

**The History of Nineteenth-Century American Popular Culture**  
History 326.01 Fall 2019

**Prof. Sarah J. Purcell (she, her, hers)**

Tuesday & Thursday 8:30-9:50 Bucksbaum 269

Office: Mears 212 Phone: 269-3091 E-mail: PURCELL@grinnell.edu  
Office Hours: T/TH 2:30-4:00 pm, and by appointment.

Please come and see me during office hours, or make an appointment. 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? 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 and continue to develop in the twenty-first 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. The main goal of this course is to produce an excellent research paper, and students will also focus on the methods of historical research, writing, and revision. Peer review will enhance the cooperative nature of the process. Students will also hone their speaking and presentation skills.

**Books: (be sure you have the correct editions)**

Eric Avila, *American Cultural History: A Very Short Introduction* (2018)

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

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)

John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, An Introduction*, 8th ed. (2018)

Jenny L. Presnell, *The Information-Literate Historian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (2019)

- Books are on 2-hour reserve at Burling Library. We will also be reading many digitized articles and book chapters. It is your responsibility to print them out and bring them to class, or bring them on a device that is not disruptive to class.
- From time to time, Prof. Purcell will post materials related to class on Twitter. Follow her at @SarahJPurcell and the course hashtag #GrinPopCultureHistory. Add to the conversation if you wish!
- One thing to note: some of our primary sources from the nineteenth century contain extremely offensive language. To quote literary scholar Dr. Koritha Mitchell, we are scholars, “not re-enactors, so we need not let the text dictate what we *give life to* in the classroom (korithamitchell.com).” We can’t pass over all racist, sexist, and other offensive language in our sources—but we always need to remember the historical context. Some slurs are too much. I, for one, do not ever say “the N-word” out loud, and I would prefer no one to do so in this class. If you want to read a quotation out loud with the word in it, just say “N” or “N-word,” instead.

**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 (due Sept. 20) and formal research proposal (Oct. 31).

Students will complete a series of assignments leading up to the final research paper. Preliminary topic selections are due September 26. On October 31, each student will turn in a paper proposal that discusses the research question, defines a proposed thesis, and outlines the paper. On November 19, students will turn in a bibliography and present for five minutes about one primary source. The research

paper is due December 4, and class presentations and peer review will follow. The final, revised version of the research paper is due Tuesday, December 17 at 5:00 pm in Ms. Purcell's office.

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

cartoon paper	10%
paper proposal	5%
bibliography	5%
research presentation	5%
peer review	5%
class participation	20%
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. Talk to Prof. Purcell if you need a refresher on citation style or academic honesty.
  - I strive to create a fully inclusive classroom, thus I welcome individual students to approach me about distinctive learning needs. In particular, I encourage students with disabilities to have a conversation with me and disclose how our classroom or course activities could impact the disability and what accommodations would be essential to you. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the Coordinator for Student Disability Resources, John Hirschman, located on the 3rd floor of Goodnow Hall (x3089).
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## **Week One: The History of Popular Culture**

**Thursday, Aug. 29:** Meet to talk about class

## **Week Two: The Rise of Popular Culture**

**Tuesday, Sept. 3:** Avila, *American Cultural History*, pp. xix-83 (skim chapter 5 if you want to); Storey, Preface and Acknowledgements (all) & Ch. 1

**Thursday, Sept. 5:** Research Lab Meet in Burling Basement lab

*Reading Due:* Leroy Ashby, "The Rising of Popular Culture: A Historiographical Sketch" *OAH Magazine of History* 24 (April 2010): 11-14,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25701403> ; Presnell, *Information-Literate*, Ch. 1 & Appendix C

**Week Three: Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow***

**Tuesday, Sept. 10:** Reading Due: *All of Levine*

**Thursday, Sept. 12:** Reading Due: Storey, Ch. 2-4 & review Levine

Recommended: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/british/brit-7.html>

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

**Tuesday, Sept. 17:** Reading Due: *All of Lehuu*; Read Oxford critical dictionary definitions of "carnavalesque":

\*<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095550811>

\*<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192806871.001.001/acref-9780192806871-e-1337>

\*<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199213818.001.001/acref-9780199213818-e-184>

**Thursday, Sept. 19:** Research Lab, Meet in Burling Basement

Reading Due: Presnell, *Information-Literate*, Ch. 2-6

**Friday, September 20: Last day to turn in Cartoon Paper (due by 5:00 pm at Ms. Purcell's Office)**

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

**Tuesday, Sept. 24:** Reading Due: *All of Cohen*; Storey, Ch. 5 & 8

**Thursday, Sept. 26:** Preliminary Research Paper topic selection due in email to Prof. Purcell by noon. (Prof. Purcell is out of town for a conference.) The minimum is one sentence describing your research topic, but the more you write, the more help you can get from Prof. Purcell.

**Week Six: P. T. Barnum, *Blackface, the Market, and Political Power***

**Tuesday, Oct. 1:** Reading Due: James W. Cook, "From the Age of Reason to the Age of Barnum: The Great Automaton Chess-Player and the Emergence of Victorian Cultural Illusionism," *Winterthur Portfolio* 30 (Winter 1995): 231-257, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4618515>; James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), Introduction, chapter 2, and chapter 3 (E-Reserve); Storey, Ch. 6 & 7

Recommended: <http://www.lostmuseum.cuny.edu/home.html>

**Thursday, Oct. 3:** Reading Due: Bill Barlow, "Minstrelcy," *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* Vol. 12 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 89-91, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616667\\_malone.20](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616667_malone.20) ; Storey,

Ch. 9; Listen to Podcasts: Backstory Radio #267 *The Faces of Racism*  
<https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/the-faces-of-racism> (35:13) Backstory  
Radio #272 *Burnt Corks & Cakewalks*  
<https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/burnt-corks-cakewalks> (1:06) [Listen  
to both, even though a bit of material is repeated between the two episodes.]

### **Week Seven: Popular Culture in the Civil War and Reconstruction**

**Tuesday, Oct. 8:** Reading Due: 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  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2568268>; Elaine Frantz Parsons, "Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan," *Journal of American History* 92 (2005): 811-836, JSTOR  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3659969>; Storey, Ch. 10

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

**Thursday, Oct. 10: Research Day Prof. Purcell holds office hours in Burling during class time**

### **Week Eight: The U.S. and the World in Late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Popular Culture**

**Tuesday, Oct. 15:** Reading Due: Gary Y. Okihiro, *Pineapple Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), Introduction & Ch. 8 (**E-RESERVE**); Storey, Ch. 11; Listen to podcast: "Studio 360, American Icons: Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show" <http://www.wnyc.org/story/96255-american-icons-buffalo-bills-wild-west/> (52 minutes)

**Thursday, Oct. 17:** Reading Due: Jonathan Auerbach, "McKinley at Home: How Early Cinema Made News," *American Quarterly* 51.4 (1999): 797-832, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30041673>; view films at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/papr/mckhome.html>; Storey, Ch. 12

**FALL BREAK October 20-27**

### **Week Nine:**

**Tuesday, Oct. 29:** Research Lab: Meet in Burling Basement

**Thursday, Oct. 31: RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL DUE IN CLASS**

### **Week Ten:**

**Tuesday, Nov. 5:** Small group proposal review

**Thursday, Nov. 7:** Writing Day (Prof. Purcell out of town—email her!)

### **Week Eleven:**

**Tuesday, Nov. 12:** Writing Day Please read: Presnell, Information-Literate, Ch. 12

**Thursday, Nov. 14:** Writing Day

**Week Twelve:**

**Tuesday, November 19: Bibliographies Due** Class meeting: Source Presentations

**Thursday, November 21:** Writing Day

**Week Thirteen:**

**November 26** Writing Day

**THANKSGIVING November 28**

**Week Fourteen:**

**Monday, Dec. 3:** Writing Day

**Special Deadline:** Wednesday, December 4 **NOON Papers Due** to Prof. Purcell and Peer Review Partners

**Thursday, Dec. 5:** Peer Review Meetings (continued on Friday, December 6)

**Week Fifteen:**

**December 10 & 12** Research Presentations

**Tuesday, December 17 5:00 PM FINAL VERSION OF PAPERS DUE at Ms. Purcell's Office, Mears 212**