HIST 223: Fashion to Fast Cars: Commodity Culture in Modern Europe

Spring 2016
Lecturer: Grace Allen
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Class Times: Mon, Weds, Fri: 12:05 – 12:55
Room: 1053 Education Sciences
My Office: Room 4271, Mosse Humanities Building
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00 – 4:00 pm, or by Appointment.

Course Description
As Americans, we commonly hear that our society prioritizes the making, selling, and buying of things above all else—or that we live in a “commodity culture” in which consumer goods increasingly shape our society. From encountering advertisements on TV or Facebook, shopping, seeing a movie, or simply driving to and from work in a car, commodities are linked to almost all aspects of our everyday lives. Yet mass consumerism is a relatively recent phenomenon, with only around two hundred years of history behind it.

If commodity culture is so new, then why does it seem so natural to us? To address this question, we will investigate how a commodity culture emerged in nineteenth-century Europe and trace its evolution up to the present day. Key themes we will explore include the impact of commercial development on work practices, urbanization, leisure cultures, imperialism, war, and “Americanization.” Throughout the course we will also discuss how commodities have shaped group identities, such as class, gender, age, race, and nation, as well as our own notions of self and “other.”

Course Objectives
By the end of the course, you should be able to:
  o Craft historical questions that contribute to effective and engaging class discussions;
  o Understand and communicate the basic arguments put forward by historians in their texts, as well as discuss and critique those arguments;
  o Identify how primary sources can help us to answer particular historical questions and the ways in which their usefulness is limited;
  o Communicate ideas clearly in written and oral form;
  o Articulate a deeper understanding of the impact of commodities on our everyday lives and in the shaping of our own culture and identities.
Structure and Requirements:
Your grade will be based on attendance and participation, 2 papers, and an in-class midterm and final. Here’s the grade breakdown:

1. Attendance and Active Participation (20%)
   a. Attendance in this class is mandatory; please come to both lectures and Friday discussion sections with an open mind, with ideas to share, and with annotated readings handy.
   b. You are required to post one discussion question based on the readings each week at Learn@UW by Thursday at 8 pm. Discussion questions are an opportunity for you to identify issues raised in the readings that you would like to discuss further in class. Please be prepared to address your own question and those of your classmates.

2. Short paper (5 pages) on Zola, Due Monday, February 29 (20%)

3. In Class Midterm, March 16, Essay and Identifications (15%)

4. Short research paper (6 pages) or creative project. Due Monday, April 25 (25%)
   a. You will develop a historical research question related to a course theme. You can choose to investigate this question through a traditional research paper or a creative project decided on with the instructor. (Ideas could include a blog, short story, advertisement, lesson plan, short film, etc.) Details to follow.
   b. Draft of research question, proposed format, and a short research bibliography. Due Monday, April 4 (5%)
   c. Completed 6 page paper. Due April 25 (20%)

5. Final Exam: Tuesday, May 10, 2:45-4:45, Essays and Identifications (20%)

Need Writing Help?
The History Lab is a new resource center where experts (PhD students) will assist you with your history papers. No matter your stage in the writing process—choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts—the History Lab staff is here, along with your professors and teaching assistants, to help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Sign up for a one-on-one consultation online: http://go.wisc.edu/hlab

Books to Purchase:
Please obtain the Penguin Classics edition (either 2001 or 2010), so we can all be on the same page.

The rest of the readings will be included in the course reader, which can be purchased at the L & S Copy Center. I will also upload all readings at Learn @ UW, but you are required to bring a physical copy to class.

Class Schedule:

Week one: (Jan 20, 22) Introduction
Wed: Introduction and Organization
Fri: Activity: “Twenty Questions to Ask an Object”
Reading:

Part I: Nineteenth-Century Capitalism and Commodity Culture

**Week Two: (Jan. 25, 27, 29) Industrial Capitalism, Labor, and Society**
Mon: The Industrial R(evolution)
Weds: Time, Discipline, and Productivity
Fri: Discussion
Reading:


**Week Three: (Feb. 1, 3, 5) Bourgeois Consumer Culture**
Mon: Taste, Conspicuous Consumption, and the Bourgeois home
Weds: The Department Store
Fri: Discussion
Reading:
Zola, Au Bonheur des Dames (1883), pp. 3 - 149.

**Week Four: (Feb. 8, 10, 12) Urbanization and Early Mass Spectacle**
Mon: Haussmann and Urban Development
Weds: World’s Fairs
Fri: Discussion
Reading:
Zola, Au Bonheur des Dames (1883), pp. 150- 265.

Before Friday discussion section, take a few minutes to look over the London School of Economics’ interactive version of Charles Booth’s 1898-99 Poverty Map of London: http://phone.booth.lse.ac.uk/. Compare and contrast the 1900s map to the contemporary poverty map of London that can be overlaid. What areas have changed or remained the same?

**Week Five: (Feb. 15, 17, 19) Gender and Commodities**
Mon: Women as Consumers and Consumed: Kleptomania and Prostitution
Weds: Masculinity and Commodities: Flaneurs, Dandies, and Collectors
Fri: Discussion
Reading:
Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), pp. 266 - 421


**Week Six: (Feb 22, 24, 26)** Race, Colonialism, and Commodity Culture  
Mon: The New Imperialism and Commercial Trade  
Weds: Race and Advertising  
Fri: Discussion  
Readings:  
Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden” (1899)


I will upload a link to several advertisements on Learn @ UW. Spend some time noting how they depict race, imperialism, and commodities and come to class prepared to discuss.

**Part II: Mass Production and Mass Culture**

**Week Seven: (Feb 29, Mar. 2, 4)** Commodities and World War I  
Monday, Feb 29 FIRST PAPER DUE  
Mon: Food, Scarcity, and Industry on the Home Front  
Weds: History of the Trench Coat  
Fri: No Discussion. (I will be at an academic conference.) Please prepare to discuss readings in class Wednesday.  
Readings:  


**Week Eight: (Mar. 7, 9, 11)** Taylorism and Fordism  
Mon: The Automobile in Europe  
Weds: Taylorizing the Domestic Sphere  
Fri: Discussion  
Readings:  


I will upload several European car advertisements on Learn @ UW. Consider how they depict themes such as gender, class, and nation, come to class ready to discuss them.

**Week Nine: (Mar. 14, 16, 18)** Mass Culture and the Modern City
Mon: Jazz, Cabaret, and Film Culture in the City
Weds: MIDTERM in class
Fri: Frankfurt School and Critiques of the “Culture Industry” (Lecture/Discussion)
Readings:


Mar 19 – 27 Spring Break

Week Ten: (Mar. 28, 30, Apr. 1) Transnational Commodity Encounters, WWII
Mon: Cosmetics, Fashion, and the “Modern Woman”
Weds: American GIs & Hersey’s Chocolate: WWII and Commodity Encounters
Fri: Discussion
Reading:


Part III: Emergence of a Mass Consumer Society

Week Eleven: (Apr. 4, 6, 8) Rebuilding Homes, Rebuilding Nations
Draft of Research Question and Bibliography for Second Paper, Due Monday, April 4
Mon: The Marshall Plan and Reconstruction
Weds: Making the Modern Home
Fri: Discussion
Reading:

Week Twelve: (Apr. 11, 13, 15) Mass Consumption in the East?
Mon: Plastics Industry and the GDR
Weds: Khrushchev’s Thaw and Commodities in the Cold War Context
Fri: Discussion
Reading:

Week Thirteen: (Apr. 18, 20, 22) Youth and Leisure Cultures
Mon: Mass Vacationing
Weds: Postwar Youth Culture
Fri: Discussion

Readings:


Mon: May 68
Second Paper or Project Due, Monday April 25
Weds: The Green Movement and the Environment
Fri: Discussion
Reading:
Guy Debord, “Territorial Domination” in Society and Spectacle (1967), 53- 56


Look over this list of Graffiti written during the May 68 protests. Instead of a discussion question this week, select two phrases and identify how they relate to commodity culture in a few sentences at Learn@UW.
http://www.bopsecrets.org/CF/graffiti.htm

Week Fifteen: (May 2, 4, 6) Fall of Communism and Americanization
Weds: Triumph of Western Capitalism?: Commodities and Nostalgia in post-1989 Eastern Europe
Mon: Americanization: Homogenization or Hybridity?
Fri: Discussion
Reading:


Exam: Tuesday, May 10, 2:45 – 4:45