

## [C19 panel: Nineteenth-Century Public Humanities and Humanities Publics](#)

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Discussion of the public humanities within the academy is often inflected by concern about the state and future of the scholarly humanities. The public humanities are increasingly treated as a potential solution to the fraught academic job market. Alternately, some view them skeptically, as unserious and oversimple compared to the academic humanities. Both perspectives themselves depend on simplifications of a complex set of disciplines, each with distinctive histories, theories, and practices. What are the public humanities, outside scholarly hermeneutics of utility and suspicion? This panel approaches that question by thinking about how the public humanities were theorized and practiced in the nineteenth-century U.S. While the term was not in use in the period, activities and sites we would recognize as public humanities are recognizable in literary, philosophical, and historical essays, Lyceum lectures, museums and repertory orchestras, reading clubs, and Shakespeare societies. Papers might inquire into what constituted public humanities, and who constituted humanities publics, in the period. Who was excluded from dominant-culture publics, and what counterpublics arose in response to those exclusions? How were these communities' engagement with literature, history, philosophy, and other humanities disciplines affected by the growth of the academic humanities during the second half of the nineteenth century? How might better understanding nineteenth-century public humanities communities and practices prompt reconsideration of the public humanities today, including their status in relation to the academic humanities? Might looking at nineteenth-century convergences and divergences between the academic and public humanities allow us to bring the two into conversation in new ways today, guiding us toward productive alliances across inherited institutional, methodological, financial and cultural boundaries separating them? This panel is broadly conceived to allow for a diversity of perspectives, disciplinary approaches, professional experiences, theoretical frames, and modes of inquiry. Participants might address only one, or several, of the guiding questions. Contact me if a more detailed description would be useful.

Please submit brief paper abstracts (Ideally fewer than 300 words) with a short bio or link to an online bio.

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