



# **On the Make: Clerks and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America (American History and Culture)**

*Brian P. Luskey*

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In the bustling cities of the mid-nineteenth-century Northeast, young male clerks working in commercial offices and stores were on the make, persistently seeking wealth, respect, and self-gratification. Yet these strivers and "counter jumpers" discovered that claiming the identities of independent men—while making sense of a volatile capitalist economy and fluid urban society—was fraught with uncertainty.

In *On the Make*, Brian P. Luskey illuminates at once the power of the ideology of self-making and the important contests over the meanings of respectability, manhood, and citizenship that helped to determine who clerks were and who they would become. Drawing from a rich array of archival materials, including clerks' diaries, newspapers, credit reports, census data, advice literature, and fiction, Luskey argues that a better understanding of clerks and clerking helps make sense of the culture of capitalism and the society it shaped in this pivotal era.

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