

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:

- Craft historical questions that contribute to effective and engaging class discussions;
- Understand and communicate the basic arguments put forward by historians in their texts, as well as discuss and critique those arguments;
- Identify how primary sources can help us to answer particular historical questions and the ways in which their usefulness is limited;
- Communicate ideas clearly in written and oral form;
- 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:

Émile Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (The Lady's Delight) (London & New York: Penguin Books, 2010)

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

Weds: Introduction and Organization

Fri: Activity: “Twenty Questions to Ask an Object”

Reading:

Roberta Sassatelli, “Born to Consume” in *Consumer Culture: History, Theory, and Politics* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007), 1-6.

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:

E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present* 38 (Dec., 1967): 56-97.

“Rules of a Berlin Factory (1844)” in Katharine Lualdi, *Sources of The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures, Vol. 2: Since 1500*, Fourth Edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2012), 312-313.

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.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, M.A. & London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 15-16.

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

Michael Ryan, "Prostitution in London" (1839), 45 – 49, 173 – 174.

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)

Edward Said, "Introduction," *Orientalism*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978), 9-36.

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:

Belinda Davis, "Bread, Cake, and Just Deserts," in *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 24-47.

Laura Lee Downs, "War and the Rationalization of Work," in *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 15– 46.

Week Eight: (Mar. 7, 9, 11) Taylorism and Fordism

Mon: The Automobile in Europe

Weds: Taylorizing the Domestic Sphere

Fri: Discussion

Readings:

Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," In *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, edited by David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 275- 282, 286-296.

Jodi Kantor and David Steitfeld, "Inside Amazon: Wrestling Big Ideas in a Bruising Workplace," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2015.

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:

Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament* (1927) (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75-86, 323-328.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1988), 120-144.

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:

The Modern Girl Research Group, “Cosmetics Advertising and the Politics of Race and Style,” in *The Modern Girl Around the World*, edited by Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn Thomas et al. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 25-54.

Mary Louise Roberts, “Making Friends,” in *D-Day Through French Eyes: Normandy 1944* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 161 – 183.

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:

Film: Jacques Tati, *Mon Oncle* (1958) available via L & S Learning Support Services.

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:

Jukka Gronow and Sergei Zhuravlev, “Soviet Luxuries from Champagne to Private Cars,” In *Pleasures in Socialism*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, (Northwestern University Press, 2010), 121-146.

Ina Merkal, “Consumer Culture and the GDR, or How the Struggle for Antimodernity Was Lost on the Battleground of Consumer Culture,” in *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth-Century*, edited by Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 281 – 299.

Week Thirteen: (Apr. 18, 20, 22) Youth and Leisure Cultures

Mon: Mass Vacationing
 Weds: Postwar Youth Culture
 Fri: Discussion

Readings:

Uta Poiger, “Presley, Yes—Ulbrich, No? Rock ‘n’ Roll and Female Sexuality in the German Cold War,” in *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 168-205.

Heike Jenss, “60s Fashion and Youth Culture” in *Fashioning Memory: Vintage Style and Youth Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 37 – 64.

Week Fourteen: (Apr. 25, 27, 29) Towards a Throw-Away Culture? Anti-Consumerist Movements in Europe.

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

Lauren Collins, “House Perfect: Is the Ikea Ethos Comfy or Creepy?” *The New Yorker*, October 3, 2011.

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:

Richard Kuisel, “Chapter 4: The Adventures of Mickey Mouse, Big Mac, and Coke in the Land of the Gauls,” in *The French Way: How France Embraced and Rejected American Values and Power* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 151-208.

Slavenka Drakulic, *Café Europa: Life After Communism* (First Published 1996) (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 6-13, 69 – 78, 109 – 117, 195 – 203.

Exam: Tuesday, May 10, 2:45 – 4:45