European Consumer Society, 1700-present

Instructor Holly Grout
Email
Course Meeting
Office & Phone
Office Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Consumption (the process of producing, selling, and using commercial goods) has become so commonplace in late-modern Western cultures, that few of us question how or why we consume. Yet, consumption is not a natural phenomenon but a culturally constructed practice that has a rich and complicated history. This course explores the evolution of modern Europe's consumer society from the eighteenth century to the present to understand how changing patterns of consumption fostered new relationships between individuals and the material world. We will pay particular attention to how consumer society intersected with other important historical developments.

European consumer society evolved through three stages: the "birth of consumption;" the "bourgeois consumer society;" and the "mass consumer society." In the first part of the course, we examine the birth of consumption, a process that began with the dual industrial and political revolutions of the late-eighteenth-century. We start by defining major terms and by situating consumption in historical context. We then explore how the early modern marketplace, the luxury trades, and the industrial revolution set the stage for a fully-realized consumer society. In the second part of the course, we focus on the development of a "bourgeois" consumer society in the period between 1850 and 1920. We will investigate how the growth of cities, the ability to produce more products more quickly, and the advent of new retail outlets contributed to this society. We will also explore the different forms of consumption practiced by the middle classes and the cultural meanings attached to consumption. In the final part of the course, we will examine the mass consumer society that emerged in Europe in the 1920s. The primary focus of this unit will be on the political significance of consumption in the twentieth century. To this end, we will study the transformation of European markets during the Cold War, the democratization of the consumer market, and the influence of America on European culture, society, and everyday life.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To demonstrate the historical significance of consumer society by examining its connections to major themes in the history of Modern Europe
- To introduce students to the methods of social and cultural history
- To broaden student understanding of consumption by exploring different ways to consume and the meanings attached to them
- To provide students with a richer understanding of the everyday lives and practices of ordinary people
- To improve each student's ability to think critically and to apply critical thinking skills to historical texts

REQUIRED TEXTS

Charles Dickens,	*Hard Times* (1854)
Slavenka Drakulic,	*How we Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (NY: Harper, 1993)
Michael B. Miller,	*The Bon Marché:* Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920 (NJ: Princeton, 1981)
Thomas Richards,	*The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (CA: Stanford, 1990)
Emile Zola,	*The Ladies Paradise* (1883)
Course Reader	Available at the Humanities Copy Center (1st floor)

*Note: *The Making of the West,* a general textbook on European History from 1750-present, is on reserve at College Library. It may be useful if you have not taken History 120 prior to this course.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

1-pg Ad Assessment	due December 1st	(10%)
4-5 pg. Essay	due October 1st	(20%)
4-5 pg. Essay	due November 12th	(20%)
Midterm Exam	Friday, October 17th	(20%)
Final Exam	Sunday, December 14th	(25%)
Active participation/attendance/discussion questions		(5%)

COURSE POLICIES

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: The Birth of Consumer Society, 1700-1850

September 1-5: **Conceptions of the World of Goods**

Lecture 1: Labor Day (no class)

Lecture 2: Course Introduction

Lecture 3: Consumption in Historical Perspective and the Contested Meanings of Things

Readings: lgor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things," ®

Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, "Culture," "Consumer," ®

September 8-12: **The Early European Marketplace**

Lecture 1: From Subsistence to Comfort: The Family Economy in the 18th Century

Lecture 2: The World of Luxury

Discussion: Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*

Readings: Jones, "Coquettes and Grisettes: Women Buying and Selling in Ancien Regime Paris" ®

Smith, *Wealth of Nations* Sourcebook excerpts®

September 15-19: **European Industrialization**

Lecture 1: New Technologies and the Re-organization of Work

Lecture 2: Consumer Society in 18th-century England

Discussion: *Hard Times* (1st half) and Thompson

Readings: EP Thompson, "Time, Work, and Industrial Capitalism" pp. 56-97®

Dickens, *Hard Times* (1st half)

September 22-26: **The Fruits of Mechanized Labor**

Lecture 1: The Underside of Consumption: the Conditions of Labor

Lecture 2: Class Distinction: New Commodities and New Consumers

Discussion: *Hard Times* and Marx

Readings: Dickens, *Hard Times* (finish)

Marx, article on Commodity Fetishism®

Sept. 29-Oct. 3: **Building the Commercial Metropolis**

Lecture 1: European Urbanization

Lecture 2: New Merchant Environments

Discussion: Miller and Jordan

Readings: Miller, *Bon Marché* Ch 1, "New Stores," Ch 2: "Grand Magasin," and Ch 6. "Selling the Store"

Jordan, "Haussmann and "Haussmannisation": The Legacy of Paris"®

Essay due Wednesday, October 1st

October 6-10: **Revolutions in Retailing**

Lecture 1: The Birth of the Department Store & the Invention of Shopping

Lecture 2: Advertising

Discussion: *The Ladies' Paradise* (1st ½) and Rappaport

Readings: Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise* (begin)

Rappaport, "'The Halls of Temptation': Gender, Politics, and the Construction of the Department Store in Late Victorian England."®

UNIT 2: A Bourgeois Consumer Society, 1850-1920

October 13-17: **Popular Forms of Middle-Class Consumption**

Lecture 1: Collecting, Leisure, and Travel

Discussion: *The Ladies' Paradise* (2nd ½)

Midterm Exam Friday October 17th

Readings: Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise* (finish)

October 20-24: **Gender and Consumption**

Lecture 1: Conspicuous Consumption: representing the middle-class family

Lecture 2: The New Woman

Lecture 3: Consumption and Sexuality: the Kleptomaniac and the Prostitute

Readings: Veblen, "Conspicuous Consumption"®

Roberts, "Gender, Consumption and Commodity Culture"®

October 27-31: **Imperialism, Nationalism, and Consumption**

Discussion: Veblen and Roberts

Lecture 1: Nations, Nationalism, and Consumption

Lecture 2: Selling Europe Abroad: Empire and Orientalism

Readings: Richards, chapter 3 and 5

Breckman, "Disciplining Consumption: the Debate about Luxury in Wilhemine Germany, 1890-1914"®

November 3-7: **New Commodities and New Ways to Consume**

Lecture 1: Consuming at the World's Fair

Lecture 2: Case Studies: Fashion, Transportation, and Entertainment in the Early 20th C

Discussion: Moser and Schwartz

Readings: Kurt Moser, "WWI and the Creation of the Desire for Automobiles" pp. 195-222®

Richards, chapter 2

Schwartz, **"**Museums and Mass Spectacle: The Musée Grévin as a Monument to Modern Life**"** pp. 7-26®

UNIT 3: Mass Consumer Society, 1920-2008

November 10-14: **The Politics of Mass Consumption**

Lecture 1: Origins of Mass Consumption

Lecture 2: Consumer Citizenship

Discussion: de Grazia and ad assessment assignment

Readings: de Grazia, "Nationalizing Women: Competition between Fascist and Commercial Cultural Models in Mussolini's Italy"®

Essay due Wednesday, November 12th

November 17-21: **Domesticity and the Interwar Consumer Household**

Lecture 1: European Economic Crisis

Lecture 2: Consumption and Daily Life

Discussion: Consumption in Interwar Europe

Readings: Bowden, "The Technological Revolution that Never Was: Gender, Class, and the Diffusion of Household Appliances in Interwar England" ®

Furlough, "Selling the American Way in Interwar France: "Prix Uniques" and the Salons Des Arts Menagers" pp. 491-519 ®

Koshar, "Germans at the Wheel: Cars and Interwar Leisure Travel in Germany" ®

November 24-28: Between Austerity and Communism: Consumption in Postwar Europe

Lecture 1: The New Europe: Rift and Recovery in the Postwar Decade

Lecture 2: Library and Consultation Day

Lecture 3: Thanksgiving Break (no class)

Readings: Drakulic, *How we Survived Communism and Even Laughed*

December 1- 5: Consumption and the Culture Wars

Lecture 1: Thirty Glorious Years (1945-1970s)

Lecture 2: Americanization in Western Europe

Lecture 3: The Communist Challenge: Consumption in Eastern Europe

Readings: Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered" ®

Horkheimer *WSJ* article from 2008

Poiger, "Rock 'n' Roll, Female Sexuality, and the Cold War Battle over German Identities"®

1-pg Advertisement Assessment due Monday, December 1st

December 8-12: Consuming in the European Union

Discussion: *How we Survived Communism*

Lecture 2: The Euro and the Global Market

Lecture 3: Course Summary and final exam review

Readings: *Economist* articles in course reader

FINAL EXAM SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14th