

History 3231

Creating the American Consumer

Course Description

This course will examine the rise of consumer culture as a primary source of American identity. Consumerism emerged in response to economic, demographic, and cultural changes that first appeared in colonial society and increased dramatically over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The expanded capacity of the American manufacturing sector during this time meant an astonishing increase in the output of goods. The producers of these items needed new markets to sell their products, which led to the expansion of the advertising, marketing and retail industries. They needed improved transportation and communication capabilities to facilitate these sales. A national media network based on newspaper syndicates, magazines and eventually radio emerged at least partially in response to that need. The manufacturers also required workers, and they drew their employees both from rural areas of the United States and from overseas. These new urban dwellers created cultures based on both their traditional values and their changing interests and needs. Institutions such as dance halls, vaudeville theaters and motion picture houses arose as a part of these new cultures. The incorporation and bureaucratization of the economy also created a situation in which most Americans now worked as employees rather than as independent merchants or laborers. As a result, many Americans began to measure themselves not by where they worked or what they produced but by the things they owned, the places they lived and the resorts where they vacationed.

We will examine the degree to which the needs and interests of the marketplace permeated the lives of Americans. The rise of cultures based on consumption changed the roles of men, women and children both within their families and in the larger society. Class and race also affected the impact of these social changes on their daily lives. Some Americans viewed these changes as a blessing and others saw them as a curse. Most people, of course, found both benefits and drawbacks in these cultural shifts. We will make our own assessments as we investigate the origins of our own media-based, celebrity-oriented culture.

Readings:

All of the books below are available for purchase in the University bookstore and on reserve at Smith Library. In addition, you may receive supplementary materials either as handouts, e-reserves, or links to materials on the web.

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*

Erik Larson, *The Devil and the White City*

William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture*

Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store*

L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*
Brian Ingrassia, *The Rise of Gridiron University*
Carl Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven*

Course Requirements:

1. **Professional Engagement:** All students in this class are expected to conduct themselves in a mature and professional manner. Your professional engagement in this class will be assessed based on the following criteria:
 - a. **Attendance:** In order to succeed in this class, you must be present at nearly all of the class sessions. Habitual absenteeism negatively impacts both you and your classmates. Consequently, I have a strict attendance policy in my class. You are allowed two absences over the course of the semester. The university makes no distinction between excused and unexcused absences, and leaving class early or arriving more than 5 minutes late counts as an absence. After these two absences, you will receive a 1/3 of a grade penalty on your professional engagement grade for every additional absence. If this attendance policy will be a problem for you, come see me **IN ADVANCE**. I will not consider explanations or requests for leniency after the fact.
 - b. **Participation:** Students are expected to be active participants in this course. This means you must complete all reading assignments in a timely fashion, and come to class prepared to engage your fellow classmates in a lively discussion. In addition, on a rotating basis students will be “on call,” which means they will produce questions for the day’s class discussions and assist me in leading those discussions. Your performance in the classroom will serve as the primary basis for your professional engagement grade.
 - c. **Professional Conduct:** I expect all students in this class to treat their classmates, me, and anyone else who becomes involved with the class in a mature and respectful manner inside and out of the classroom. That means turning off all handheld electronic devices for the duration of our class periods; if students fail to do so, I will require everyone to drop such devices at the front of the room at the beginning of class. As a general rule, I will not allow the use of laptops in class; if you have a particular reason why you need to use your laptop, you may ask for permission. Holding private conversations during the class is also unacceptable. Students who violate these standards of behavior will receive a significant penalty in their class participation grade.

Outside the classroom, professional conduct means addressing class-related e-mails in a respectful fashion. When writing to me or to other men or women who are not your peers, please address the person by their title (Dr. Ringel, Dean Stoneking, Mr. or Ms. Smith) and be sure to spell their name correctly. If the e-mail is requesting their assistance in writing or in person, please give them a reasonable amount of time to fulfill the request, recognizing that they have multiple other obligations beyond working with you. When dealing with me, requests that are not made in such a timely fashion will not be honored, absent exceptional circumstances.

2. **Writing Assignments:** Students will write take-home essays for their midterm and final exams; details on these exams will be forthcoming, but they will focus on students' ability to write essays that establish that they have done the required reading and viewing for the class and that they have the ability to consider these texts critically in response to class discussions. In addition, students will write a 3000-3500 word research essay on a pre- WWII consumer product of their choosing. In order to guide you toward a successful completion of this assignment, I will require you to complete a series of preliminary assignments, including an abstract, an annotated bibliography, an outline, and a work-in-progress, all of which will be incorporated into your final grade for the assignment. I will provide you with guidelines for each of these assignments during the first two weeks of the semester.

I expect my students to be able to construct coherent arguments and to express themselves in clear, grammatically correct English. If you struggle with writing, I suggest you contact the HPU Writing Center, located on the fourth floor of Smith Library. The Writing Center provides writing assistance at any stage in the writing process, from invention through revision, for students at all levels, from freshman to graduate. The Center is staffed by student writing consultants and will be open Sunday through Thursday from 1:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., starting Tuesday, September 6th. Appointments for twenty-five or fifty-minute sessions may be made on the fourth floor of Smith Library at the Grades First kiosk using an HPU Passport or student ID number. Consultants at the Writing Center do not proofread or edit students' papers for them, but they do work with students to help them develop strategies for improving their writing in light of their respective assignments, instructors, and personal writing styles. For more information, please visit the Writing Center in 430 Smith Library, or contact the Center's Faculty Coordinator, Dr. Joe Goeke, at jgoeke0@highpoint.edu or (336) 841-9633.

3. **Research Presentations:** All students in this class will produce a 10-15 minute presentation of their research. Everyone will be required to submit their research abstract to BIGSURS 2013 and, if accepted, present their work during that conference, which will be held on the HPU campus April 5-6. If the abstract is not

accepted, students will not be penalized but will still be required to present their work to a university audience at a time to be determined in April or during exam period.

4. **Optional Assignments:** In addition to the required assignments listed above, students will also have the opportunity to complete two optional assignments. These assignments are a great way to improve your grade while learning about some of the other avenues historians pursue when attempting to do research or present their work:
 - a. **Oral History Interview:** HPU has an oral history project that allows students to interview local community members on a variety of topics and then preserve their interviews in audio and written form on a university website. Students who undertake this assignment will find a local citizen to interview on a consumer-culture related topic (subject to approval by me), conduct and transcribe the interview, and write a short response paper that explores the process and what the student learned from it. Deadlines for this project are listed below.
 - b. **Animated Film Project:** Students may have the opportunity to work with students from Professor Lambert's Motion Graphics class on a short (approx. 2 minute) animated film on an approved consumer culture topic. Students who undertake this assignment would write a script for the film during the first half of the semester and then serve in a supporting yet collaborative role with the motion graphics students who would transform the script into a film during the second half of the semester. Deadlines for this project are also listed below.
5. **Grading and Assessment:** The final grade will be computed from a weighted average of the individual grades you earn for your class participation (including your questions submitted to the class website), written assignments, and exams. Your class participation will be determined both from the quality and quantity of contributions to the class.

The course requirements will be weighted as follows in determining your final grade for the course:

Take-Home Midterm	10%
Take Home Final	20%
Research Paper (including all assignments)	40%
Paper Presentation	10%
Professional Engagement	20%

Optional Extra Credit Assignments

Oral History Interview	25%
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6. The Fine Print

- a. This syllabus is a road map for this class but it is not set in stone. I reserve the right to make changes in the syllabus with proper advance notice given to you.
- b. You must complete all assignments to receive a passing grade.
- c. All papers are due at the times stated below. You must submit papers electronically. All responsibility for technical problems such as e-mails not received by me lies with you. Late papers will automatically be marked down 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late (the first day begins at the time they are due and weekend days count) unless you have written documentation from your advisor, an academic Dean, or from University medical services. Computer problems are **never** an acceptable excuse for late work.
- d. Students are responsible for checking their High Point University e-mail addresses regularly for information regarding this course. Failure to check this e-mail address is not an acceptable excuse for missing notifications about changes in assignments or deadlines for this class.
- e. If you have a question about a grade you receive on a paper, test, or for the course, please come to my office hours or make an appointment. I will not discuss grades over the phone or e-mail. However, I am happy to discuss questions about the course material via e-mail.
- f. Academic Honesty: The work you submit for this course should be completely and solely your own. This means that any and all quotations from the words and thoughts of others must be appropriately acknowledged in your assignments. To do anything less is stealing. If you have any questions about plagiarism, please talk to me about them in advance. I will be happy to help you sort through any confusion. Any evidence that you have failed to follow these rules will be immediately and thoroughly investigated, and any violations of the honor code will be submitted to the Honor Court. Be forewarned: I consider cheating to be a very serious and utterly avoidable offense. Expect no leniency from me in cases of suspected cheating/plagiarism.
- g.. Students with Disabilities: Students who require classroom accommodations due to a diagnosed disability must submit the appropriate documentation to Disability Support in the Office of Academic Development, 4th Floor Smith Library. Student's need for accommodations must be made at the beginning of a course. Accommodations are not retroactive.

Class Schedule

Jan 7	Introduction
Jan 9	Material Culture and History Reading: <i>The Mansion of Happiness</i> (Bb)
Jan 11	Consumer Culture in the Colonial Period

Reading: *Journey of Madam Knight* (Bb)
Gentlemen's Progress: The Itinerarium of Alexander Hamilton (Bb)

Jan 14 Consumer Culture and the Revolution
Reading: *The Marketplace of Revolution*, Intro and Chapter 1 (Bb)

Jan 16-18 The Rise of Marketing and Public Amusements
Reading: P.T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs* (Bb)

Jan 21 MLK Day- No Class

Jan 23 The Astor Place Riot and The Rise of Highbrow and Lowbrow Cultures
Reading: *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (Bb)

Jan 18 Selection of Topic for Optional Animated Film Project (submitted via e-mail) by 5 pm

Jan 25-28 The Gilded Age: Consumer Actions and Reactions
Reading: Mark Twain, *The Gilded Age* (Bb); *Looking Backward*

Jan 25 Submit Abstract for Research Paper to me and to BIGSURS 2013 (<http://www.highpoint.edu/bigsur2013/abstract-submissions/>) by midnight

Jan 30- Feb 4 The Dangers and Joys of Urban Consumer Culture in the Late 1800s
Reading: *Devil and the White City*

Feb 1 Deadline to Commit to Oral History Interview Project (submitted via e-mail) by 5 pm

Feb 6-11 The Rise of Department Stores
Reading: *Land of Desire*

Feb 7 Annotated Bibliography Due by 5 pm

Feb 13- Feb 18 Consumer Culture, Shopping, and Femininity
Reading: *When Ladies Go A-Thieving*

Feb 15 Take-Home Midterm Assignment Posted by 5 pm

Feb 20-22 Children and Consumerism
Reading: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

Feb 21 Research Paper Outline Due by 5 pm

Feb 25 Interpretations of Oz, Part I: Consumer Culture and Religion
Reading: *Land of Desire*

Feb 27 Interpretations of Oz, Part II: Consumer Culture and Foreign Policy
Reading: "The Wizard of Oz as Monetary Allegory" (JSTOR)

Mar 1 **Take-Home Midterm Assignment Due at 5 pm**
Final Script for Optional Animated Film Project due by 5 pm
Arrangement of Oral History Interview (confirmation submitted via e-mail) by 5 pm

Mar 4, 6 & 8 Spring Break- No Class

Mar 11-15 Electric Dreamlands
Reading: *Electric Dreamland*

Mar 18-25 Consumer Culture, Sports, and Masculinity
Reading: *The Rise of Gridiron University: The Glory of Their Times* (Bb)

Mar 19 Research Paper Work-In-Progress Assignment Due by 5 pm

Mar 27 Consumer Culture, Race, and Masculinity
Reading: *Manliness and Civilization* (Bb)

Mar 29 Good Friday- No Class

Apr 1 Easter Monday- No Class
Completion of Oral History Interview by 5 pm

Apr 3-8 The Harlem Renaissance
Reading: *Nigger Heaven*

April 4 Research Paper Due by 5 pm

Apr 10 -12 Consumer Culture in Middle America
Reading: *Middletown* (Bb); *Land of Desire*

Apr 11 Take-Home Final Assignment Posted by 12 pm

Apr 15-17 The Jazz Age
Reading: F. Scott Fitzgerald stories (Bb)

Apr 15 **Submission of Recorded and Transcribed Interview and Interview Response Paper by 5 pm**

Apr 18 Optional Revision of Research Paper Due by 5 pm

Apr 19-22 The Depression and its Impact on Consumer Culture
Reading: *Land of Desire*; *The Rise of Gridiron University*

Apr 25 **Final Exam Period, 12-3 pm**
Take-Home Final assignment Due at 12 pm