American Cultural History: Selected Topics
Material Culture and Consumer Culture

COURSE GUIDE

History 546          Spring 2006
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Office: McIver 210                Hours: Mon. and Wed. 1:00-1:50
Email: letolber@uncg.edu, this is the best way to reach me        and by appointment

Scope of the Course

This course is designed as an advanced reading seminar focusing on the critical
perspectives and methods of historians who study American cultural history. The course is
designed with two basic goals in mind: 1. To introduce you to the interdisciplinary practice of
cultural history, and 2. To explore key periods in the development of American culture from the
colonial era to the early twentieth century. The central theme of the course this semester is
"material culture and consumer culture.” 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 market in the twentieth century. We will pay particular
attention to the contributions of material culture scholars for our understanding of the social and
political dynamics that have shaped consumer culture in American history.
Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester students should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skill development in the following areas.

- Explain distinctive periods in the development of American consumer culture from the eighteenth through the twentieth century.
- Understand and evaluate a variety of methods for using visual (objects, photographs, art, etc.) rather than text-based sources as historical evidence.
- Synthesize central arguments of each reading assignment and evaluate major points of agreement or disagreement among particular authors.
- Design a research topic focusing on an aspect of American consumer culture that interests you and produce a meaningful annotated research bibliography for the project based on your independent research.

Required Readings

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

Journal Articles and Book Chapters: (available on ereserves, JSTOR, or other journal databases as noted.)
Required Readings (continued)


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


Evaluation

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Essay 1</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Essay 2</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>30%</td>
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**Participation (10%)**

This assessment will be based on three criteria:

1. **Consistent attendance**--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.

2. **Thorough preparation** for class--readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized by a 3% reduction in the final grade for every day the assignment is late. Assignments later than one week will not be accepted for credit. It is very important that you make arrangements with me **in advance of the due date** if you will not be able to meet an assignment deadline in the course.
Evaluation (continued)

3. Regular contributions to class discussions—the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers. Discussions will take place during every class meeting in both small group exercises and as a whole class and you will have opportunities throughout the semester to develop your oral communication skills.

Midterm Essays (60%)
You will write two essays based on questions that require you to synthesize ideas and arguments in the assigned reading. A set of questions will be distributed well in advance of the due dates. Undergrads: about 7-10 pages double-spaced; Grads: about 10-12 pages double-spaced. Use Turabian-style footnoting in all papers. All written assignments should be typed, with appropriate citations in Turabian style [http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/handouts/turabian.html]. You will submit your written assignments electronically to my email address on the appropriate due date. Late assignments will be penalized. Late assignments will be penalized by a 3% reduction in the final grade for every day the assignment is late. Assignments later than one week will not be accepted for credit. It is very important that you make arrangements with me in advance of the due date if you will not be able to meet an assignment deadline in the course.

Make note of the following due dates:
15 February Midterm Essay 1 due (undergrads)
20 February Midterm Essay 1 due (grads)
17 April Midterm Essay 2 due (everybody)

Annotated Bibliography (30%)
You will develop an annotated research bibliography on a topic of your choice. Instructions for the assignment will be provided in workshops scheduled during the semester.

Make note of the following due dates:
1 March Preliminary Topic Description and Bibliography due (everybody)
1 May Final Annotated Bibliography due (everybody)

Course Schedule

9 January Introductions
11 January Consumerism in historical perspective
16 January (MLK holiday)
Unit 1
From the Pre-Industrial Household to the Market Economy:
Consumer Society Before the Civil War


# Unit 2
## Industrialization and the Rise of a Mass Consumer Society

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 March</td>
<td><strong>Preliminary Topic Description and Bibliography due</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6/8 March</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 March</td>
<td>Research Workshop: Undergrad</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 March</td>
<td>Research workshop: Grad</td>
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<td>27 March</td>
<td>Grocery Store and the Invention of Self Service Shopping</td>
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17 April  Clarke, Alison J. “Tupperware: Product as Social Relation.” [ereserves]


24 April  **Midterm Essay 2 due (everybody)**
Annotated bibliography workshop (everybody)

26 April  No class.

1 May    **Annotated Bibliography due (everybody)**