



## Course Objectives

### Course Focus:

Students in this course 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 course will focus particularly on how ideas and structures of race, class, and gender were changed and reinforced by American popular culture.

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? How did popular culture both help reinforce hierarchies and allow people to push back against them? 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? How did the nineteenth century pave the way for modernity?

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.

### Skills Objectives:

This course challenges students to form their own arguments about the past as they examine primary sources and evaluate how other historians and cultural critics have composed their arguments. Students will enhance their skills at critical thinking, research, reading, speaking, writing, and developing arguments as they engage in a dialogue with the past. We will also improve our interdisciplinary skills as we examine material through historical and American Studies lenses. We will think together about the overlap and tensions between history and American studies as disciplines.

In writing/research assignments, students in this course will work on strengthening their abilities to revise, to analyze coherently, to argue from sources (both primary and secondary), and to use appropriate grammar and style. Historians, as the members of a specific academic discipline, use particular conventions in their writing. Students will learn to recognize many of these conventions in their readings and will integrate historical research skills and writing as they learn strategies to improve their own written work. We will also explore the interdisciplinary nature of American Studies in writing assignments.

## Student Responsibilities:

Join in all small-group work, online discussion posts, online activities, and live discussions.

Communicate with Prof. Purcell frequently.

Read your email daily, and be sure to respond to any requests (such as requests to fill in surveys) from Prof. Purcell and your peers.

Turn in your assignments by the deadlines, but if you need extensions or other flexible arrangements, do NOT be afraid to ask for them. Prof. Purcell expects you to ask for help, and she will give it. We do have some collaborative projects, and you'll need to stay accountable to your partners.

how people in the past fought back without letting the material ruin us, and Prof. Purcell can help.

### Student Support:

You can expect support from Prof. Purcell for any kind of need (personal or academic) in this class. Feel invited to call, text, or email her at any time. If you have any questions or need help of any kind, you can always start by asking Prof. Purcell.

You may consult with the Grinnell College Writing, Speaking, and Reading Lab on any assignment in this course, unless specifically prohibited on the assignment. Make an appointment [here](#).

If you experience any tech problems at all, please let Prof. Purcell know, and she will help you contact the relevant Grinnell College office to get help solving your issues.

For health needs (physical and mental), please consult with Student Health and Wellness [here](#).

If you require accommodation for any diagnosed disability, please speak with Prof. Purcell during the first few days of class. Grinnell College (and Prof. Purcell) provide reasonable accommodations. Students must also arrange their accommodations with Accessibility and Disability Services; contact Jae Baldree at 641-269-3710 or email [baldreej]. Information available [here](#).

If you have other needs not addressed above, please let me know soon so that we can work together for the best possible learning environment. In some cases, I will recommend consulting with the Academic Advising staff. They are an excellent resource for developing strategies for academic success and can connect you with other campus resources as well: <http://www.grinnell.edu/about/offices-services/academic-advising>. If I notice that you are encountering difficulty, in addition to communicating with you directly about it, I will also likely submit an academic alert via Academic Advising's SAL portal. This reminds you of my concern, and it notifies the Academic Advising team and your adviser(s) so that they can reach out to you with additional offers of support.

### Illness & Attendance policy

Attendance is important to this class, so please attend if at all possible. That being said, we all know that illness can/will happen, and you should NOT attend class if you are ill. Please email Prof. Purcell (if possible) if you are ill, and we will make arrangements for how you can keep up with course work on a flexible schedule (according to how ill you are). You don't need to provide a doctor's note, or to give Prof. Purcell details about your health challenge, just reveal that you need to be out of class, and we will adjust.

If you need to miss class for a religious holiday, athletics, or other co-curricular activity,



## UNIT TWO: Antebellum Print and Cultural Hierarchy

Tuesday, February 6 The Emergence of Popular Culture

Reading Due: Jim Cullen, *The Art of Democracy*, Chapter 2, pp. 33-86,  
<https://grinnell.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfnq1.6>;

Theory Reading: Antonio Gramsci excerpts on hegemony, intellectuals, and the state (posted in Pweb)

Browse: *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1830-1839, Hathi Trust Digital Library:  
<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008920204> Click on the volumes listed at Princeton University (volumes 1-17) to see the full digitized issues

Thursday, February 8 Shakespeare and Cultural Hierarchy

## Unit Three: Gender, Crime, and Power: Bodies and Popular Culture

Tuesday, February 20 The Murder of Helen Jewett

Reading Due: Patricia Cline Cohen, [The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York](#) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

Theory Reading: Anna Szorenyi, "Judith Butler: Their Philosophy of Gender Explained," (blog), October 19, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/judith-butler-their-philosophy-of-gender-explained-192166>

Thursday, February 22 The Murder of Helen Jewett NO live class meeting (Prof. Purcell is out of town at a conference) We will continue our book discussion on P-web in the Discussion Board. You can comment ANY time today.

Reading Due: Patricia Cline Cohen, [The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York](#) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

Tuesday, February 27 NO class meeting (Prof. Purcell is out of town conducting a program review at another college) Take-Home Quiz #2 due at 8:00 p.m. on P-web

Thursday, February 29 NO class meeting (Prof. Purcell is out of town conducting a program review at another college)

Watch on your own: "The Chinese Exclusion Act," Dir. Ric Burns, PBS American Experience, 2018. Click here:

[https://grinnell.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlax\\_ay04440018\\_0lo00px?](https://grinnell.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlax_ay04440018_0lo00px?)



Optional Theory Reading: bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness," Postmodern Culture 1 (1990), [doi:10.1353/pmc.1990.0004](https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.1990.0004)

Optional Theory Reading: for further clarification, skim: Sam Han, "Structuralism and Post-structuralism," Routledge Handbook of Social and Cultural Theory (December 2013), <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203519394.ch3>

## Unit Four: Power and Resistance: Identities and Popular Culture

Thursday, March 7      Barnum and the Arts of Deception

Reading Due: 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)

P. T. Barnum, The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself (New York: Redfield, 1855), HathiTrust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hb0b9s&view=1up&seq=5> Read: Preface and pp. 148-159 & 171-176

Tuesday, March 12      Henry "Box" Brown: resistance in body and culture

Reading Due: Hollis Robbins, "Fugitive Mail: The Deliverance of Henry 'Box' Brown and Antebellum Postal Politics," American Studies 50 (Spring/Summer 2009): 5-25, <https://grinnell.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/41057153>

OER Services, "Primary Source Reading, Henry Box Brown," <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-ushistory10s2xmaster/chapter/primary-source-reading-henry-box-brown/>  
State Historical Society of Iowa, "Henry 'Box' Brown Song and the Engraved Box, 1850," <https://iowaculture.gov/history/education/educator-resources/primary-source-sets/underground-railroad/henry-box-brown-song>  
Henry Brown, Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself (Manchester, UK: Lee & Glynn, 1851), "Documenting the American South,"



Browse: Harper's Weekly website of primary sources about the Klan,  
<https://education.harpweek.com/KKKHearings/ItemsListOf.htm>

Thursday, April 11      Popular Culture/ Trans Culture

Reading Due: Listen to: "Episode 359: Jen Manion, Trans-ing Gender in Early America," , (53:41), <https://benfranklinsworld.com/episode-359-jen-manion-trans-ing-gender-in-early-america/> ; Elizabeth Reis, "Transgender Identity at a Crossroads: A Close Reading of a 'Queer' Story from 1857," Early American Studies 12 (Fall 2014): 652-55, <https://grinnell.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/24474874>;  
Elizabeth Reis, ed. "Consider the Source: The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman," Early American Studies 12 (Fall 2014): 666-78, <https://grinnell.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/24474875>

NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, "Curated Themes and Tours: Pre-20<sup>th</sup> Century History," <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/theme/19th-century-history/> Look for the trans presence

Friday, April 12      Research Assignment #2 Due on P-web at 5:00 pm

## Unit Five: Cultural Hierarchy & Cultural Agency

Tuesday, April 16      The "Sacralization" of Culture

Reading Due:

Before class w

Tuesday, April 30      Taking Sports Seriously

Reading Due: Elliot J. Gorn and Michael Oriard, "Taking Sports Seriously," The Chronicle of Higher Education, March 24, 1995, <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/about.illinoisstate.edu/dist/c/190/files/2019/10/Taking-Sports-Seriously.pdf> ; Kathleen Bachynski, No Game for Boys To Play

Library of Congress, "Chicago World's Fair: Topics in Chronicling America,"  
<https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling->