This course is intended for undergraduates with any major and does not have any prerequisites.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**
What has been the history of the commercial arts in America?
What does this history tell us about American culture and society?
How can we learn from arts’ imperfections as well as their achievements?

This course seeks to answer these and related questions. We will study selected examples of American popular arts and entertainments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, placing them in historical, cultural, artistic, and critical contexts. Instead of approaching these materials as idle diversions to be consumed and discarded, we will consider them as works that can repay critical analysis and historical and cultural interpretation. Through our efforts, the class will attempt to rediscover the broadly shared imaginative and aesthetic life of America usually only touched upon in historical and literary studies.

Among the major issues that we will consider are:
- The character of the commercial arts and their relation to folk or vernacular arts, on one hand, and to elite or patron-supported arts, on the other.
- The cultural needs and demands that commercial arts satisfy.

* Please note that, in addition to lectures, each student must enroll and faithfully attend a recitation section.
Racial stereotypes and appropriations in commercial arts from P. T. Barnum and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* through rhythm & blues, rock, and on to Spike Lee.

Gender roles and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

And (as the phrase goes) much, much more!

Throughout the course, we will persistently ask two overriding questions:

- **How have the popular arts served to provide a national democratic culture and identity?**
- **What have been the terms of inclusion and exclusion?**

In the process of our inquiries, you will be learning not simply *more* history, but a different way of understanding history and what constitutes historical materials. At the same time, you will learn new ways of practicing aesthetic and cultural criticism that can be applied both to historical and contemporary materials. The course seeks, in short, to increase your historical knowledge, your understanding and appreciation of how different arts have developed in the United States, and your critical and interpretive abilities. You will learn not only answers but also better ways of asking questions.

**COURSE FORMAT: LECTURES AND RECITATION SECTIONS:**

Class meetings in this course are divided into lectures and recitation sections. The teaching assistants and I intend the two formats to complement one another, and we regard both as integral parts of the course. The lectures will provide contexts for the topics under study and will also offer interpretations for you to consider. Students should attend lectures faithfully and listen critically. Attached as I may be to some of my discoveries, I don’t wish you simply to record my words and commit them to memory. (Don’t attempt to transcribe all of the materials on PowerPoint slides or all that I say. Good notetaking is deciding what is important and recording it. Do especially note then major themes, names, dates, and the significance of materials to which I devote special attention and which are included on lecture outlines (available on our course website). The ultimate aim is to learn from my efforts how to develop your own interpretations and, equally important, how to communicate your discoveries effectively (in papers and examinations, for example).

The role of the recitation sections, or, as I prefer to call them, discussion groups, is to assist in this process of learning. Discussion groups should serve, in effect, as the course workshops, where you come to exchange ideas and questions about the various topics under study, to sharpen your critical tools, and to work toward new understandings and hypotheses, more satisfying and penetrating than those you might have previously held. Discussions, then, are collective enterprises that, to function successfully, demand every member’s preparation, attendance, and active participation. In these groups teaching assistants will lead discussion, not mount an additional lecture. They will help the class define problems and formulate questions, but the success of discussion depends on each member joining in the enterprise and striving to make this a rich learning experience.

To facilitate discussion and your success on essays and tests, very short writing assignments may be assigned for some discussion meetings and will be due at the scheduled time of your particular section. At other times, there will be brief quizzes.
SAKAI WEB SITE:
We will use a password-protected Sakai website to provide course materials, selected documents, announcements, messages, and other aids to the course. Please make sure you have access to this site and visit it at the outset of the semester to familiarize yourself with its contents. Note especially “Questions for Thought and Discussion,” “Critical Reading,” and “A Time Line,” as well as lecture outlines. The lecture outlines are intended not to be complete lecture notes but to provide a skeleton for your notetaking.

CHECKING E-MAIL
We will frequently make important course announcements and assignments using your university e-mail account. It is your responsibility to check it frequently.

ATTENDING A PERFORMANCE AT MEMORIAL HALL”

Students will attend a performance in Memorial Hall and write a short exercise about their experience. Vouchers to obtain ten-dollar tickets at the Memorial Hall box office will be distributed early in the semester. You should obtain your tickets promptly.
You may choose among the following:

- Irwin Mayfield & the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra (Sunday, February 15, at 7:30 pm) [link]
- Brian Blade and the Fellowship Band (Friday, February 20 at 8 pm) [link]
- Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (Tuesday, February 24, and Wednesday, February 25, at 7:30 pm) [link]
OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE OF CLASS TOPICS AND READINGS:

1. INTRODUCTION

Aims and Expectations: Everything You’ve Always Wanted to Know about History 363--But Were Afraid to Ask (Wed., Jan. 7)

Thinking about the Popular Arts Historically: First Meetings of Discussion Groups (Recitation Sections): Jan. 7-9, depending on date and time of your particular section

Start reading Barnum, Life, as listed below.

Stars and Stripes Forever: Defining “Folk,” “Popular,” and “High” Art (Mon., Jan 12)

2. THE AGE OF BARNUM

Reading:

To the Astor Place Riot: The Theater and its Publics (Wed., Jan. 14)

Discussion groups: Jan. 14-16

HOLIDAY: MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. (No class Mon., Jan. 19)

P. T. Barnum, the Dialectics of Class, and the Legitimization of Amusement (Wed., Jan. 21)


Discussion Groups: The Significance of P.T. Barnum (Jan. 21-23)

2. SENTIMENTALITY, SLAVERY, AND SOCIAL REFORM

Reading:
- George L. Aiken, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly: A Domestic Drama in Six Acts* (1852; published acting ed., 1858).
  Available at the extensive website, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture,”
  sponsored by the University of Virginia

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*I intend to follow this schedule as far as it is practical but, if unforeseen circumstances occur, I reserve the right to make changes to assignments, including due dates and test dates (excluding the officially scheduled final examination). Such changes will be announced as early as possible so that students can adjust their schedules accordingly.*
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“God Wrote It”: Harriet Beecher Stowe and Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Mon., Jan. 26)

Complete reading of both play and chapters of Uncle Tom’s Cabin by this lecture.

Race, Reform, and the Sentimental Strategy (Wed., Jan. 28)

**Discussion Groups:** Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Jan. 28-30)

3. MARK TWAIN AND THE DILEMMA OF THE HUMORIST IN POSTBELLUM AMERICA

**Reading:**

• Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894), pp. 51-226 of Penguin ed. This text and an abundance of relevant materials are also available on the website, “Mark Twain and His Times,” sponsored by the University of Virginia. [http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/wilson/pwhompg.html](http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/wilson/pwhompg.html)

• Mark Twain, Whittier birthday dinner speech (1877; [http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/onstage/whittier.html](http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/onstage/whittier.html))

• Brief entry on U.S. Supreme Court in decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plessy_v._Ferguson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plessy_v._Ferguson))

Mark Twain and His Audiences (Mon., Feb. 2) Read Whittier Birthday Dinner speech and *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. You are not expected to read “Those Extraordinary Twins.”

*Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Legal Fictions, and Cosmic Jokes (Wed., Feb. 4) Read short article on *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

**Discussion Groups:** *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (Feb. 4-6)

**FIRST ESSAY DUE IN CLASS: WEDNESDAY, FEB 11**
A detailed description of this assignment will be distributed well in advance.

4. THE POPULAR ARTS AND THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW MASS CULTURE

**Reading:**


**Film:**

• *Coney Island*, directed by Ric Burns, roughly 56 minutes (1990) [http://thewallbreakers.com/culture/791-american-experience-coney-island](http://thewallbreakers.com/culture/791-american-experience-coney-island)
Coney Island and Cultural Revolt (Mon., Feb. 9) Read *Amusing the Million*.

Harry Houdini and the Rise and Fall of Vaudeville (Wed., Feb. 11)

**Discussion Groups:** The Significance of Coney Island (Feb. 11-13)

5. **THE STRENUOUS LIFE: AMERICAN CULTURE AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

   **Reading:**
   

The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity (Mon., Feb. 16) Read *Tarzan of the Apes*.

The Tarzan Escape (Wed., Feb. 18)

**Discussion Groups:** *Tarzan* in Cultural Context (Feb. 18-20)

**MIDTERM EXAMINATION: MONDAY, Feb. 23**
A study sheet to help you in your exam preparation will be distributed well in advance.

6. **THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE DETECTIVE STORY**

   **Reading:**
   
   (Recommended but not required is the definitive film version of Hammett’s novel, (1941, directed by John Huston; starring Humphrey Bogart, available at the Media Center, Undergraduate Library).


**Discussion Groups:** The Popular Arts in Performance (Feb. 25-27)

**In advance of these discussions, you should attend one of the following performances at Memorial Hall:**

- Irwin Mayfield & the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra
  Sunday, February 15, at 7:30 pm.

- Brian Blade and the Fellowship Band
  Friday, February 20 at 8 pm

- Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
  Tuesday, February 24, and Wednesday, February 25, at 7:30 pm
The Maltese Falcon: Games and Skills in a World of Chance (Mon., Mar. 2) Read *The Maltese Falcon*

Sex and Romance in *The Maltese Falcon* (Wed., Mar. 4)

**Discussion Groups:** March 4-6)

**SPRING BREAK:** MAR. 7-15

**8. AMERICAN FILM COMEDY: LATE SILENTS AND EARLY TALKIES**

**Films:** You are responsible for **two** of the following four films:
- **42nd Street** (1933) dances staged & directed by Busby Berkeley (65-DVD575; 89 min.).
  Screening March 16, at 6:30 in UL 205.
- **She Done Him Wrong** (1933), starring Mae West & Cary Grant (65-V1556; 65 min.).
  Screening March 16, at 8:00 in UL 205.
- **Duck Soup** (1933), starring the Marx Brothers (65-V93; 70 min.).
  Screening March 18, at 6:30 in UL 205.
- **Modern Times** (1936), directed by & starring Charles Chaplin (65-DVD1325; 89 min.).
  Screening March 18 at 7:45, in UL 205.

Rituals of Adjustment and Dreams of Triumph: Chaplin, Keaton, and Silent Comedy (Mon., Mar. 16) Watch at least two of the above required films.

The Comedy of Cultural Subversion: The Marx Brothers and Mae West (Wed., Mar. 18)

**Discussion Groups:** The Importance of the Movies in 1930s America (Mar. 18-20)

**9. THE HOLLYWOOD MUSICAL, COMMERCIAL RADIO, & THIRTIES AMERICA**

**Reading:**

Dance and Thirties Musicals: Berkeley vs. Astaire (Mon., Mar. 23)

Hopes and Fears for Radio in the 1930s (Wed., March 25) Read 1930s radio materials


**SECOND ESSAY DUE IN CLASS: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8**
A detailed description of this assignment will be distributed well in advance.

**10. MAGIC KINGDOMS FOR THE MASSES**
Reading:


- Eric Avila, “Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Film Noir, Disneyland, And the Cold War (Sub)Urban Imaginary,” *Journal of Urban History / 31 #1* (November 2004): 3-22 (available through UNC Library Articles and Databases at [http://juh.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/31/1/3](http://juh.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/31/1/3))


Film:


Walt Disney’s Wonderful World of Fakelore (Mon., Mar. 30) Read Watts and Marling essays.

Disney’s Utopias of the American Dream (Wed., Apr. 1) Complete Disney readings and watch *Disneyland Dreams*.

**Good Friday: April 3:** No Class

11. SEARCHING FOR SATISFACTION IN POSTWAR AMERICA

**Reading:**

- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1964), chapter 1, “The Problem That Has No Name” (on course web site).


Films: You are responsible for both of the following films:
• *Nashville* (1975), directed by Robert Altman (65-DVD2369; 154 min.).
  Screening XXX, at 6:30 in UL 205.
• *Do the Right Thing* (1989), directed by Spike Lee (65-DVD598; 120 min.).
  Screening XXX, at 7:00 in UL 205.

I Love Lucy and the Feminine Mystique (Mon., Apr. 6) Read Friedan and Hoyt v. Florida excerpts.

Rock ‘n’ Roll, Race, and Fifties America (Wed., Apr. 8)

**Discussion Groups:** Disney, Suburbia, and Postwar American Culture (Apr. 8-10)

Woodstock Nation and Other Legends of the Sixties (Mon., Apr. 13) Read “How Woodstock Happened.”

“It Don’t Worry Me”: Robert Altman’s Satire of Bicentennial America (Wed., Apr. 15) Watch *Nashville* and *Do the Right Thing.*

**Discussion Groups:** The Politics of Popular Arts in *Nashville* and *Do the Right Thing* (Apr. 15-17)
Who Owns the Wall of Fame? Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (Mon., Apr. 20)

Conclusions and Valedictories (Wed, Apr. 22)

**Discussion Review** (Apr. 22-24)

**FINAL EXAMINATION:** CXXXXX (no, we can’t change the date.)
A study sheet to help you in your exam preparation will be distributed well in advance.

**ITEMS TO PURCHASE:** Books marked with an asterisk have been ordered at Student Stores.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS, WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS,**
EXAMINATIONS, ATTENDANCE POLICY, AND OTHER DIABOLICAL TORTURES:

A. Regular preparation, attendance, and participation in both lectures and discussion. As explained below, Students will be penalized for unexcused absences in both lectures and discussions beyond the first three at the rate of one-seventh of a letter grade for each absence. A student who accumulates more than ten unexcused absences will fail the course.

   Grades on short quizzes and one-page response paper on Barnum and participation in discussion = 15% of total grade.

B. Two interpretive essays (roughly 5-7 pages each) = 50% of total grade
C. Midterm examination = 15% of total grade
D. Final examination = 20% of total grade.

All these requirements, including preparation, attendance, and the punctual completion of assignments, apply equally to every student, whatever the basis of your enrollment.

All students are reminded to support the Honor System in this and all their University work.

BUILDING A LEARNING COMMUNITY: ATTENDANCE AND ATTENTION:

This course stresses face-to-face instruction within a learning community. Students are expected to attend all classes faithfully and punctually and to give your undivided attention to the instructors. To minimize distractions and to enhance everyone’s concentration, laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices are not permitted. Please also put newspapers and crossword puzzles away, and do not leave class unless you feel unwell. A student disregarding these guidelines will be counted as absent for the class meeting. Students will be penalized for unexcused absences in both lectures and discussions beyond the first three at the rate of one-seventh of a letter grade for each absence. A student who accumulates more than ten unexcused absences will fail the course. Please let us know in advance if possible when you will be absent, and please discuss unforeseen absences with us as soon as possible. It is your responsibility to sign the roll for each class and to make a note on it in timely fashion when you wish an excused absence to be noted. Explanations provided substantially after the fact cannot be honored. It is not acceptable to sign the roll and then leave class or to arrive significantly late and sign in, and a student who does so will be counted as absent. It is still more unacceptable to sign in on behalf of another student, and such a violation of academic integrity will be treated as an Honor Code violation. Students may not compensate for missed classes by doing alternative or extra assignments.
A NOTE ON PLAGIARISM:

Plagiarism is a violation of the Honor Code and of academic integrity. As the American Historical Association states, “Plagiarism…takes many forms. The clearest abuse is the use of another’s language without quotation marks and citation. More subtle abuses include the appropriation of concepts, data, or notes all disguised in newly crafted sentences, or reference to a borrowed work in an early note and then extensive further use without attribution.” The AHA statement adds, “The plagiarist’s standard defense—that he or she was misled by hastily taken and imperfect notes—is plausible only in the context of a wider tolerance of shoddy work. A basic rule of good notetaking requires every researcher to distinguish scrupulously between exact quotation and paraphrase. A basic rule of good writing warns us against following our own paraphrased notes slavishly. When a historian simply links one paraphrase to the next, even if the sources are cited, a kind of structural misuse takes place; the writer is implicitly claiming a shaping intelligence that actually belonged to the sources.” For the full text of this statement, see: [http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.htm#Resisting%20Plagiarism](http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.htm#Resisting%20Plagiarism)

For more on plagiarism and how to avoid it, visit the links on our course website.

In preparing for the midterm and final examinations, students will be given specific instructions as to what kinds of group preparation are not permissible.

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES:

Student life is stressful at best. If you find yourself feeling emotionally overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed, we encourage you to contact Campus Health Services without delay. Remember that these services are there to serve you. It is a sign of strength, not weakness, to seek appropriate help when you need it.

[http://campushealth.unc.edu/caps](http://campushealth.unc.edu/caps)
INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATION AND OFFICE HOURS:
Please feel free to talk to us individually about any matter relating to the course that interests or
concerns you—or simply to chat. Please do not feel that, because you have a teaching assistant, you can’t talk directly with the professor. I would be delighted to see you.

If you have a specific concern about graded work, however, you should first talk with your teaching assistant. You should generally wait a day before seeking a conference after graded work is returned; then if you are dissatisfied, uncertain about our criticisms, or how you might improve, please have a conference in timely fashion rather than waiting until the next assignment or, worse, the end of the semester. If you remain uncertain or dissatisfied after talking with your teaching assistant, by all means, please come and see me. Remember, too, that the Writing Center is a valuable resource. We encourage you to use it.

John Kasson
Hamilton 473
Office hours:
`M 2:00-3:00, W 1:30-3:00,
& by appt.
`jfkasson@email.unc.edu

A Note on E-Mail Etiquette for Our Course:

To ensure clear and reasonably harmonious communication, please observe the following guidelines in all of your e-mail messages in our course:

- **Subject headings:**
  In your messages, please pay attention to the subject heading. Don’t simply hit reply to an old e-mail message of ours with a subject heading unrelated to your message. Then we are confused at first just what you are writing about. Moreover, if we wish to retrieve an old message, the subject heading is of no help.
The Body of Your Message:
We distrust e-mail messages that simply include an attachment. We also wish that our communications to be courteous and mutually respectful.

Therefore, your e-mail message should be in the form of a very brief letter rather than a hasty note. So, include an introductory greeting of some kind, such as Dear Mr. or Ms. XXX, Professor, Most Worthy Sir or Lady, Your Serene Highness, etc.

In the body of your letter, using a complete sentence, say what you are including in your attachment.

- Include a complementary closing of some kind: Regards, Warm wishes, Cordially, Your humble and obedient servant, Yours in the struggle, etc.
- Signature: Please sign your full name.
- Proofread your message.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

Accessibility Resources & Service:
“AR&S provides reasonable accommodations, so students with disabilities who are otherwise qualified may, as independently as possible meet the demands of University life.” Includes eligibility guidelines and information for how to get started, as well as resources for students with disabilities (including alternative testing options, note-taking requests, and frequently asked questions).

- Website: s://accessibility.unc.edu
- Location: SASB North, Suite 2126
- Phone: 919-962-8300 Email: accessibility @ unc. edu

Academic Advising:
“The mission of the Academic Advising Program in the College of Arts and Sciences is to partner with students to create meaningful educational plans that are compatible with their career and life goals.” For setting up appointments with advisers to discuss matters ranging from course planning to academic difficulty to graduation review.

- Website: http://advising.unc.edu/
- Location: Steele Building
- Phone: 919-966-5116

The Center for Student Academic Counseling:
“The Center for Student Academic Counseling offers academic counseling and personal support for all UNC students. Historically, CSAC's primary objective has been to sponsor programs and activities that promote academic excellence, increase retention, and improve the campus climate for diversity among minority students in general and Native American and African American undergraduates in particular.”

- Website: http://cssac.unc.edu/programs/student-academic-counseling
- Location: SASB North, Room 2203
- Phone: 919-966-2143
The Learning Center:
“Helps students learn more efficiently and perform better in their course work. Services include Academic Counseling; Reading Program; Tutoring in Math and Sciences; Drop-in Peer Tutoring; Test Prep for GRE, GREAT, LSAT, MCAT; Workshops; and Success Programs for students with LD/ADHD.”
Website: http://learningcenter.unc.edu/
Location: SASB North, lower level, Room 0118
Phone: 919-962-3782 Email: learning.center@unc.edu

University Career Services:
“UCS serves underclassmen, seniors, graduate students and alumni. Services include individual career advising; internship and employment search assistance; workshops on job-seeking skills; resume mailing service to employers; on-campus interviewing; graduate school preparation assistance; and online internship and job listings and occupational and employer information.”
Website: http://careers.unc.edu/
Location: Hanes Hall, Room 219
Phone: 919-962-6507 Email: ucs@unc.edu

The Writing Center:
“The Writing Center is an instructional service that provides writing assistance for students, faculty, and staff. We offer both face-to-face and online consultations, as well as a collection of online resources for writers and educators.”
Website: http://writingcenter.unc.edu/
Make appointments online
Location: SASB North, lower level, Room 0127 (main location) and Greenlaw Hall, Room 221
(satellite space)
Phone: 919-962-7710 Email: writing.center@unc.edu

Wellness Resources

Carolina Women's Center:
“The Carolina Women's Center's mission is to create an inclusive education and work environment where gender is not a barrier to success, difference and diversity are celebrated, and everyone is safe to live, learn, teach, and work without threat of harm or unequal treatment.” The CWC offers monthly programming (speakers, screenings, discussions, and performances), ongoing trainings/workshops (notably HAVEN training, to increase support for student survivors of sexual violence), and general resources.
Website: http://womenscenter.unc.edu/
Location: Stone Center, Suite 101
Phone: 919-962-8305 Email: cwc@unc.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services:
Providing individual, couples, and group therapy as well as other resources and programs to promote academic and personal wellness for students. Offers information on how to get started and the philosophy behind the programs. Note: first time visits are walk-in only, no appointment
necessary.
Website: https://campushealth.unc.edu/services/counseling-and-psychological-services
Location: Campus Health Services (James A. Taylor Building), 3rd Floor Phone: 919-966-3658

**Diversity and Multicultural Affairs:**
“Diversity and Multicultural Affairs is an office in the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost and serves as the diversity arm of the University. DMA is led by the Vice Provost & Chief Diversity Officer and has the responsibility of providing university-wide leadership in building and sustaining an inclusive campus community that values and respects all members of the university community and beyond.”
Website: http://diversity.unc.edu/
Location: South Building, Ground Floor
Phone: 919-962-6962

**LGBTQ Center:**
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Center works to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for UNC-Chapel Hill community members of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. We address this mission by allocating our resources across three broad areas: 1) Educational programs; 2) Direct services and resources; 3) Advocacy.”
Website: https://lgbtq.unc.edu/
Location: SASB North, Suite 3226
Phone: 919-843-5376 Email: lgbtq@unc.edu