

Soc 150b  
Brandeis University  
Spring 2009  
M W Th 12:10-1:00  
Pearlman 113

Laura Miller  
Office: Pearlman 103  
736-2643  
lamiller@brandeis.edu  
office hours: M 2:00-3:00  
W 1:00-2:00  
and by appointment

## **The Culture of Consumption**

Contemporary society is frequently characterized as a consumer society, a place where material goods and the process of accumulating those goods have become extremely important for individuals and the larger culture. This course will examine the development and significance of a culture of consumption. It will pay particular attention to the ongoing debate over whether consumption is a diversion from pressing social problems or a legitimate expression of popular pleasure. We will also consider how the current economic crisis may be affecting consumer culture. In the first few weeks of the course, we will examine the rise of commercialized leisure and the ways in which consumption patterns became marked by class and gender. The course will then lead into the contemporary era by exploring the significance of advertising and marketing for consumer culture. Finally, we will study how consumer culture gets expressed in various realms of everyday life.

The TA for this course is Nicky Fox (nsfox@brandeis.edu). Her office hours will be announced in class.

### **Requirements**

Students are expected to keep up with the readings, attend class regularly, and actively participate in discussions. In addition, you will complete two short papers covering readings and other course material, and a take-home final exam consisting of essay questions.

### **Evaluation**

First short paper (4-5 pages)	27%
Second short paper (5-6 pages)	33%
Take-home final	35%
Participation	5%

Students are expected to uphold standards of academic integrity. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use references and, where appropriate, quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, or ideas not your own -- whether they are found in written materials or on the Internet, and whether they are created by a published author, another student, or your parent. Violations of University policies on academic integrity may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. Students with questions about standards of academic integrity are advised to consult Section 4 of Rights and Responsibilities from the Brandeis Student Handbook and/or speak to me. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you

should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Academic Services at 736-3470 (brodgers@brandeis.edu). Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

The following books are available for purchase from the university bookstore:

William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1993].

These books are also on reserve at the main library.

The readings for weeks 1-3 are on the Latte site for this class. Look at the section titled "Readings."

All other readings are contained in a custom course packet. Information on how to purchase this will be announced in class.

There is also an area on Latte with links to organizations and other resources related to issues we will be discussing in class. This may be useful for those who would like to pursue these issues further, either during the course or sometime in the future. I may be adding to this site as the course progresses, so you may want to check it periodically.

## Course Schedule

week 1  
Jan 14-15

### **Introduction**

Gary Gardner, Erik Assadourian, and Radhika Sarin, "The State of Consumption Today." In Brian Halweil and Lisa Mastny, eds., *State of the World 2004: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004, pp. 3-21.

David Leonhardt, "Buying Binge Slams to a Halt." *New York Times* November 12, 2008, pp. A1, A20.

week 2  
Jan 20-22

### **Origins of Consumer Society**

Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1972, chap. 1.

Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*. London: Europa Publications, 1982, chap. 1.

Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, chap. 3.

week 3  
Jan 26-29

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Consumption**

Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York: Mentor, 1953 [originally published 1899], chap. 4.

Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964, pp. 1-12.

Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. London: Routledge, 1996, chap. 3.

Daniel Miller, "The Poverty of Morality." *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 1, No. 2, November 2001, pp. 225-243.

week 4  
Feb 2-5

### **Department Stores: Palaces of Consumption**

William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993, introduction, chaps. 3 & 5.

week 5  
Feb 9-12

### **The Growth of Commercialized Leisure**

David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1993], Introduction & chaps. 7-9, 11-12.

week 6  
Feb 23-26

### **Cold War Consumerism**

Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988, chap. 7.

Robert H. Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, chap. 2.

first short paper due Thursday, February 26th

week 7  
Mar 2-5

### **Advertising: Creating New Art or Creating New Needs?**

John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, fortieth anniversary edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998, chap. 11.

Joseph Turow, "Segmenting, Signalling and Tailoring: Probing the Dark Side of Target Marketing." In Robin Andersen and Lance Strate, eds., *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 239-249.

Mica Nava, *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*. London: Sage, 1992, chap. 9.

Michael Schudson, *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*. New York: Basic Books, 1986, chap. 7.

week 8  
Mar 9-12

### **Love and Romance for Sale**

Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, chaps. 1 & 2.

Elisabeth Eaves, "The Lap of Luxury." *New York Times* October 25, 2005, p. A29.

Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Commercialization of the Calendar: American Holidays and the Culture of Consumption, 1870-1930." *Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 3, December 1991, pp. 887-916.

week 9  
Mar 16-19

### **Children: Learning Consumer Culture**

Stephen Kline, "Toys, Socialization, and the Commodification of Play." In Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judd, eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 339-358.

Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993, chap. 4.

Juliet B. Schor, "The Commodification of Childhood: Tales from the Advertising Front Lines." *Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer, 2003, pp. 7-23.

Susan Bordo, "The Empire of Images in Our World of Bodies." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 19, 2003, pp. B6-B9.

toy show & tell

week 10  
Mar 23-26

### **Fashion: Class, Style, and Identity**

Leach, *Land of Desire*, chap. 4.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, Introduction.

Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, chap. 8.

Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, chap. 10.

week 11  
Mar 30-Apr 2

**Theme Parks and Themed Environments**

Susan G. Davis, "The Theme Park: Global Industry and Cultural Form." *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 18, No. 3, July 1996, pp. 399-422.

Scott A. Lukas, "Theming as a Sensory Phenomenon: Discovering the Sense on the Las Vegas Strip." In Scott A. Lucas, ed., *The Themed Space: Locating Culture, Nation, and Self*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007, pp. 75-95.

John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*. London: Routledge, 1998, chap. 5.

Noam Shoal, "Commodification and Theming of the Sacred: Changing Patterns of Tourist Consumption in the 'Holy Land'." In Mark Gottdiener, ed., *New Forms of Consumption: Consumers, Culture, and Commodification*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, pp. 251-263.

second short paper due Thursday, April 2nd

week 12  
Apr 6-8

**Shopping Malls and Other Retail Forms**

Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall." In Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York: Noonday Press, 1992, pp. 3-30.

Jeffrey S.P. Hopkins, "West Edmonton Mall: Landscape of Myths and Elsewheres." *Canadian Geographer*, Vol. 34, No. 1, Spring 1990, pp. 2-17.

Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2004, chap. 8.

week 13  
Apr 20-23

**Education: Consumers in the Classroom**

David F. Labaree, *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Race in American Education*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, chap. 1.

Jill J. McMillan and George Cheney, "The Student as Consumer: The Implications and Limitations of a Metaphor." *Communication Education*, Vol. 45, No. 1, January 1996, pp. 1-15.

Alex Molnar, *School Commercialism: From Democratic Ideal to Market Commodity*. New York: Routledge, 2005, chap. 2.

week 14  
Apr 27-29

**Ethical Consumption: From Consumer to Citizen**

C.B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, chap. 4.

Neal Ryan, "Reconstructing Citizens as Consumers: Implications for New Modes of Governance." *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 60, No. 3, September, 2001, pp. 104-109.

Kate Soper, "Rethinking the 'Good Life': The Consumer as Citizen." *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Vol. 15, No. 3, September 2004, pp. 111-116.

Alice Malpass, Clive Barnett, Nick Clarke, and Paul Cloke, "Problematizing Choice: Responsible Consumers and Sceptical Citizens." In Mark Bevir and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Governance, Consumers and Citizens*. Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 231-256.

Scott Clouder and Rob Harrison, "The Effectiveness of Ethical Consumer Behaviour." In Rob Harrison, Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw, eds., *The Ethical Consumer*. London: Sage, 2005, pp. 89-104.

Take-home final due Friday, May 1st (seniors)  
Wednesday, May 6th (all others)