

History 340
Critical Periods in American History the 1890s
Roger Williams University
CAS 228
M, W, F, 12:00 - 12:50
Fall Semester, 2007

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Week of October 15, 2007

For *Monday, October 15*

Read, in *Schlereth*,
5. *Communicating*, pp. 177 - 207

We've mentioned the revolution in communications almost from the first class. Today we'll zero in on it. We've talked about the telephone before, so I expect I will not spend much time on it now, though I'm still wavering about whether to show you a video about it. (I'll probably make up my mind at the last minute.) Other forms of communication have been mentioned as well, like the post card. Greeting cards extend this idea and relate it to specific seasons of the year, chiefly Christmas and Valentine's Day, but also to personal anniversaries, as well. We'll think about those, and about changes in the way mail was delivered which bring the post office into modern ways, chiefly the RFD system (1896). We've already mentioned this a bit in conjunction with the salesmanship of Mr. Sears.

Movies, too, or early versions of them, begin to make their impact on the American psyche, though their real story comes after 1900.

For **Wednesday, October 17**

Read, in *Schlereth*,
6. *Playing*, 208 - 241

It begins to sound like a broken record, but many of our popular recreational activities take their form in the 1890s, give or take a few years. Professional Baseball, for example, takes its modern form then, and the first World Series took place in 1903. Leisure time is a function of efficient economic activity. If one has to spend every waking hour earning his/her daily bread, leisure is only an abstraction. We've seen it begin as a perquisite of the rich (The Leisure Class, as Thorsten Veblen called them). But, through some of the processes we've investigated in the last couple of weeks (remember the combine thresher machines pulled by dozens of horses) humans didn't have to work 24/7 to earn their daily bread. In this chapter we will look at a real smorgasbord of things... sports, the invention of the vacation, fitness fads (bicycling, gymnastics), and even such things as soft drinks and soda fountains take their place (in competition with the old favorite, the saloon).

For *Friday, October 19*

INTERNET ASSIGNMENT in two to three parts:

Choose any two of the three below. Have trouble choosing? Do all three.

I. Sports

Baseball: <http://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/awal/1317.ram>

Football: <http://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/awal/4184s1.ram>

<http://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/awal/4184s2.ram>

Horse Racing: <http://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/edmp/0882.ram>

Boxing: <http://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/edmp/4015a.ram>

<http://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/edmp/4015b.ram>

Hockey: <http://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/edmp/0037.ram>

As leisure time increases and as America becomes more urbanized and affluent, we begin to see Americans indulging in spectator sports to a greater degree than heretofore. Of the sports above, Boxing and Horse Racing had been around for the longest time. Baseball was moving into a professional era and Football was a standard form of exercise at American Colleges and Universities. So, take your character to one or more sporting events and record his/her reaction.

II. American Popular Song

Popular Music was one of America's Passions during the 1890s. In those days, Americans were as much producers of music as consumers of them. We've seen the advertisements for musical instruments of all types, and the presence of a musical instrument in the home (and the ability to play a musical instrument) were marks of gentility aspired to by members of all social classes. (You saw this prominently featured in the video on Sears. To respond to the appetite for popular music a vigorous sheet music industry arose, and advances in printing technology and the availability of cheap paper made mass editions of the latest hits available to many people. Thanks to the internet, many examples of popular song are available in facsimile editions. The cover art and the lyrics provide many insights to social and cultural attitudes, and the range is very wide, indeed. What I'd like to have you do is visit the websites below and select several songs which might appeal to your character. I promise I won't demand that you sing your choices in class (unless you want to).

<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/dynaweb/sheetmusic/hf=0> This is the Historic American Sheet Music at Duke University. Visit the Decades from 1880 to 1910

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/award97/rpbhtml/aasmhome.html> This is the African American Sheet Music Collection which is part of the American Memory Collection.

It was assembled by Brown University Note that this music was composed by blacks but its appeal was not limited to a black audience. Much of it was racist.

For a history of Black Musical Theatre in the 1890s visit <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/award97/rpbhtml/aasmsprs3.html> Be warned that much of the music in this genre at this time would be considered offensive today.

III. American Theatre, naughty and nice.

The Library of Congress has a super resource on the Variety Stage. As we've seen in Chambers, American social and sexual mores are beginning to change in the decades around the turn of the century, and in major cities especially, a variety of forms of live entertainment are competing for the American Dollar. Visit the website at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/vshtml/vshome.html>, prowl around, and take your sweetie to a show...or have your sweetie take you...or go by yourself, I'm not fussy, but write down your reaction in your to what you see. (Spend a little time on this one...there are scripts for all sorts of skits, including a variety of ethnic ones which would probably be considered politically incorrect today.

I won't ask anyone to sing (unless he/she wants to) or to act out a skit (unless a couple of you want to).

Commencing next week, I'm going to spend some time each day browsing your journals to see how you're doing. I will make comments and raise questions. I won't visit every journal every day. When I visit yours, I'll send you an e-mail letting you know I've stopped around and that there are some comments for you to take a peek at.