

HIS1522S Topics in 20th Century U.S. History: Transnational Commodity Culture

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University of Toronto • Winter, 2008

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class meets: W, 12-2

Sid Smith 2116

This seminar will investigate the global production, distribution, and consumption of mass-produced commodities that have been identified as “American” [i.e., U.S.] artifacts. Commodities will be interpreted broadly in this seminar, and will include both material artifacts (processed food, clothing, electronics) and formerly inalienable aspects of the self (emotions, style, sexuality). Students will address questions such as: How does nationalism frame the meaning of globally-circulating commodities through, for example, ‘buy American’ campaigns, or the antipathy towards U.S. products? What is the relationship between U.S. commercial hegemony on a global scale and U.S. imperialism? In the context of global production of mass-produced goods, how can consumer activism be sustained at the local level, with activists building social movements across national boundaries? Students will analyze the seminar’s keywords—‘culture,’ ‘commodity,’ and ‘transnational’—via introductory framing texts and will read a number of recent empirical works of late 19th and 20th century history.

Assignments and grading weights:

Response papers: each week, the majority of students will submit a short response paper to the class discussion list (on Blackboard). The papers/emails should be about 300-350 words in length, and are meant to be reflections or challenges to the main issues raised in the reading, with an emphasis on the book or articles’ argument(s) and evidence. (If the reading is especially dense, feel free to use this assignment to help you make sense of the content). These should be posted to the discussion list no later than 9 am on Wednesday morning, so that all of us can read them before class (please do post them earlier if you can). Also, it would be great if you can read the comments of your peers, and respond to them as well—either in the content of your small piece, or via a separate post. Please do *six* of these response papers, with one per week; you can choose which weeks you want to do, depending on your work schedule. You are welcome to incorporate or respond to other postings, en route to making your own claims or observations about the material. I won’t be marking these weekly (though I will be reading them). Instead, I will monitor the discussion and then provide feedback twice during the term: once in mid-semester, and once at the end. Aspects of the discussion on line will be incorporated into our seminar discussion.

Discussion Questions: students will sign up for two weeks in which they are responsible for generating a total of four discussion questions. These questions must be well crafted to prompt students to engage central themes, debates or methods in the scholarship for that week. It is recommended the questions, as a whole, cover the range of questions we’ll want to bring to the scholarship, including questions about analytic framework; argument; evidence; historiography; and historical themes. Students who write questions will also take responsibility to facilitate quality discussion that week. Your discussion will be co-directed by the two of you, and so you will need to meet with your partner in advance of the seminar in order to decide on the questions together, and how to get meaningful conversation going. Please print out the questions and bring 16 copies to seminar. You are welcome to shape your questions in relationship to the issues emerging on the Blackboard unfolding on Blackboard.

Final paper: This is a 8-10 page paper on a topic of your choice due at the end of the semester. Use this essay to analyze and historicize a bounded set of primary sources, or a specific transnational ‘text’. In other words, the main focus is to select, analyze, and historicize primary source text(s), possible in transnational circulation. Please note that this page length is typical for a 20-25 minute conference paper, and so I would encourage you to conceptualize this assignment as a conference paper if this is of interest to you. Related to this assignment is the submission of a paper ‘abstract’ of 350 words, due in class on March 26th. I encourage you to discuss your ideas with me in office hours, some time before mid-March. The papers are due by 5 pm on Monday, April 21st in my box in the Munk Centre (South house reception). I will distribute a handout in class with further guidelines/pointers etc for these related assignments.

Participation: is required for the course. Please come to each class meeting having done all the reading.

Grading weights: response papers, 20%; discussion questions, 20%; final paper 40%; participation, 20%.

Texts, available at Toronto Women’s Bookstore, Harbord Street:

Kristen L. Hoganson *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (UNCP, 2007).

Matthew Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The U.S. Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (Hill and Wang, 2000).

Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Mona Domosh, *American Commodities in the Age of Empire* (Routledge, 2006)

Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance Through 20th Century Europe* (Harvard 2005).

Christina Klein *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (UCaLP, 2003)

Penny Von Eschen *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard, 2004).

Vanessa Schwartz, *It’s So French!: Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago 2007)

Kathleen M. Barry, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants* (Duke 2007).

Articles marked by “•” are available in the course reader, which can be purchased from Quality Control Copy, 333 Bloor Street (a bit further west than the Bata Shoe Museum). Hours: Mon-Fri, 8:30 am-7:30 pm, Sat. 10:00-5:00. The course reader will be available for purchase after January 30th.

Week 1: Wed. Jan. 9, 2008: Introduction to the course

Week 2: Wed. Jan. 16, 2008: Gopher Prairie Cosmopolitanism

Kristen L. Hoganson *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (UNCP, 2007).

Week 3: Wed. Jan. 23, 2008: Exporting Goods; Importing People

Matthew Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The U.S. Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (Hill and Wang, 2000).

Week 4: Wed. Jan. 30, 2008: Popular Culture Abroad in the Gilded Age + Progressive Era
Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Week 5: Wed. Feb. 6, 2008: Analyzing Categories: 'Culture'

- Raymond Williams, 'The Analysis of Culture' (excerpt), from *The Long Revolution* (1961), 41-71 [emphasis on structures of feeling material]
- Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular,'" from R. Samuel (ed.), *Peoples History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1981), 227-40.
- Michael Denning, "The Socioanalysis of Culture: Rethinking the Cultural Turn," in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (Verso, 2004), 75-86.
- William H. Sewell, Jr., 'The Concept(s) of Culture,' from Victorian Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (UCal P, 1999), 1-35

Week 6: Wed. Feb. 13, 2008: 'Cultural Intermediaries'

Special seminar guest: Prof. Marlis Schweitzer, Dept. of Theatre, York University

- Pierre Bourdieu, 'Cultural Goodwill,' from *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge (1984), 318-371.
- Sean Nixon and Paul Du Gay, 'Who Needs Cultural Intermediaries?'" intro to special issue on cultural intermediaries from the journal *Cultural Studies*, 2002, 16:4, 495-500.
- Keith Negus, 'The Work of Cultural Intermediaries and the Enduring Distance Between Production and Consumption,' *Cultural Studies*, 16:4 (2002), 501-515.
- Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "Introduction," *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Hopkins, 2000), 1-13.
- Jennifer Scanlon, Mediators in the International Marketplace: U.S. Advertising in Latin America in the Early Twentieth Century, *The Business History Review* (2003, vol. 77 no. 3), 387-415.

--reading week—NB: the Victoria de Grazia book is quite long—nearly 500 pages—so please get a start on it over reading week if you can.

Week 8: Wed. Feb. 27, 2008: Empire, Hegemony, and Governmentality

Mona Domosh, *American Commodities in the Age of Empire* (Routledge, 2006). To make room for the two articles, below, please feel free to read only two of the three case study chapters in the Domosh book (Singer, McCormick, and Heinz); do make sure to read the final chapter.

- T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* vol. 90, no. 3 (June 1985), 567-593.
- Simon Gunn, "From Hegemony to Governmentality: Changing Conceptions of Power in Social History," *Journal of Social History* vol. 39, issue 3. Spring 2006, pp. 705-720.

Week 9: Wed. March 5, 2008: Imperium/Emporium: the U.S. as 'Market Empire'

Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through 20th Century Europe* (Harvard 2005).

Week 10: Wed. March 12, 2008: Analyzing Categories: 'Commodity'

- Karl Marx, "The Commodity," in *Capital*, vol. 1, 125-177 (Penguin classics edition, 1990)
- Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," originally published in Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*

(Cambridge UP, 1986), 3-63; but here, an excerpt from Martha M. Eatman and Joan C. Williams, eds., *Rethinking Commodification: Cases and Readings in Law and Culture* (NYU 2005), 34-35.

- Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy,' in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minnesota, 1996), 27-47

Week 11: Wed. March 19, 2008: **Culture and Cold War Internationalism**

Christina Klein *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (UCalP, 2003).

- Yunxiang Yan, 'McDonald's in Beijing: The Localization of Americana,' in James L. Watson, ed. *Golden Arches East: McDonalds in East Asia* (2nd edition, 2006), 39-76.

Week 12: Wed. March 26, 2008: **Race and Cold War Cultural Diplomacy**

Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard, 2004).

Due in class: 350 word abstract for your paper. I encourage you to conceptualize this as writing an abstract for a conference paper—especially papers that are using primary sources. Please go to the conference announcements part of H-Net at <http://www.h-net.org/announce/search.cgi> and find a conference that is of interest to you (and relates to your paper!). Preferably, the call for papers deadline would be later than this week, in case you want to actually submit an abstract. Submit your abstract to me, along with a copy of the call for papers (cfp). For more guidance on what a paper abstract is, please see the handout for the paper assignment, to be distributed in class.

Week 13: Wed. April 2, 2008: **Film and the Commodification of 'Frenchness'**

Vanessa Schwartz, *It's So French! Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago 2007)

Week 14: Wed. April 9, 2008: **Glamour as Transnational Service Labor**

Kathleen M. Barry, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants* (Duke 2007).

Paper Due: Monday, April 21, 5 pm, in my box at Munk Centre (south house reception).