HI 475
American Consumer History

Thursday, 12:30-3:30 pm
226 Bay State Rd. Rm. 304

In this colloquium you will become acquainted with a relatively new field of study, the history of consumer society in modern America. Although we will briefly consider the roots of American commercialism, consumer culture was so transformed in the late nineteenth century that the primary focus of the course will be on the period between 1880 and the present. We will begin with an analysis of historians’ debates about when consumer culture emerged, followed by an investigation of the differences between pre-industrial and industrial consumer society, and then move on to a more in-depth study of the “all-consuming” 20th century and beyond. Topics include the development and rise of national markets, product brands, department stores and shopping malls, advertising and commercial amusements as well as explorations that address the relationship of consumerism to gender, age, race, ethnicity, social class and religion. Throughout the course, we will also examine critiques of consumer culture and the history of consumer politics.

Required Books:
Lawrence Glickman, ed. Consumer Society in American History: A Reader (1999)
John Kasson, Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century (1978)

Required books can be purchased at the BU Barnes and Noble Bookstore and are on reserve at Mugar Library. Assigned articles, book excerpts and other documents are available through:
(1) our Blackboard website or
(2) Mugar Library electronic course reserves: www.bu.edu/library/bi/reserve/index.html
Password: hi475 (all lowercase letters)
*These readings are listed on the syllabus with (reserve) written after them.
Course Requirements:

Class participation
The primary aims of the course are to teach you how to conduct close analytical readings of the assigned works as well as to familiarize you with the historical scholarship in this field. The colloquium format demands that you be well prepared for class. Be sure to complete all of the required reading before coming to class each week. Participation in discussion is essential and, thus, attendance is mandatory. If you absolutely must miss a class (serious illness or family emergency), you should get in touch with me (preferably in advance) to work out an acceptable way to make up the missed work. (Attendance and participation in class counts for 15% of your grade)

Papers
1. 10 Response Papers
   2-page responses to the week’s topic. These must be turned in at the beginning of class. No late papers will be accepted. Often you will be asked to respond to the week’s readings. The exact response topic will be announced in class and posted on the website the week before it is due. (30%)

2. Each student will select a different book from a list I will provide and write a 4-6 page review of the book that emphasizes how it adds to our understanding of American consumer culture. Students will share their findings with the rest of the class in brief presentations. (20%)

3. A 10-page essay using secondary sources from our required reading to analyze primary source material that you have researched. Due in my mailbox by 3 pm on Wednesday, May 2 (35%)

You will receive further instructions in class concerning the book review and 10-page paper assignments.

Academic Integrity
Please review the CAS policy on plagiarism in the Academic Conduct Code: http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/
It is essential to cite all sources in your writing, and, of course, to turn in only your own, original work.
CLASS SCHEDULE

Jan. 19  Introduction: The Historical Study of Consumer Culture

Jan. 26  The Roots of American Consumer Society
Readings:
- Glickman: 1-32 & 85-129
Due: Response Paper #1

Feb. 2   Advertising and Branding
Readings:
Screening: The Ad and the Ego (Part I)
Due: Response Paper #2

Feb. 9   The Rise of the Department Store
Readings:
- Leach, Land of Desire
- Annie Marion MacLean, “Two Weeks in Department Stores,” The American Journal of Sociology Vol. IV, No. 6 (May, 1899): 721-741
- “Rules and Regulations for the Siegel and Cooper Employees”
Due: Response Paper #3

Feb. 16  Gender and Modernity
Readings:
- Glickman: 207-240

Screening: The Kleptomaniac
Due: Response Paper #4

Feb. 23          The Buying and Selling of American Holidays
Reading: Schmidt, Consumer Rites
Due: Response Paper #5

March 1          Race, Ethnicity and the Consumer I
Readings:
• Glickman: 170-206
• Lawrence Glickman, “Inventing the American Standard of Living: Gender, Race and Working-Class Identity, 1880-1925,” Labor History (Spring-Summer 1993): 221-234

March 8          Commercialized Leisure
Readings:
• Kasson, Amusing the Million;
Watch (before class): Coney Island   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoKxgzeKebU
Due: Response Paper #6

March 15         No Class (Spring Break)

March 22         Race, Ethnicity and the Consumer II
Readings:
• Glickman: 241-273 & 316-325
Due: Response Paper #7

March 29         Born to Buy
Readings:
• Lisa Jacobson, Introduction and Chapter One, “‘Big Sales from Little Folks’: The Development of Juvenile Advertising” and Chapter 3, “Heroes of the New Consumer
April 5  Consuming Place
Readings:
Due: Response Paper #9

April 12  The Politics of Mass Consumption
Reading:
- Cohen, A Consumers’ Republic
Due: Response Paper #10

April 19  The Abundance of Post-World War II America
Readings:
- Glickman: 298-315
Screening: Tupperware!

April 26  Shop ‘til You Drop: Rethinking Consumerism
Readings:
- Glickman: 341-372
- Kalle Lasn, Culture Jam (1999): xi-xvii, 3-27, 72-83, 123-127 (reserve)

FINAL 10-PAGE PAPER DUE IN MY MAILBOX WEDNESDAY MAY 2 BY 3 P.M.