HIST 3866
History of Comics and Superheroes

1

- This course is about the role of comic books in popular culture in American society in the 20th century

- it is a HISTORY course

- therefore we will begin at the beginning (early 20th century) and make our way slowly to the early 21st century

- The focus is on how:
    - comic books reflected broad changes in American politics, society, culture
    - American politics, society, culture may have been affected by comic books

- our goal is to take comic books as a serious and substantive contribution to American pop culture

- although we will focus on comic books as an art form, we will also explore the culture of comic book movies too

2

What is 'Popular Culture'?

Original: Grant Wood, *American Gothic* (1930)

3

• First, define **"culture"**

• Franz Boas (1858-1942), considered the founder of modern anthropology:
  • culture is the primary template through which people's worldviews are formed
  • There is an emotional connection

4

Popular Culture

- Difficult to define popular culture without defining (or accepting/understanding) the difference between:
  - high culture and low culture
- Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), English cultural critic
  - culture = *"the best that has been thought and said in the world"*
  - British aristocracy = best of culture
  - argued against placing any value on popular (or low) culture
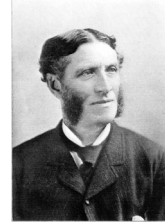
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Popular Culture / 'low culture'

- low culture:
  - "culture by the people for the people"
- Populist, popular, and public
- Rejects tradition, intellectualism
- Examples from the postwar era
  - Examples: 'pop art' of the late 1950s/early 1960s
  - Pop artists sought to depict everyday life using:
    - Brand name commercials
    - Fast-food items
    - celebrities

6

Roy Lichtenstein
Drowning Girl (1963)

7

Andy Warhol
Gold Marilyn Monroe (1962)

8