



American Cultural History: Selected Topics Material Culture and Consumer Culture

COURSE GUIDE

History 546

Spring 2006

Prof. L. Tolbert

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Hours: Mon. and Wed. 1:00-1:50
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)

Ames, Kenneth. *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

Breen, T. H. *Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.

Hale, Grace Elizabeth, *Making Whiteness : The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York : Pantheon Books, 1998.

Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Kasson, John. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.

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

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]

Crowley, John E. "The Sensibility of Comfort," *American Historical Review* Vol. 104, No. 3 (June 1999): 749-782. [use journal finder]

Required Readings (continued)

- Jaffee, David. "One of the Primitive Sort: Portrait Makers of the Rural North, 1760-1860." In Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds. *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985. [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. [use journal finder]
- Perkins, Elizabeth A. "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 486-510. [use journal finder]
- Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. "Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 55, No. 1. (Jan., 1998), pp. 3-38. [use journal finder]
- AHR Forum. *American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 5 (Dec. 1992): 1369-1430. [use journal finder]. 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

Participation	10%
Midterm Essay 1	30%
Midterm Essay 2	30%
Annotated Bibliography	30%

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

- 18 January Crowley, John E. "The Sensibility of Comfort," *American Historical Review* Vol. 104, No. 3 (June 1999): 749-782. [Use journal finder]
- 23 January Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. "Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 55, No. 1. (Jan., 1998), pp. 3-38. [Use journal finder]
- 25 January Breen, T. H. *Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Read chapters 1-5.
- 30 January Breen, T. H. *Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Read chapters 6-8.
- 1 February Jaffee, David. "One of the Primitive Sort: Portrait Makers of the Rural North, 1760-1860." In Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds. *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985. [ereserves]
- 6 February Perkins, Elizabeth A. "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 486-510. [Use journal finder]
- 8 February Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999. Read through chapter 3.
- 13 February Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999. Finish the book.
- 15 February Research Workshop: **Undergrads. Midterm Essay 1 due.**
- 20 February Research Workshop: **Grads. Midterm Essay 1 due.**

Unit 2

Industrialization and the Rise of a Mass Consumer Society

- 22 February Ames, Kenneth. *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992. Read through chapter 3.
- 27 February Ames, Kenneth. *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992. Read through chapter 3.
- 1 March **Preliminary Topic Description and Bibliography due**
- 6/8 March Spring Break
- 13 March Research Workshop: Undergrad
- 15 March Research workshop: Grad
- 20 March Kasson, John. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.
- 22 March 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. [use journal finder]
- 27 March Grocery Store and the Invention of Self Service Shopping
- 29 March Hale, Grace Elizabeth, *Making Whiteness : The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York : Pantheon Books, 1998. Read thorough chapter 3.
- 3 April Hale, Grace Elizabeth, *Making Whiteness : The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York : Pantheon Books, 1998. Finish the book.
- 5 April AHR Forum. *American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 5 (Dec. 1992): 1369-1430. [use journal finder]: 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.
- 10 April AHR Forum. *American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 5 (Dec. 1992): 1369-1430. [use journal finder]: 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.

- 12 April Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003. Read Parts One and Two
- 17 April Clarke, Alison J. "Tupperware: Product as Social Relation." [ereserves]
- 19 April Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003. Read Parts Three and Four
- 24 April **Midterm Essay 2 due (everybody)**
Annotated bibliography workshop (everybody)
- 26 April No class.
- 1 May **Annotated Bibliography due (everybody)**