

American Studies 430
American Humor
M - Th: 3:30 - 4:50
GHH 108
Roger Williams University
Fall Semester, 2010

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Week of September 9, 2010

Welcome back. Did you labor on Labor Day? Did you play? Did you do some of each? If you were lucky the distinction between labor and play was so blurred you couldn't distinguish between them. We won't split hairs. We won't split hares, either.

For Thursday, September 9:

Read, in Constance Rourke, *American Humor* (hereafter, Rourke because I'm lazy).
Introduction by Greil Marcus. pp. vii-xxvi. (Does that look longer in Roman Numerals?)
Chapter 1 Corncocks Twist your Hair pp. 16-36

If anyone complains that you're wasting good time "studying" humor, you can disabuse them by quoting a bit of the introduction...it's full of serious words. But buried in those serious words you'll find Snoop Dog. [But Seriously, Folks...](#) Marcus does a fine job of connecting our times to those in which Rourke wrote. Her death would have been comic if it wasn't so tragic, or maybe ironic would be a better word. She took a pratfall on an icy porch—the stuff of slapstick comedy since the [slapstick](#) was invented.

Maybe one of the things some of you did over Labor Day was watch baseball. Rourke will introduce us to the Yankee in this week's reading: Not the team (thank goodness—I've booed the Yankees for a very long time) but the character type. Watch out for little gems like this: " 'I'll be shot if it ain't a Yankee!' cried one. The yard was suddenly vacant. Doors banged and windows were shut. The peddler moved relentlessly nearer, reached a doorway, and laid his pack on the half hatch. The inhabitants had barred their doors double-locked their money-tills in vain. With scarcely a halt the peddler made his way into their huses, and silver leapt into his pockets."

I read this chapter and I'm reminded of "infomercials" on cable tv. Are you reminded of anything? The chapter introduces you to a number of stereotypes, positive and negative related to the idea, "Yankee," but not only to the Yankee—to his foil or victim as well. To prepare for this day's class I'd like to have you list these traits good and bad—chart them, if you like doing that sort of thing, and think about if those character traits have survived until the present. How and where? Reflect on this and write about it in your online journal.