

Student: Mr. James Burnes

**Graduate Field Examination in 19th-century American Studies Scholarship
February 28, 2017**

- There are four questions to choose from; select two to answer.
 - The examination is open-book and open-notes.
 - The duration of the examination is from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
 - At the conclusion of the allotted time for the examination email the answers to the two questions you chose to Dr. Katherine Pandora at kpandora@ou.edu.
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1. The interdisciplinary field of American Studies has always been particularly concerned with the study of cultural forms as expressions of shared and contested experiences about “what it means to be an American.” Drawing on your reading, identify the most significant ways in which this issue was addressed in the nineteenth century, and what the cultural ramifications were by the century’s end. In your answer also discuss how scientific ideas, activities, and practices in the 19th century contributed to cultural contestations over American identity.

2. Discuss how new approaches to the study of literary and print culture in the period known as “The American Renaissance” are indispensable for understanding American society and culture in this time period. Within this scholarship, which treatments of authors, genres, and/or popular forms of print media have been most successful in your view? How have topics related to “science and literature” entered into this research?

3. Examine the questions proposed and answers given by American Studies scholars in three of the following five areas for the nineteenth century: American modes of imperialism and empire; urbanization and America’s large metropolitan cities; the reinforcement, transgression and contestation of racial and gender norms; the dynamics of cultural hierarchy; and the concept of American exceptionalism. In the course of your discussion point out particular articles or books that you judge to be especially significant and your reasons why.

4. In what ways do topics, questions, methods, values, and/or theoretical perspectives characteristic of American Studies differ from the practices of historians of science? How might historians of science best make use of American Studies in defining and clarifying issues of current historiographic interest?

The American Renaissance

In order to fully understand culture, you must understand what is popular in that culture. The broadest definition of “popular” in the Academic sense seems to be “beneath study.” The work done on the American Renaissance can serve not only to understand the culture of the 19th century but can be utilized to understand cultural shifts (and anomalies) in the present. Focusing on the the 19th century, American Renaissance studies provides a way to look at culture, literature especially in my case, in context with one another and not as separate creations by authors within vacuums and removed from each other and their respected social and political climates.

David Reynolds’ *Beneath the American Renaissance* is a restructure of the earliest works in the field by F.O. Matthiessen. Mainly this means deconstructing the notion that (now famous) American authors such as Emerson and Melville were “marginal figures in a society that offered few literary materials.” This entire premise rests on the idea of what constituted “literary materials” for Matthiessen, that is highbrow versus lowbrow literature. The “high” authors include Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorn, Poe, Melville, Whitman, and Dickinson; while the “low” including sentimental fiction, sensational novels, reform tracts with “anonymous” authors, penny papers including trial reports, and dark humor. The connection between the high authors and these low genres are exactly what make them standard inclusions for American Literature syllabi. Far from being “ahead of their time” or “above the flow” each of these authors gleaned much from the popular literature of their time up to and including content and style.

Working in the opposite direction, Jane Tompkins deconstructs Matthiessen's pantheon of literature gods completely. In 1986 she wrote, "this present study and Matthiessen's are competing attempts to constitute American Literature" (200). Including a chapter asking "But is it any good" addresses the question that plagues the inclusion of the popular work that Tompkins highlights including Wieland, Arthur Mervyn and the standard-bearer *The Last of the Mohicans*. She mostly covers the work of Susan Warner compared with that of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne was aided by "circumstances" while Warner was hindered by (literally) not being Hawthorne. Many of the works discussed by Tompkins should be brought in and added to the existing cast initially put forth by Matthiessen in 1941 and studied as canonical American literature. At least they can be studied as historical works within Antebellum America, as Reynolds suggested with his own inclusion of Poe and Dickinson. Tompkins seems to believe there is only a set number of places within the canon and that some of Matthiessen's must be removed in order for Warner to be studied fully. For historiography, looking at all three works together instead of one or the other, these three works—Matthiessen (1941), Tompkins (1986), and Reynolds (1988) can serve to provide a much more holistic picture of early 19th century American literature.

Isabelle Lehuu's *Carnival on the Page* combines Mikhail Bakhtin's literary criticism and Victor Turner's liminality work in Anthropology to explore the carnival atmosphere of Antebellum American Fiction. This research is based on the idea that the carnival atmosphere from open markets and feasts in the middle ages is reinvented within the penny newspapers, illustrated ladies' magazines, giant newspapers, and gift books. These publications significantly changed the cultural landscape of America by challenging the definition of that constituted a "book." American literature could be shaped by printed artifacts that were "cheap, light, and

grotesque.” According to Lehuu these works may have led to a “rupture” in print culture that separated the Antebellum period from its past and present. This perspective depends on the idea that Antebellum literature was expensive, homogenous, and serious. As Reynolds has revealed that position is problematic as it was many of the light, cheap, and grotesque sources that fed the “great” works that established what we know of Antebellum literature—that it was expensive, homogenous, and serious. She lumps penny press papers into the same genre as yellow journalism which I find extremely problematic. Penny papers are the means in which yellow journalism is spread but they are not the same thing.

Understanding American Literature in the Antebellum period, and most of the post war period means understanding the entire cultural context of the United States. The same is true for American religion, American art, and even American apparel. Each of these must be explored in relation to each other as well for anything to make any sense. American Literature and science are wedded from the earliest days of the Republic. Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson pursued the two together. The growing schism between the two towards their separate specialties, professions, and departments are chronicled by Thoreau, Poe, and Emerson among others. N. Katherine Hayles presents one of the most important hang ups in the study of the two: Why is it always how science influences literature? She wrote in the closing essay of *American Literature and Science*: “In the end, science like literature, is a cultural construct and both of them need to be considered (and understood) as two sites within a complex cultural field” (200).

Perhaps that is just the easiest course of study to unpack. Sam Halliday explores the literary appropriation of science and technology vocabulary in *Science and Technology in the Age of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and James: Thinking and Writing Electricity*. For these authors electricity is either a thing to be written about or described, a thing used to describe, or

vary operations of both. A “spark” and other electrical subtexts serve as model, metaphor, or substance for ideas. Electrical communication led to new ways of miscommunication and misrepresentations. More broadly it was things such as electricity and the telegraphy that influenced both thinking and writing. The telegraph brought people across a growing nation together and allowed for the alienation of those nearby.

If the topic of science can be included in works in the American Renaissance, and I think it should, then there is ample evidence to support Reynolds’ addition of Poe to Matthiessen’s original list. Science hoaxes may be the best way to understand the popular relationship with science at large. Richard Adams Locke’s Lunar discoveries series in *The Sun* in 1835 drove readership of the penny paper to astronomical heights. This would be one of Lehuu’s example of light, cheap, and grotesque. The invented discoveries of Sir John Herschel were similar enough to Poe’s *Hans Phaal* that he was certain it was plagiarized. Lynda Walsh explores such other hoaxes in *Sins Against Science*. The notion that these hoaxes were presented in the same manner as factual accounts is the broadest basis for understanding why people could be taken in. Most, at least in the case of Poe, were attempts to show the public that their unquestioning faith in the science bug could have dire consequences. Such instances consisted of a moral which was roughly: you simply look foolish but real harm could have been done otherwise. In Twain’s case it was more airing his annoyance at the latest scientific “fads” like fossils in the case of his “Petrified Man” story. Poe’s directives were a little more concrete and he would attack the public funding of science at the expense of art. Twain could merely copy scientific writing for his (mainly anti-intellectualism) hoaxes, Poe and Dan DeQuille both had training in the sciences and had written about science at other times in their career.

What constitutes “literature” is an even more loaded question than what can constitute a “book.” Nina Baym utilizes letters and correspondences to uncover the ways in which women writers responded to the sciences. Nature writing, ladies magazines, and education promotion were just some of the topics that women of letters were publishing. Botany, especially, was hailed as the perfect hobby for a middle class wife living in the country. Women provided science with popularizers, appreciators, and more importantly consumers. Beyond popularizers Baym looks at the wives of men of note who were also generating scientific knowledge either as illustrators or, in the case of Elizabeth Cary Agassiz, her husband’s “ghostwriter and publicist.” *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation* provides a more complete image of the scientific writings that Walsh deemed so common to the laypeople on either side of the 1840s. In the end it provides readers with, among other catalogue lists, the outline for the strategies middle class women of letters used to associate themselves with science as well as the limitations of the same affiliations. I am not sure who Matthiessen would hate more in the American Renaissance pantheon: Twain or women.

Twain did succeed where many of the more popular “academic” authors failed: he reached the “people” during his lifetime. Whitman lamented that he had not fully reached them and was not a more powerful agent for social change especially after the Civil War. David Reynolds’s cultural biography of Whitman attempts to take down the notion that Whitman *is* America and that America *is* Whitman. While this is true, what Whitman’s life does reveal is American *culture*. Whitman outlived many of his contemporaries and following his life as Reynolds does provides a glimpse into the ebb and flow of the 19th century. The fact that his face adorned a box of cigars, aptly named “blades o’ grass” proves that he had lost himself and become culture.

Like Whitman though, Twain saw himself as an outsider. Mark Twain was more than a pseudonym for writing, it was an identity to inhabit when he was attacking the establishment from the outside. Samuel Clemens needed a vehicle to travel through the frequently disunited states in order to make reports back to the reader and it not be a personal affiliated account. Twain reached the public that Whitman and Poe missed. This seems mainly due to the popular press, and the reading public's penchant for fiction. In the end Twain tells a good tale, even if they follow the same model and employ the same tropes. Whereas Poe and Locke's hoaxes may have had morals, for Twain many were hard social commentary. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Author's Court* presents an even more dire portrait of the unstoppable juggernaut of American technological progress. These aren't just stories for story's sake, but they have somehow managed to have been absorbed separately from their intended social warnings. In this case Twain reached the people that Poe and Whitman missed, but they didn't take the intended message.

Edgar Allan Poe, whatever his faults, seems to have always had his finger on the pulse of American Culture. From a surprisingly broad corpus of work in a short life his two most popular works were *The Raven* (Poetry) and *The Gold-Bug* (Prose). He even wrote that the bird outdid the bug when *The Raven* became more popular than his gold story. He is seen as a hoaxer with *Hanns Phaal and Balloons* or *MS Found in a Bottle*. He was also an astute critic in the press, much to the detriment of his personal amicability. His science work such as *Eureka* which was dedicated to Alexander von Humboldt, may arguably be ancestral to science fiction. His works compare Platonic and Newtonian theories of optics. Newtonian optics for Poe is the actual mechanical process of looking which is more or less what we would consider sight. The older, "untrue" Platonic system is where the seat of imagination and actual "seeing" comes into play.

This is the type of thing that establishes Poe's brilliance and provides more than enough fodder for Reynolds' argument to include his work in the annals of the American Renaissance.

Following Poe along that cultural pulse the explosion of Egyptomania in the 19th century provided fuel for all manner of literature and spectacle. Scott Trafton explores this history of science topic in a hard literary perspective. In *Egypt Land* Trafton, posits, "The scientific construction of race begins with the question of Ancient Egypt and vice versa" (49). That construction is continually played out in situations of "melodramatic" Barnum-esque spectacle such as tomb openings and unwrapping parties. Trafton's analysis of Poe's *Some Words with a Mummy* looks at it as a general satire on the process as a whole but misses that opportunity to tie it to a single instance. Leading up to a specific unwrapping party, the advertisements grew increasingly dramatic until the mummy was finally billed as a princess and the unwrapping would be a royal affair. The unwrapping revealed it was decidedly *not* a princess and Poe's patience for Egyptomania ran out. *Some Words* may be one of Poe's more obscure bits of prose but it reveals his talents as a satirist and his understanding of American culture. While Twain's Yankee modernizes, and ultimately destroys, King Arthur's Court, Poe's mummy offers a retort for every piece of "modern" life presented, save one. For the mummy, and likely for Poe, the ultimate production of American society, its industrial and economic culture is the cough drop.

The American Renaissance provides a working set of standards that can be utilized to understand the early 19th century within a broader context that includes literary and print culture. I understand the connotations of the designation, similar to the Harlem Renaissance a century later, however I can only think that there was nothing in the colonial period that was close to the level of "pure cultural development" that could be "reborn" in the early 19th century. If anything the Antebellum period should be described as a naissance of American literature. While I do

believe that understanding the American Renaissance is indispensable for understanding American society and culture in the long 19th century, I believe it must encompass most of that 19th century and many more types of literature and print culture to be truly complete. Twain was only 16 years younger than Whitman, and he lived 18 years longer, capping Mattheissen's pantheon with Twain would provide a more complete body of work for 19th century literature. While including more than five authors and more than five years may make it more difficult to undertake a full close reading comparison among those influential authors, opening the field more broadly may provide a fuller image of the lives of each of Mattheissen's subjects, as well as Tompkins and Reynolds additions. While the works of Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman and Hawthorne may have become American canonical classics by the time Mattheissen coined the term "American Renaissance" it is almost assuredly that more people were reading the penny press newspapers at the time the authors' were publishing their most famous works. Understanding what was up for public consumption at the time of a works' publication may allow scholars to more closely analyze what did or did not work, and why.

American Studies and What it Means to be an American

American Exceptionalism seems to be the initial driving force behind the development of American Studies as a cross and interdisciplinary discipline. Throughout my readings authors from various fields work at unpacking and deconstructing the term before analyzing literature, popular culture, science, politics, or their topic of choice. Looking at the term historically, one must employ the widest net in determining what 19th century Americans meant by the term as they applied it to different aspects of their lives. The beginning of the 19th century saw a coming of age of a generation post-Independence. The old guard was still around, but it was left to those “born” Americans to shape the new Republic. This included defining itself in its own terms, but also defining itself by what it was not: British specifically, and European more broadly. Lacking the centuries of cultural history endemic to Europe, Americans turned to the wilderness as a way of expressing its vast historical existence. The land itself was, at first, according to Annette Kolodny, described as motherly and sustaining. The land itself would protect and sustain the new Republican values that were pushing further west as the American destiny unfurled.

That wilderness was more than a physical, geographical space. Roderick Nash explores how the *idea* of wilderness shaped the construction of early frontier cities as they were sttled from frontier towns to established thriving cities that soon served as gateways to more rugged, rustic areas west. That wilderness existed to be cleared and tamed was one of the earliest hallmarks of what it meant to be American, or to have an American experience. Nash’s wilderness as a social construct also mirrors the opposite side of Kolodny’s thesis of land described as feminine. At first the land sustains, and is motherly as it provides the necessities of

survival for the American homestead. As more and more land is cleared the relationship takes a more active turn. Mother earth becomes a mistress, a virgin for the taking. Raw landscape to be shaped to the American Republic ideals. It is worth noting here that American geography (and eastern geology) helped to serve and maintain this type of frontier expansions as it was mostly forested areas even on the Appalachian trail. Nothing as forboding as the Alps or the Pyrennes stood between the Americans seaport cities and the Mississippi river.

Even when wilderness was a physically bounded space, it still served more as an idea than a place. Richard White's work on the question of the The Louisiana Purchase reveals that while the "purchase" itself doubled the size of the early republic and was seen, or at least spun, as one of the earliest examples of American brilliance in bargaining at the European table. In fact, according to White, it was just another European real estate deal of little or no importance to the French when the deal was made. It had far more lasting implications on the Spanish when the French sold it to America. Even as an idea, the Louisiana Purchase folded in a more diversely settled area into American jurisdiction. Many of those living in the area were more influenced by the Spanish than the French. This, I think, may have been some of the earliest seeds of what would become Manifest Destiny as it also set into motion future dealings with Spain and Mexico. The purchase itself was less American diplomatic maneuvering, and more of plagued European governments looking for a way to offload a large liability. This, in part may be why the exploration of the area has eclipsed the actual terms of purchase over the last century.

That exploration, the *Corps of Discovery*, provided the opportunity for Americans to stretch their burgeoning scientific (read Natural History) muscles. Thomas Jefferson and other Enlightenment thinkers in communication with their counterparts in Europe needed a way to prove their prowess on a grander scale than the Eastern Seaboard, and without the vast colonial

landholdings of the French and British they turned inward to explore the world “as it was,” pristine, and untouched by man. Again, what should have been a handicap in world culture was turned into an asset in understanding the history of the world. Jefferson in exchanges with Buffon as well as Peale’s Mammoth discoveries in New York were pushing American Natural History onto a larger audience. Since extinction was not an option for men like Jefferson he was certain that Lewis and Clark would find living mammoth in the Rocky Mountains (Stony Mountains).

The *Corps of Discovery* was in line with scientific explorations around the world, most specifically the travels of Alexander von Humboldt throughout South America on land and the sea voyages of Captain Cook. The publication of Humboldt’s *Kosmos* and Cook’s journals spurred an intense drive for exploration across the globe. There was a drive to become the *American* Humboldt and the *American* Cook. Internal exploration led to travels in the Pacific by expeditions such as the U.S. Exploring Expedition which put a decidedly American spin on Cook’s voyages and Darwin’s famous Beagle voyage by sending 40 tons of artifacts back to the U.S. Capital ultimately forcing the federal government to create a permanent museum.

American identity within the cities helped shape the new Republic as much as cleared land and raw materials. Antebellum America was a patchwork of identities throughout the North, the South, and the West—an ever changing definition that serves best in this period as “unsettled,” or “frontier.” Throughout the 19th century, the idea that America is made up from a collection of individuals can serve early definitions of what it means to be “American.” In the decades between the federally mandated exploration and the Civil War American politics began to take shape, and shape the future of the Republic and what it meant to be an American. American political parties began to take shape as the influx of immigrants filled the cities and the

slavery question loomed larger over Congress. Even in areas where slavery was already abolished many Whigs practiced what Alexander Saxton calls “soft racism.” The Democratic party was decidedly more pro-White and tied mainly with the southern plantation owners who relied on slave labor in order to continue to maintain their lifestyles. Beyond the questions of Black and White, Whig and Democrat as settlers pushed west they encountered *Native Americans*, many for the first time. They were seen as part of the pristine untouched wilderness, part of the wild in ways that did not manipulate or exploit the wildness. The development of the Republic was steered by white upper class politics. Black inhabitants were too subjugated onto bondage to ever be true participants in a republic while those with red skin were too free. As the Irish fled famine, they adjusted to their new home—and life as “Americans”—by taking up acts in blackface. Saxton specifically addresses blackface minstrelsy as a way the Irish could distinguish themselves as something other than the “other.” That is, they were white first, and Catholic second.

Meanwhile in the far west of California, the culture was all constructed by mixing: missed blood, mixed marriages, mixed cultures. As Albert Hurtado writes, California is the best example in understanding the development of not only frontier development and culture, but *American* culture. European influence began in California with Spain claiming the area in the late 17th century. Mexican independence turned Spaniards into Mexicans in 1821, and shortly thereafter the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) turned them all into Americans. These were large scale changes as those on the ground continued to operate within existing cultural hierarchies and patriarchies relatively unchanged and challenged until the discovery of gold. The American experience was pushed again west in all forms of travel in order to strike it rich. Hurtado’s work mainly looks at the ratio of women to men in the area. During the Gold Rush

period the influx of men greatly outnumbered the “right” type of women to marry and forced many Native, Mexican, and “other women of color” into prostitution at extremely high rates.

The mid 19th century saw fortunes made and lost outside the gold fields as well. As urban industrialization outpaced rural farms and even plantation culture, some American’s found themselves in the emerging “leisure class.” A beautifully American term, it is also rife with contradictions. The Puritan work ethic and industry were some of the earliest hallmarks of Americanism itself, and Andrew Lyndon Knighton distills that down to one thing: productivity. The lines between what constituted productivity and un-productivity were not only blurry, but constantly shifting. To be un-productive was a terrible characteristic of the working class, but it was exactly what it meant to be part of the leisure class. Un-productivity was, according to Knighton, at once a sign of laziness and productivity, poorness and wealth.

This leisure class hypocrisy really follows the move of the US from rural to Urban as outlined in Karen Halttunen’s *Confidence Men and Painted Women*. Middle class culture was as defined by the structure of sincerity and propriety as it was by productivity (or un-productivity). Since there wasn’t room for everyone in this newly structured courses, many took advantage of the flux in order to feign sincerity within these newly formed manners and customs. While they could not maintain their grasp on the middle class, they could maintain dominance over any country “rubes” that chose to try their luck in the cities and away from the family farms. That very instability led to many creative (perhaps distinctly American) structures for social mobility. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg outlines the socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological anxieties about any position within the new hierarchies in her analysis of language. Women specifically used language to protect themselves from the growing repression that trended along the with the revolutions with commerce, industry, and transportation that disrupted and confused the

dominant male constructed ideologies regarding their attempts to legitimize their old power structure within the new emerging class/industry organizations. In short, as men faced the threat of uncertainty to their existing family structure they attempted to regain some sense of power trying to control sexual behavior.

The new leisure class could be un-productive by definition, but many turned to other means of productivity: and emerging tourist industry. John Sears' *Sacred Places* ties together the old idea of natural phenomena as American cultural achievement, the expanding middle class, and the transportation boom. On the one hand people chose to visit the "sublime" in nature in places such as Niagara Falls and Mammoth Cave. The cave maintained a more natural state while idea of progress and technology harnessed the falls for hydroelectric power. Man's power over nature, revealed by the creation of electricity from moving water turned the Falls into more than a natural attraction, it became a technological one as well, and then, inevitably, a tourist one. Technology and Medicine also played a hand in developing these "sacred" places of interest. For those who wished to see more of those American advances they scheduled what would now be called "dark tours." Those of means in the 19th century may choose to visit a hospital or an asylum either to marvel at how culture was evolving to help those less fortunate or to gawk at those whose handicaps meant they were not welcomed (or able to function) within modern society.

The public's interest in science, technology, medicine, and gossip led to the explosion of penny press papers in the antebellum period. Long the domain of those who could afford expensive subscriptions and had tables large enough to accommodate a paper, the advent of cheap, small, portable newspapers revolutionized American life. That revolution got its start on the moon. In 1835, Richard Adams Locke penned a newspaper story recounting the telescopic

discoveries of Sir John Herschel in South Africa. The articles ran for weeks with each discovery of living beings on the moon more sensational than the last. Sales drove the penny press to the forefront of American consciousness *and* culture. After visiting the United States Charles Dickens wrote how newspapers were everywhere, even lowly mechanics and working men were partaking of daily news. Man-bats on the moon made newspapers an *American* phenomenon.

Matthew Goodman's book *The Sun and the Moon* provides an excellent account of the hoax as well as the larger culture of hoaxing in the mid 19th century. The period just before the Civil War saw the establishment of the hoax as a literary genre, thanks in part to Poe beyond Locke's Lunar discoveries story, and an entertainment genre in the form of Barnum's humbugs. The crux of Locke's story's authority came in the form of a Scientific Journal. The American press worked from the earliest publications of these journals to translate their works for public consumption.

This meant that the public was an ever growing, *reading* public. Ronald Zboray reveals that even after press popularity and burgeoning book trades distribution networks actually did little to break up the stratification of readers by class. The arrival of a "mass literary marketplace." He argues that far from democratizing the populace, economic development actually exacerbated the regional differences within the country, and not just in literary tastes. Information however was traveling more freely across the country and more than just reports of Lunar man-bats were circulating. Abolitionist tracts were printed and circulated as the growing gulf between slave and free regions of the United States continually strained what it meant to be an American.

Before the the Civil War the federal government abstained from its right to print and control money. The States might have been united under the government but they were far from

united in tone, desire, trade, or even money. Especially money. Showing true American ingenuity, State banks, and many more localized banks issued their own bank notes which were exchanged for goods and services throughout a generally localized area and could ultimately be exchanged at the issuing bank for hard currency specie in the form of gold or silver. There was never enough specie to cover all the legitimate bank notes in circulation, much less any that were forged or counterfeited. In a sense, counterfeit did not just apply to the notes, sometimes entire banks could be counterfeit. As Stephen Mihm points out, it was the confidence behind a notes' ability to be traded for goods and services that drove the market—both legitimate and counterfeit. Paradoxically, many of the counterfeit banks possessed a greater confidence than many of the official state or local banks who were more times insolvent than not. It was not simply the forging of documents which needed handbooks to spot, many of which were in circulation in multiple editions, but catering to or on the confidence of the system. According to Mihm, it took the Civil War to solidify the federal government's resolve to be in sole control of the nation's currency through the development of the secret service to work to clear out the hard counterfeiters. Soon the nation's confidence in their currency (and paper money) became an issue of *national* pride and confidence. In some respect the shared experience of the war and the post-war economy made money a nationalistic issue: to be American meant utilizing and trusting the federal reserve notes, the American dollar.

The Civil War propelled technology and culture throughout the entire American experience and consciousness. It's conclusion also pushed more Americans west and into a brand new old American Mythos. The West as it developed in the post war period drove as much change in the cities as anything that was settled and built in the geographic west. The Slavery Question turned into a quagmire of assimilation debated and racial tensions increased nearly

everywhere, even in anti-slavery states. The push west also brought in more questions of Americans relationship with the Indians. Only relatively recently has the term Native American come into wide usage, and the idea of referring to the indigenous people in any form of “American” would strike many 19th century settlers as blasphemous. As scientific study took a stronger foothold in the post war period, many were interested in preserving the “Vanishing Race” for cultural anthropology if not for humanity’s sake. Steve Conn writes that the Native American question in general and Native Americans in particular focused American national historical consciousness during the 19th century. Following the main theme of developing anthropology, Conn shows that linguistics, and especially “object-based epistemology” had evolved with the artist’s brush and the archaeologist’s spade. Conn’s work breaks from the longstanding traditions that kept native peoples aligned with their own history (that is *prehistory*) and thus their vanishing in the face of modernity, and, more importantly, not being part of their own present in the 19th century (perhaps even today). Regina Darnell recounts that moral for anthropologists here may be “that Native Americans had a history in American popular though that preceded the discipline’s hegemony over them.”

As the classes continued to stratify American culture followed suit. According to Lawrence Levine there was a decline of a rich, largely shared culture (or even a common cultural consciousness) from the 1840s into the 1890s. In his book *Highbrow/Lowbrow* Levine outlines the popularity of Shakespeare through the use of Blackface Minstrelsy as a form of parody and you cannot parody something that is not popular. The decline in shared culture coincides with a growing American aristocracy. Throughout the latter half of the century financial, railroad, and other dynasties arose to fill a void in American culture reserved for the higher born in Europe. They were the money and the power. Many of them had started as “regular” people and through

hard work and shrewd business dealings gained wealth, and power. Industry was improved by technological advances in the sciences and were reported as the work of benevolent benefactors of industry. It was a self-sustaining cycle throughout most of the Gilded Age.

In that stratified culture the battle for institutional control was inevitable. Even though museums were a relatively new entity Americans were fighting to make it their own. Les Harrison outlines that structure battle in *The Temple and the Forum*. Throughout he follows the development of three museums that mirror a bit of American cultural development through the 19th century: Peale's Museum, Barnum's Museum, and the Smithsonian. The ideas of democratic or even public discourse is shaped by the architecture of these buildings and the cities where they reside(d). The temple is filled with reverence for more than holy nature, but is is paramount of unidirectional authority. Specialists, or at least those initiated, were the ones dispensing and recollecting the order of nature. The forum on the other hand was (and is) the bustling arena for opinions, thoughts, private enterprise, and in some of the examples of Barnum: the popular, the bizarre, and the humbug. Peale's museum included a light narration of the great chain of being as portrayed by specimens from the *Corps of Discovery* and his own exhumation of the mastodon. Barnum's work with the American museum democratizes wonder to anyone with ticket money and invites everyone to be part of the show, either the duped or the duper. The Smithsonian is the epitome of national museums on par with the cultural institutions of Europe. These collections of things were distinctly American and were displayed in distinctly American manners. By the end of the 19th century, American Culture had come into its own not just in museums, literature, and politics, but more basal instances of newspapers, scientific journals, and popular accounts of exhibitions west. In a little more than a century the British American Colonies had become a major player on the world economic stage and was aspiring to colonial ambitions of its own.

By 1898 a common consciousness of America's west and a self-made man, was as much part of a merchant in Boston as it was to a rancher in Montana. The popularity of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show drew people into arenas to see the greatest battles of the plains fought out again and again. Dime novels were the literary equivalent of the early penny presses, and they exploded into the leisure classes (possibly as productivity for the mind—a productive unproductivity). Barnum's inroads into popular culture on display paved the way for Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows. These roads stretched from the American frontier across the Atlantic into the major cities of Europe (William Cronon) who were just as detached from their own wilderness (Roderick Nash) as the Americans were from their own cultural history (John Sears). Interestingly enough, the Wild West Show was more diverse than any city it visited.

The shows, and the experience west, no matter how short influenced more than one eastern youth. One in particular embraced in so thoroughly that it continued to influence his life even as he ascended through the ranks in the Navy before he resigned to lead a unit of volunteers in the Spanish American War. Theodore Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill later became another dramatic historical even in the Wild West Show. This is another example of that cyclical influence of the American Experience. America took possession of Spain's Pacific holdings, which lead to the Philippine-American War in 1899 with America setting up the Tagalong Republic and now influencing nearly the same geopolitical mechanizations that lead to their original purchase of land from the French in 1803.

As we have seen above there are nearly infinite examples of what it means to be an American in the 19th century. This is precisely why American studies must work inter and cross disciplinarily in order to provide the most complete picture of how that culture developed across politics, literature, science, religion, class, race, and gender. If you asked anyone to list the traits

of what it meant to be an American in the 19th century, there may be some similarities, but the lists would all invariably be different. It appears through the research that the strongest identification of what it meant to be an American is to describe it by what it is not. It was not European, it was not homogenous, even if it acted as it was, it was not uniformed or unified, and above all it was not finished.