



# **Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850-1877**

*Linda Frost*

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In *Never One Nation*, Linda Frost argues that during the eventful decades surrounding the Civil War, American identity was constructed not only nationally but also locally. Depictions of race, class, and sexuality seen in P. T. Barnum's museums, in the image of the Circassian Beauty, and in popular periodicals like *Harper's Weekly*, the *Southern Illustrated News*, and the *San Francisco Golden Era* further illustrated who was - and who was not - an American. Local coverage of Native Americans and Chinese in the West, African Americans and recent Irish immigrants in New York, and slaves and Yankees in the South played a major role in conflating Americanness with whiteness. These ideas were shaped by reactions to events such as the 1863 Draft Riots and the Dakota uprising in Minnesota in 1862, and laid bare through the demonization of Northern whites in Confederate newspapers and anxieties expressed in California newspapers about the possibility of Chinese immigrants gaining U.S. citizenship. Through close readings of specific articles published in regional periodicals, mostly unexamined by literary scholars, Frost shows how Americanness came to be defined in the mid-nineteenth century by the mainstream popular culture. The era's many social upheavals - Emancipation, Reconstruction, the start of the Indian wars in the West, immigration, and the completion of the transcontinental railroad - sharpened the desire of Americans to feel part of a national community, even as they made this search for an American identity extremely contentious and necessarily fragmented. *Never One Nation* provocatively reframes the discourse on racial formation and reveals how local cultures and prejudices can recast the identity of a nation.

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