

The History of Nineteenth-Century American Popular Culture

History 326.01

Prof. Sarah J. Purcell

Website: <http://www.grinnell.edu/courses/his>

Tuesday 10:00-11:50 and Thursday 10:00-10:50 Mears 115

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Friday 8:30-10:00 a.m., and by appointment

Please come and see me during office hours, or make an appointment, so I can meet you one-on-one. Call my office or e-mail me at any time.

Students in this seminar will examine the creation and expansion of American popular culture in the nineteenth century as they focus on diverse cultural forms: dime novels, newspapers, music, sports, cartoons, material culture, theater, minstrel shows, magazines, etc. The seminar will focus particularly on how ideas and structures of race, class, and gender were changed and reinforced by American popular culture. Each student will produce a major research paper that will analyze popular culture in an historical context to consider how popular culture created or changed power dynamics in American society.

This semester, we will also take up a number of important theoretical issues involved in the study of popular culture. Questions we will consider include: What is the difference between popular and “high” culture? Did the masses help to shape popular culture, or were they controlled by it? Was popular culture a positive or degrading force in nineteenth-century America? Did the forms of popular culture influence the kinds of messages people could express? Was popular culture in the nineteenth century different from the forms of mass-media that took shape in the twentieth century? How did historical events of the nineteenth century influence popular culture and vice versa?

Together we will examine how various historians, popular culture critics, and theorists have analyzed nineteenth-century American popular culture, and we will analyze many forms of popular culture ourselves. We will focus heavily on matters of interpretation and evidence. Our group discussions will also inform each student’s individual research, which will explore in-depth a particular form of popular culture.

Students will hone a variety of skills over the course of the semester as they engage in the process of history. While the main goal of this course is to produce an excellent research paper, students will also focus on the methods of historical research, writing, and revision. Peer review will enhance the cooperative nature of the process.

Books:

Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett* (1998)

James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (2001)

Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (2000)

Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988)

Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (2005)

Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna* (2005)

John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, An Introduction*, 4th ed. (2006)

Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (2007)

*All books are on 2-hour reserve in Burling Library.

Assignments: While this course is mainly focused around the major research paper (20-30 pages), students are expected to keep up with reading assignments for discussion in class. In the first half of the semester, all students will complete a 3-page paper analyzing a cartoon and a short historiographical essay comparing two authors' approaches to the study of popular culture.

Each student will be required to post *two* questions each week for class discussion on the PioneerWeb discussion board. Your questions must be posted each **Monday evening by 7 p.m.** for our Tuesday discussions. You need to *read* and *think about* everyone's questions before coming to class.

Students will complete a series of assignments leading up to the final research paper. Preliminary topic selections are due September 30. On November 4, each student will turn in a paper proposal that outlines a proposed thesis and argument. On November 20, students will turn in a bibliography, and that week they will give an oral presentation about one, major primary source. The research paper is due December 2, and class presentations and peer review will follow. The final, revised version of the research paper is due Wednesday, December 17 at 2:00 p.m.

Grades will be assigned in the course according to the following formula:

cartoon paper	5%
historiography paper	10%
paper proposal	5%
bibliography	5%
primary source presentation	5%
research presentation	5%
peer review	5%
class participation	10%
Research paper	50%

Attendance is essential. If you must miss class or an individual meeting due to illness or for any other reason, please let me know.

Please familiarize yourself with the Grinnell Student Handbook Academic Honesty policies, and abide by them. You must cite all your sources properly in University of Chicago Style for this course. Consult your *Turabian* book for details on University of Chicago Style.

If you require an accommodation for a diagnosed disability, please let me know in the first week of class.

Week One: The History of Popular Culture

Thursday, Aug. 29: *Reading Due:* Storey xi-12; Jim Cullen, *The Art of Democracy, Intro. and Chapter 1*

Week Two: Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*

Tuesday, Sept. 2: *Reading Due:* Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*; Storey Ch. 2-4; SKIM: Stuart M. Blumin, "The Hypothesis of Middle-Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Critique and Some Proposals" *The American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 299-338 (JSTOR)

Thursday, Sept. 4: Research Lab *Turabian*, Ch. 3 (meet in Burling basement IIF computer lab)

Recommended: http://www.nypl.org/west/tw_subhome.shtml
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/british/brit-7.html>

Week Three: Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page*

Tuesday, Sept. 9: *Reading Due:* Lehuu; Storey "Carnavalesque" handout

Recommended: <http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/dp/pennies/home.html>

Thursday, Sept. 11: Research Lab *Turabian*, Ch. 1-2, & 4 (meet in Burling Basement IIF computer lab)

Week Four: Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*

Tuesday, Sept. 16: *Reading Due:* Cohen; Storey, Ch. 7

Thursday, Sept. 18 Last day to turn in Cartoon Paper

Week Five: Cook, *The Arts of Deception*

Tuesday, Sept. 23: Reading Due: Cook; Storey, Ch. 6

Thursday, Sept. 25: Reading Due: Review Cook; Storey, Ch. 8

Recommended: <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/abolitn/abhp.html>
<http://www.lostmuseum.cuny.edu/home.html>

Week Six: Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era*

Tuesday, Sept. 30: Reading Due: Neely **PRELIMINARY TOPIC DUE**

Recommended: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/perform/guide/musamer.html>

Week Seven: The Civil War and Popular Culture

Tuesday, Oct. 7: Reading Due: Alice Fahs, "The Market Value of Memory: Popular War Histories and the Northern Literary Marketplace, 1861-1868," *Book History* 1(1998): 107-139 (**Project Muse**); Alice Fahs, "The Feminized Civil War: Gender, Northern Popular Literature, and the Memory of the War, 1861-1900," *Journal of American History* 85 (1999): 1461-1494 (**JSTOR**); Elaine Frantz Parsons, "Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan," *Journal of American History* 92 (2005): 811-836 (on-line at History Cooperative <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/92.3/parsons.html>)

Week Eight: The West and the World

Tuesday, Oct. 14: Reading Due: Rydell and Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*
Last day to turn in Historiography Paper

FALL BREAK October 18-26 Recommended: *Turabian*, Ch. 5-7

Week Nine: Movies

Tuesday, Oct. 28: Reading Due: Jonathan Auerbach, "McKinley at Home: How Early Cinema Made News," *American Quarterly* 51.4 (1999): 797-832 (**Project Muse**); Storey, Ch. 9

Required Website: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/papr/mckhome.html>

Week Ten: Tuesday, Nov. 4 Topic Presentations **PAPER PROPOSAL DUE**

Week Eleven: November 11 & 13 Writing Days

Week Twelve: Tuesday, Nov. 18 Source Presentations (See *Turabian*, pp. 122-127)
Thursday, Nov. 20 Bibliographies Due, Source Presentations

Week Thirteen: November 25 Writing Day

THANKSGIVING November 27

Week Fourteen: Tuesday, Dec. 2 Research Presentations **PAPERS DUE**
Thursday, Dec. 4 Research Presentations; *Turabian, Ch. 9-12*

Week Fifteen: December 9 & 11 Research Presentation

Friday, December 15 2:00 p.m. FINAL VERSION OF PAPERS DUE