

History 483
**CONSUMERISM AND THE WORLD OF GOODS IN EIGHTEENTH- AND
NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH AMERICA**
Spring 2010

Vivian Bruce Conger
Office Hours: TR 10:00-12:00 and 1:00-3:00
Or by appointment

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Course Description

This seminar is an exploration of material culture in the colonial, revolutionary periods, and antebellum periods. It will explore the English background before moving on to tracing the transition from production to consumption in early America. It will examine how the ability of capitalism to shape taste, fashion, architecture, material culture, and even manners led to “a refinement of America.” It will explore the meaning of consumption to both the genteel and ordinary folk, the purposes that consumption served, and the systems of value in which consumption was embedded. It will also study how consumerism created as well as reflected moral ideologies and political attitudes as old structures were first subverted and then radically modified.

Required Readings

I have put these on course reserve (with the exception of *Luxury and Pleasure*—it is on order and hopefully it will be processed in time). The *Marketplace of Revolution* and *The Invention of Comfort* are also available as e-books.

Allgor, Catherine. *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation*

Berg, Maxine. *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*

Breen, T. H., *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*

Bushman, Richard L., *The Refinement of American: Persons, Houses, Cities,*

Crowley, John E., *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Britain and Early America*

Shields, David S. *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*

Articles on course reserve (as noted below)

Articles posted on Blackboard (as noted below)

Grading

Attendance and class participation	35%
Leading class discussion	15%
Research paper	50%

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and **ACTIVE participation in class discussions**. I grade attendance. You will receive one graded level lower for every class you miss (i.e., if you miss one class, your attendance grade will be A-, if you miss two classes, your attendance grade will be B+, and so on). I will be keeping track of those who contribute in a meaningful way to the discussion every week, so if you know you feel uncomfortable talking in front of the class, please see me as soon as possible and I will work out an alternate way that you will be graded on this aspect of the course.

WRITING IS THINKING. You will be doing freewriting, freethinking, and reflection on a regular basis. At least in part, this where you will develop and affirm your own voice. You will have a record of your thoughts and feelings—ideas to interact with and to build on. Not only will journaling help you write your final papers, but it will help make those papers better products of your learning. I will not grade these journals, but at the end of the semester you will read back over all your journals entries. You will select two entries to photocopy for me. Then you will type a one-page reflection on why each was an important entry for you. I will assess these “meta reflections” by seeing how much you refer to the text itself—that is, to quotes from your own journal related to course content or to something learned in the course. I will also look for whether you’ve been critical of your own work, and whether (and where) you see your own growth. Please keep your journal in a spiral binder. You **must** bring that binder with you to class every week.

2. Two students will lead the discussion on assigned weeks. (**I will lead discussions on 2/2, 2/9—even though it is my wedding anniversary, 3/23, and 4/13**). When it is your week to lead the discussion, the two of you together **MUST** come in to see me ahead of time to discuss the questions you will ask. I will expect you to have read the assignment and to have thought about the issues you would like to explore and the questions you want to ask **BEFORE** you meet with me. You will be graded on this, and part of your grade will be determined by the discussion we have in my office (please note: you will **NOT** be held accountable for the unwillingness of fellow students to participate in the discussion.).

You can be creative; that is, class discussions don’t always have to entail all of us sitting around the table discussing the readings. You can set up debates, play devil’s advocate (create controversies), have small and large group discussions, design role-playing exercises, etc. But whatever you do, remember that you must cover the main arguments of the book as well as the large theoretical issues the readings raise about eighteenth-century consumer culture. At the end of each discussion, everyone should understand what the book was about and how the authors proved their points.

3. **At minimum**, a 25-page seminar paper based as much as possible on primary sources. The papers will be presented both orally and written the last three class periods. Fairly early in the semester I will ask you to commit to a date. If you need to change that date, **YOU** must find someone who would be willing to switch. You must e-mail me a copy of your paper by 5:00 p.m. the Friday prior to your Tuesday presentation. I will then send a copy of that paper to everyone in the class. **PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS REQUIRES EVERYONE TO MAKE SURE YOUR MAILBOXES WILL HAVE ENOUGH ROOM FOR THE PAPERS!** I will

accept no excuses for having not read the paper. Everyone will read the papers before they are presented (your comments on one another's papers will be factored into your discussion grade, so don't take this responsibility lightly). Your BRIEF oral presentation (remember everyone has read it) might address your thesis, why you asked the questions you did, the sources you used, and how you reached your conclusions. You might also talk about problems you had and are still having—this is a great opportunity to get the group to help you with your project. You will be expected to revise your paper based on in-class and written comments on your paper. I will generally leave the in-class discussion to the group and will make most of my comments on the draft. I do not grade preliminary versions, but in assigning the final grade on the project, I will take into consideration whether you met various deadlines (see below), the quality of the first version, your oral presentation, and the effort you made toward revising the project.

A one-page research prospectus that describes the topic, takes a thoughtful look at initial assumptions, details research questions, and list at least two secondary sources and two primary sources is due on **Monday, February 15**. NOTE: You MUST consult with me before you decide on your topic. Don't put it off until the last minute. I want to have a productive conversation with you about what you might want to do. Come to this meeting well prepared. To help you with your search for a topic, be sure to look over the reading list for this class, look at the complete table of contents for: *Consumption and the World of Goods* (on course reserve), *Of Consuming Interests* (I will pass this out in class), and *Material life in America, 1600-1860* (on course reserve). Also look at this deep and rich on-line resource:

[Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture](http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts)

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts>

For years, those wanting to examine historical artifacts closely had two options. They could travel to the appropriate museums and view the objects from a distance or study small pictures in exhibition catalogues. With its online visual database, this site presents an efficient and powerful alternative for exhibiting artifacts. Part of the University of Wisconsin's series of digital collections, the library provides a digitized record of seventeenth- through nineteenth-century Anglo-American ceramics, furniture, and prints. The quality of the images and the multiple views are particularly notable. The result is an accessible and engaging model for the online presentation of historical objects. [Read full review.](#)

Think about what interests you—you will have to like your topic; if not it will be a very long and miserable semester. Brainstorm—write down lots of ideas.

A more extensive bibliography is due on **Monday, March 1**. A preliminary outline and your penultimate bibliography are due **Tuesday, March 23**. A historiographical essay (the historiography that you will include in your paper), is due **Monday, April 5**. Please also note that you are required to come to my office to talk about your project at some point during this week. Your drafts are due according to the schedule below (I'll distribute sign up sheets on Tuesday, February 2). The final version of your paper (with my commented rough draft attached) is due no later than 4:00 p.m., Tuesday, May 11. Clearly this paper cannot be turned in electronically.

Assignments are to be submitted to me electronically on the day they are due.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES

- January 26 Introduction to course and in-class exercises
- February 2 Joyce C. Appleby, “Consumption in Early Modern Social Thought,” Chapter 8, *Consumption and the World of Goods* by John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., **COURSE RESERVE**
- Neil McKendrick, “The Consumer Revolution in Eighteenth-Century England,” Chapter 1, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Ann Smart Martin, “Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, 23 (Summer/Autumn, 1993), 141-157, **Access via JSTOR**
- David Steigerwald, “All Hail the Republic of Choice: Consumer History as Contemporary Thought,” *The Journal of American History*, September 2006, 385-413. **Access via History Cooperative**
- February 9 John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort*, “Introduction,” Part I (“Architectural Amenity”) and Part II (“From Luxury to Comfort”)
- February 15 Research Prospectus due—no later than 5:00 p.m.**
- February 16 Student-led discussion: Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Parts I and II
- February 23 Student-led discussion: Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Part III
- Karen Harvey, “Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *Gender & History*.
- Amanda Vickery, “His and Hers: Gender, Consumption and Household Accounting in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Past and Present* (2006), Supplement 1, **Access via JSTOR**
- March 1 More extensive bibliography due no later than 5:00 p.m.**

- March 2** Student-led discussion: Richard Bushman, *Refinement of America*, “Introduction” and Part I: Gentility, 1700-1790, Chapters 1-VI
- Timothy J. Shannon, “Dressing for Success on the Mohawk Frontier: Hendrick, William Johnson, and the Indian Fashion”
- March 9 Student-led discussion: David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*
- March 16** **NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK**
- March 23 T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*, Introduction, Chapter 1, and Part One: An Empire of Goods (Chapter 2-5)
- Preliminary outline and penultimate bibliography due**
- March 30 Student-led discussion: T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*, Part two: “A Commercial Plan for Political Salvation” (Chapters 6-8)
- I am not requiring it, but you might want to read T.H. Breen’s response to David Steigerwald (you read his article in the *JAH* several weeks ago—see the above citation. It is an interesting example of the give and take between scholars.**
- John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort*, Part III
- April 5** **Historiographical essay due no later than 5:00 p.m.**
- DURING THIS WEEK, YOU MUST COME TO MY OFFICE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR PROJECT!!**
- April 6 Student-led discussion: Richard Bushman, *Refinement of America*, Part II: Respectability, 1790-1850, Chapters VII-XII
- April 13 Catherine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation*
- April 16 Rough drafts for Group 1 due in my e-mail inbox by 5:00 p.m.
- April 20 **Paper presentations—Group 1**
- April 23 Rough drafts for Group 2 due in my e-mail inbox by 5:00 p.m.
- April 27 **Paper presentations—Group 2**

April 30 Rough drafts for Group 3 due in my e-mail inbox by 5:00 p.m.

May 4 **Paper presentations—Group 3**

**WE WILL ALSO CELEBRATE OUR HARD WORK AND
SUCCESSFUL SEMESTER—DETAILS TO BE WORKED OUT!**

**May 11 FINAL VERSION OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE NO LATER THAN
4:00 P.M. Note: you must attach my commented rough draft—if you
don't you will be graded on your rough draft.**