

## American Cultural History: Selected Topics Material Culture and Consumer Culture

### COURSE GUIDE

**History 546**

**Fall 2013**

Prof. L. Tolbert

Office: MHRA 2109  
Hours: by appointment

Email: [ltolber@uncg.edu](mailto:ltolber@uncg.edu), this is the best way to reach me. I do not have an office phone.

*\*Note that this syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Any necessary changes in the syllabus or course schedule will prioritize effectiveness for student learning.*

## Scope of the Course

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Historian Lawrence Glickman asks, “When did the United States become a consumer society? Has it always been one? Were Americans born to shop? Did they learn to do so? Or were they coerced?” These questions could hardly be more relevant as the nation experiences the current crisis of consumer culture. This semester we will explore the new American consumer history, a history that has largely been written in the last two decades.

Since the 1990s, studies of consumer history have revolutionized our understanding of American history. Once considered peripheral, consumption is now understood to be central to major aspects of American history from politics, economics, and religion, to the social history of gender and race. We will explore the evolution of consumer culture in the United States from the so-called “consumer revolution” of the eighteenth century through the development of a mass consumer society in the twentieth century.

This course is designed as an advanced reading seminar focusing on the arguments and methods of historians who study American consumer culture. We will pay particular attention to the contributions of material culture scholars for our understanding of the social, political and economic dynamics that have shaped consumer culture over time. Material culture methodology has been especially valuable for evaluating the way material goods confer rank or status in a social hierarchy, the role of fashion and demand in spurring economic growth and changing manufactures, and the ways in which people can construct their own meanings for objects produced by themselves or others. Essay assignments will require you to evaluate different types of primary source evidence to interpret consumer experience in particular historical contexts.

# Learning Objectives

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Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- Identify and explain distinctive periods in the development of American consumer culture from the colonial era through the twentieth century in a transatlantic context.
- Contextualize the role of material objects, including the physical contexts of consumption, in the creation of consumer society over time.
- Assess the role of technology in the creation of consumer society over time.
- Evaluate the impact of consumption on groups and individuals in particular historical contexts, paying attention to such factors as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and region.
- Apply the arguments and interpretations from assigned readings to analyze different types of primary source evidence in the context of consumer experience during a particular historical period.
- Compare and contrast central arguments of each reading assignment and synthesize major points of agreement or disagreement among particular authors as the course unfolds.
- Review original scholarship in historiographical context.

## Required Readings

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**Books:** (available at UNCG Bookstore and on reserve in Jackson Library)

Blaszczyk, Regina Lee. *American Consumer Society, 1865-2005, From Hearth to HDTV*. Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2009.

Jaffee, David. *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Smith, Woodruff D. *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

**Journal Articles and Book Chapters:** (available on Bb ereserves, JSTOR, or other journal databases. Use Library Catalog to locate articles not posted on Bb ereserves.)

Benson, Susan Porter. "The Cinderella of Occupations: Managing the Work of Department Store Saleswomen, 1900-1940." *Business History Review*. Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 1981): 1-25.

Breen, T. H. "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, No. 119 (May 1988): 73-104.

Carrier, James. "Reconciling Personal Commodities and Personal Relations in Industrial Society," *Theory and Society* Vol. 19, No. 5 (October 1990): 579-598.

Clarke, Alison J. "Tupperware: Product as Social Relation." In Martin, Ann Smart and J. Ritchie Garrison. *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. Distributed by University of Tennessee Press, 1997. [Bb ereserves]

Hale, Grace Elizabeth. "For Colored" and "For White": Segregating Consumption in the South," pp. 162-182. In *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*. Edited by Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Bryant Simon. Princeton University Press, 2000. [Bb ereserves]

Leach, William R. "Transformation in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925" *Journal of American History* Vol. 71, No. 2 (1984): 319-342.

Logemann, Jan. "Beyond Self-Service: The Limits of 'Americanization' in Post-War West German Retailing in Comparative Perspective." In *Transformations of Retailing in Europe after 1945*. Edited by Ralph Jessen and Lydia Langer. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012, pp. 87-100. [Bb ereserves]

Marchand, Roland. "Advertisements as Social Tableaux." *Advertising & Society Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2000).

Martin, Ann Smart. "Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework. *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 28, No. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1993): 141-157.

Pendergast, Tom. "Consuming Questions: Scholarship on Consumerism in America to 1940." *American Studies International*. Vol. 36, No. 2 (June 1998): 23-43.

Shaw, Gareth et. al. "The Coming of the Supermarket: The Processes and Consequences of Transplanting American Know-How into Britain." In *Transformations of Retailing in Europe after 1945*. Edited by Ralph Jessen and Lydia Langer. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012, pp. 35-54. [Bb reserves]

Stearns, Peter N. "Stages of Consumerism: Recent Work on the Issues of Periodization." *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 69, No. 1 (March 1997): 102-117.

Tolbert, Lisa C. "The Aristocracy of the Market Basket: Self-Service Food Shopping in the New South." In *Food Chains*, ed. Roy Rosenzweig and Warren Belasco. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. [posted to the assignments section of Bb]

AHR Forum. *American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 5 (Dec. 1992): 1369-1430. The forum consists of the following:  
 Lawrence W. Levine, "[The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences](#)," pp. 1369-1399  
 Robin D. G. Kelley, "[Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk,'"](#) pp. 1400-1408  
 Natalie Zemon Davis, "[Toward Mixtures and Margins](#)," pp. 1409-1416  
 T. J. Jackson Lears, "[Making Fun of Popular Culture](#)," pp. 1417-1426  
 Lawrence W. Levine, "[Levine Responds](#)," pp. 1427-1430

## Evaluation

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### Undergraduates

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Discussion Board        | 10% |
| Primary Source Analyses | 60% |
| Book Review             | 30% |

### Graduate Students

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|-------------------------|-----|
| Discussion Board        | 10% |
| Primary Source Analyses | 60% |
| Review Essay            | 30% |

### Discussion Board Reading Responses: (10%).

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These assignments will vary in format, length, and purpose from week to week, but will never exceed one page in length. Instructions will be provided in advance of due dates. Formats may include creating a set of inquiry questions about the reading, identifying and comparing authors' thesis statements, a paragraph connecting the week's reading to a larger historiographical problem addressed in the course, a short essay evaluating a particular methodology. These assignments are intended to help focus your thoughts before class discussion or reflect on the readings after class discussion and will offer opportunities to practice specific critical thinking skills in a manageable way before you are graded on more formal writing assignments. Discussion Board postings will be graded based on substantive engagement with the assigned reading for the week using the rubric below. This rubric may be updated as the semester unfolds to clarify expectations based on your feedback and questions. See Course Policies section below for late assignment penalty. Some Discussion Board assignments are described in the Course Schedule below. Instructions for additional Discussion Board assignments will be provided as the semester unfolds.

### Discussion Board Rubric

Description of characteristics for different levels of student performance.

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 5   | Response is substantive and conveys a complex understanding of author's thesis and its relationship to larger themes and issues raised in the course. Uses specific authors' names and specific examples from the reading appropriate to the discussion topic. Makes connections across readings from different weeks. Identifies relevant examples to develop reasoning. Follows instructions. |
| 4   | Response is substantive and conveys an analytical reading comprehension. Ability to identify main points in the reading. Uses specific authors' names and specific examples from the reading appropriate to the discussion topic. Makes connections across readings from different weeks. May overlook some of the most relevant examples to develop reasoning. Follows instructions.           |
| 3   | Response may be more general than substantive. May convey incomplete reading or some misunderstanding of the key ideas in the reading. Difficulty distinguishing main points in the reading. May use examples that are general rather than specific. Tendency to describe rather than analyze. May not identify the best examples for the discussion topic. Follows instructions.               |
| 2/1 | Response conveys lack of understanding of main points in the reading. Does not follow instructions. Off-topic.  |
| 0   | Postings after class and incomplete responses will not count for credit. See course policies for late penalty.  |

### *Primary Source Analysis Case Studies (60%):*

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Use the assigned readings to evaluate the following primary source documents in appropriate historical context for understanding consumer history of the period. Detailed instructions for the primary source analyses will be provided as the semester unfolds.

Case Study 1: Using Photographs as Historical Evidence, due by noon on October 16.

Case Study 2: Using Advertisements as Historical Evidence, due by 5:00 p.m. on November 15.

**Undergraduates:** Essays should be 6-7 pages, typed and double-spaced. Use Turabian style citations [[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)] for all references.

**Graduate Students:** Essays should be 7-10 pages, typed and double-spaced. Use Turabian style citations [[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)] for all references.

### *Undergraduate Students: Book Review (30%)*

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Survey the footnotes and bibliographic essays of the assigned reading to identify a book on a significant topic of consumer history and/or material culture history that interests you. You may study any period of American consumer history addressed in the course. Read your selected book and write a 1000-word review of the book. Book Review selection due by noon on October 23. Discussion Board posting identifying thesis statement + one paragraph about the most important contribution the book makes to the study of consumer history due by noon on November 6. Final book review is due by 5:00 p.m. on December 2.

### *Graduate Students: Review Essay (30%)*

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Using the book review guidelines for the American Studies journal, *American Quarterly* ([http://www.americanquarterly.org/submit/book\\_reviews.html](http://www.americanquarterly.org/submit/book_reviews.html)) develop a review essay that evaluates **three** books on a subject or theme related to any period of American consumer history. Follow the *American Quarterly* standard for a review of multiple books (no more than 5000 words). Your review should take into account the professional evaluations of at least two different scholars (if possible) in published reviews of the books. A one-page proposal explaining the theme of the review essay including annotated bibliography of the three selected books is due October 23 by noon. Discussion Board posting about historiography of the 3 books is due by noon on November 6. The final essay is due by 5:00 p.m. on December 2.

# Course Policies

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## *Participation and Attendance Policy*

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Consistent attendance— Attendance is mandatory. This is a seminar, not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the readings and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else's notes. For this reason, consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course. I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. You must attend at least two hours of the class period to be counted for full attendance for the class. If the University is closed for snow you will not, of course, be counted absent. If it snows and the University is open, class will be held as scheduled and attendance counts. In the event that I am unable to attend class due to unforeseen circumstances I will distribute an email message and post an announcement to Bb at least two hours (if possible) before class is scheduled to begin. Documentation for absences will not be collected except in cases where an extended absence may be necessary (for example, hospitalization). **There will be a 3% reduction of the student's final grade for each absence after the first 2.** Beyond even this penalty, a student who seriously neglects attendance and class preparation risks failing the course.

Regular contributions to class discussions—participation is not formally graded as a specific percentage of the final grade but the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers.

## *Late Assignment Penalty*

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Meeting deadlines is an essential element of professional behavior. Please note that *unless arrangements have been made well in advance of due dates*, assignments will be penalized by **a 3% reduction in the final assignment grade for every day the assignment is late**. Assignments later than one week will not be accepted for credit without an extremely impressive explanation. Using effective quantitative reasoning, your grade average can recover from an F on an individual assignment more successfully than it can recover from a “0”. It is better to turn in an incomplete assignment on time than to turn in nothing at all.

Thorough preparation for class—readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time, including Discussion Board postings. **Failure to submit Discussion Board postings by the deadline will result in 2 points subtracted from your final Discussion Board grade for each skipped Discussion Board assignment.** Postings must be complete and must fully address the question for credit. Incomplete assignments will not count for credit.

## *Electronic Communication*

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Students are responsible for checking Blackboard and UNCG email on a regular basis. Students are encouraged to utilize email and other forms of digital communication when interacting with the instructor (lcto1ber@uncg.edu). When using email, students are expected to be professional and courteous, not casual and familiar. Remember that emailing an instructor is not the same as texting your best friend. Keep in mind that you are making an impression with every interaction whether it be in class or online. Present yourself in a professional manner. Students should also remember email is an asynchronous form of communication. Thus, while a prompt response may be desired, it may not always be possible (especially late at night and on weekends). Students should allow at least 24 hours (48 hours on weekends) for a response. That said, the instructor answers emails in the timeliest fashion possible.

## *Academic Integrity*

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UNCG considers academic dishonesty to be a serious offense. Dishonest behavior in any form, including cheating, plagiarism, deception of effort, and unauthorized assistance, may result in such sanctions as a failing grade on an assignment or failure in the course depending on the nature of the offense. Students must follow the guidelines of the University Policy on Academic Integrity: <http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integrity-policy/>



## Course Schedule

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### August 22 Introductions

**August 28 Discussion Board Assignment due by noon on August 28:** Write 3 sentences or questions addressing the following: Identify 3 big questions or historical problems that have engaged consumer historians. I want complete sentences. I want only 3 sentences. I do not want a paragraph. I do not want an essay.

### August 29 Historiography and Methodology

Read: [organized in recommended reading order]

Stearns, Peter N. "Stages of Consumerism: Recent Work on the Issues of Periodization." *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 69, No. 1 (March 1997): 102-117.

Pendergast, Tom. "Consuming Questions: Scholarship on Consumerism in America to 1940." *American Studies International*. Vol. 36, No. 2 (June 1998): 23-43.

Martin, Ann Smart. "Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework." *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 28, No. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1993): 141-157.

### September 5 Consumer Revolutions in the Early Modern Era

Read:

Smith, Woodruff D. *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

### September 12 No Class. Discussion Board Assignment due [subject tba]

### September 19 American Consumption in the Revolutionary Era

Read:

Breen, T. H. "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, No. 119 (May 1988): 73-104.

Jaffee, chapters 1-3, pp. ix-146.

### September 26 Part 1: Consumption in a Market Economy Part 2: Book Review Workshop [Bring Blaszczyk to class]

Read:

Jaffee, chapters 4-epilogue, 147-334

### October 3 Using Photographs as Historical Evidence Workshop

#### Review:

Jaffee chapters 6 and 7

#### Read:

America's First Look into the Camera: Daguerreotype Portraits and Views 1839-1864.

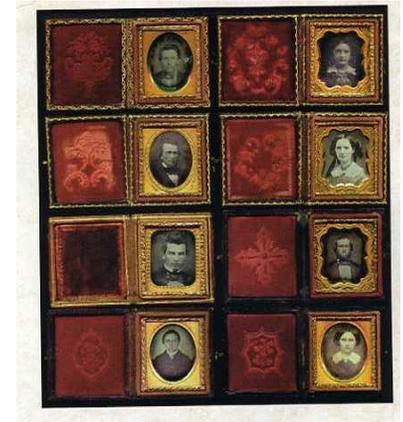
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/daghtml/>

Mirror Images: Daguerreotypes at the Library of Congress:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/daghtml/dagpres.html>

Secrets of the Dark Chamber Exhibit with primary sources:

[http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/helios/secrets/darkchamber-noframe.html?exhibitions/online/helios/secrets/secrets\\_introduction.html](http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/helios/secrets/darkchamber-noframe.html?exhibitions/online/helios/secrets/secrets_introduction.html)



### October 10 Victorian Consumers

#### Spaces of Consumption Case Study: The Department Store

Read: [organized in recommended reading order]

Blaszczyk, Part One, chapters 1-3, pp. vii-92.

Leach, William R. "Transformation in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925" *Journal of American History* Vol. 71, No. 2 (1984): 319-342.

Benson, Susan Porter. "The Cinderella of Occupations: Managing the Work of Department Store Saleswomen, 1900-1940." *Business History Review*. Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 1981): 1-25.

### October 16 Using Photographs as Historical Evidence Case Study Due by noon.

### October 17 Spaces of Consumption: The Segregated South

#### Read:

Grace Elizabeth Hale. "For Colored" and "For White": Segregating Consumption in the South, pp. 162-182. In *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*. Edited by Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Bryant Simon. Princeton University Press, 2000. [ereserves]

Tolbert, Lisa C. "The Aristocracy of the Market Basket: Self-Service Food Shopping in the New South." In *Food Chains*, ed. Roy Rosenzweig and Warren Belasco. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. [posted to Bb]

### October 23 Undergraduate Students: Book Review selection due by noon. Graduate Students: Review Essay Proposal due by noon.

### October 24 Using Advertisements as Historical Evidence Workshop

#### Read:

Blaszczyk, Chapter 4: Mr. Advertiser Meets Mrs. Consumer, 116-136.

Marchand, Roland. "Advertisements as Social Tableaux." *Advertising & Society Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2000).



**October 31** Studying Consumption in Industrial Society: Problems and Possibilities

Read:

Lawrence W. Levine, "[The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences](#)," *American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 5 (Dec. 1992): pp. 1369-1399.

AHR Forum. *American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 5 (Dec. 1992): 1369-1430. The forum consists of the following:

Robin D. G. Kelley, "[Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk,'](#)" pp. 1400-1408

Natalie Zemon Davis, "[Toward Mixtures and Margins](#)," pp. 1409-1416

T. J. Jackson Lears, "[Making Fun of Popular Culture](#)," pp. 1417-1426

Lawrence W. Levine, "[Levine Responds](#)," pp. 1427-1430

**November 6 Discussion Board Posting Due by noon on November 6:** Undergraduates: thesis statement and one paragraph about the most important contribution the book makes to the study of consumer history; Graduates: 1-page essay about key historiographical relationship among the three review essay books.

**November 7 Part 1: Book Review Reports**

**Part 2: Modern America**

Read:

Blaszczyk, Part Two, chapters 4-6, pp. 93-178.

**November 14 Mass Consumer Society in the Postwar Era**

Read: [organized in recommended reading order]

Blaszczyk, Part 3, chapters 7-conclusion, pp. 179-275.

Clarke, Alison J. "Tupperware: Product as Social Relation." In Martin, Ann Smart and J. Ritchie Garrison. *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. Distributed by University of Tennessee Press, 1997. [ereserves]

Carrier, James. "Reconciling Personal Commodities and Personal Relations in Industrial Society," *Theory and Society* Vol. 19, No. 5 (October 1990): 579-598.

**November 15 Using Advertisements as Historical Evidence Due by 5:00 p.m.**

**November 21 Part 1: Supermarkets: Transatlantic Connections**

**Part 2: Summations and Course Evaluations.**

Read: [organized in recommended reading order]

Shaw, Gareth et. al. "The Coming of the Supermarket: The Processes and Consequences of Transplanting American Know-How into Britain." In *Transformations of Retailing in Europe after 1945*. Edited by Ralph Jessen and Lydia Langer. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012, pp. 35-54.

Logemann, Jan. "Beyond Self-Service: The Limits of 'Americanization' in Post-War West German Retailing in Comparative Perspective." In *Transformations of Retailing in Europe after 1945*. Edited by Ralph Jessen and Lydia Langer. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012, pp. 87-100.

**November 28 No Class. Thanksgiving Holiday**

**December 2 Graduate Students: Final Review Essay Due by 5:00 p.m.**

**Undergraduate Students: Final Book Review Due by 5:00 p.m.**