potential for a distinctly American culture, Whitman stated that "America has yet morally and artistically originated nothing." But the environment that existed in the nation during the time of Whitman's writings was, in his opinion, perfect for crafting a culture separate from Europe's. Whitman attempted to show that violence and struggle are inherent in democracy, and are in themselves something to be desired. In America this struggle pitted the founding fathers against oppressive European monarchs, and drove settlers west to achieve manifest destiny. American's drive to overcome, to triumph over crisis, is reflected upon positively in "Democratic Vistas," and reflects the period of great turmoil in which he penned the work. For it was written during a period in America's history that found the Union divided, and brother slaying brother.

Walt Whitman insisted that America's failure to create a distinctive culture would be its demise. If America failed to create its own culture, it would fail to utilize the demographics that already existed within it, and risk these demographics turning against one another. He wrote this with the feud between the north and south in mind, for American was in dire need of a foundation. Conflict would happen, but it was in his opinion necessary that "human nature expand itself in numberless and evenly conflicting directions." Whitman believed that an American aesthetic must incorporate the nation's diversity and vastness, that it must "play, soar, and grow" to become as large as the "engines in the factories or the granite stones that are their foundations."

Whitman's warning were picked up in 1929, when a pamphlet entitled, *American Taste* by Lewis Mumford commented that the cause of the Great Depression could be traced to the "repeated 'transfusions from other cultures'" (Saab 1). Mumford too was now more than ever interested in crafting a unique American aesthetic. For he believed that the depression showed America needed to cast aside its dependence on "European styles, and its relegation to museum halls, ancient homes, and forgotten attics" (Saab 1). Mumford would quote the sentiments of Whitman in his essay, lamenting that it was time for "a program of culture, drawn out, not for a single class alone, or for the parlors or lecture rooms, but with an eye to practical life" (Saab 1). Once again America utilized the conflict that was the depression in a way Whitman would have applauded. Conflict is inherent in democracy, as Whitman and Mumford concurred, but must be utilized properly not by lamenting on bygone eras, but creating an active taste, which must "live primarily in its own time" (Saab 2). Here Mumford followed Whitman, who advocated an aesthetic that utilized the current landscape; as he wrote, America grows not from "the feudal and the old," but from the "democratic and modern."

As economic crisis and tyrannical fascism during the 1930s threatened the liberty Whitman had penned as an element of this American aura, the Roosevelt Administration sought to harness the American aesthetic to defend the nation. Artists employed by the newly-created Works Progress Administration (WPA) would wield an American aesthetic to combat unemployment, economic

depression, and tyranny abroad.

The Works Progress Administration responded to America's economic crisis by providing public works jobs for the unemployed, including artists, who were given positions in the Federal Art Project (FAP). Thus, the stage was set for the United States to create a culture of its own. It was then, from great conflict and strife that an American aesthetic would be born. As discussed in Saab's *For The Millions*, the FAP artists self-consciously sought to create a culture that would be "divorced from an imported past and firmly rooted in the tenets of participatory democracy" (Saab 1). This desire to "transform American society in positive ways" was exactly what Whitman had described in his work when he pleaded for art which would fill the soul of America, and send it sailing into "space forever, visiting every region, as a ship on the sea."

This idea of an American "nature" as Whitman called it, was finally realized through the public works of the FAP. Through public murals, paintings, and posters, the American aesthetic Whitman dreamed of became a reality. It was then that Americans could firmly show their own culture through this distinctly democratic aesthetic. These works celebrated the individual as a part of the national whole, while still an entity in itself, or as Whitman stressed, "the origin-idea of the singleness of man."

This aesthetic continues to grow today, but is an ever-changing beast that is pursued by artists of all fields, ad men included. Advertisements are art, as Edelman reminds us, and if companies can successfully pin down this shape-shifting aesthetic in its most current of forms, they have a chance at "uplifting the masses out of their slough" (Whitman). Yet as Edelman wrote, ads are immediately political because of mechanical reproduction. The use of technology changes the "aura of the piece" simply because technology allows them to reach the entire population (Edelman 34-5). These kitsch pieces differ from classical works, as their powers to infiltrate know no boundaries. This explains why the ads by Levi's are so powerful. Under the definition of kitsch, they are almost inescapable. These ads make their way into the homes of millions of Americans, many times a day, via television.

Levi Strauss & Co. has used an American aesthetic to promote more than just the sale of jeans. Instead, a belief that art can be used to positively transform American society is promoted in these commercials, a belief that transcends the aesthetic used by the WPA. Like the WPA posters from the 1930s, these commercials appeal to Americans through their use of the faceless American worker as a cultural icon. Levi's jeans launched their ad campaign during a period of historical turmoil, "the recession," creating a sense of timelessness in their ads. For just as Whitman experienced the Civil War, and Lewis Mumford had the Great Depression, the Americans of today live in a post-911, post-Katrina United States in financial crisis. The argument Levi's is making is simple: Americans have been through all that, and are prepared to take on whatever is thrown at them in the future. Americans donned Levi's riveted jeans when Whitman wrote "Democratic