

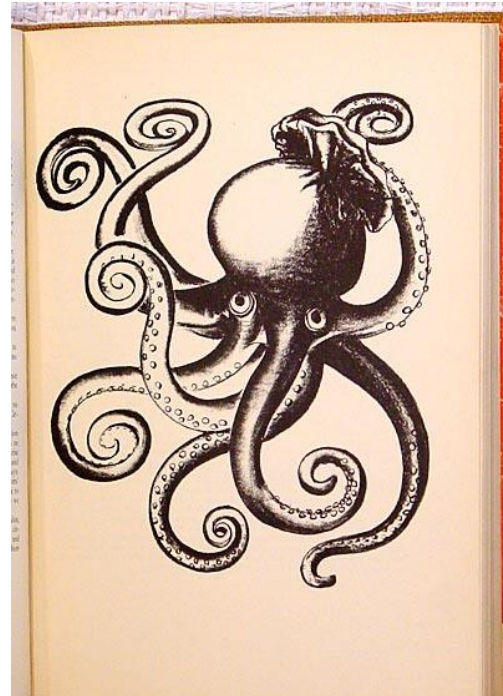
Cultures of Consumption: Commodity Fetishism
050:333:01 & 512:333:01

Tuesdays 4:30 – 5:50PM, 111 Murray Hall
Thursdays, 4:30 – 5:50PM, 114 Murray Hall

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Office Hours: 1 – 3PM Tuesdays, or by appointment
Ruth Adams Building 205E

Course Description

This course examines the development of market economies, mass production, and the consumption of commodities on a global scale, from 1492 to the present. We'll examine, among other topics, industrialization and the changing nature of work, the relationship between consumer practices and the condition of laborers, and the development of the advertising industry, television, technology, and corresponding ideas and ideologies about mass consumption.



Hugo Gellert, "The Transformation of Money into Capital," 1934

This course qualifies for the Critical Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies (CCRES) minor. If you are interested in learning more about CCRES, please let me know.

American Studies Department Learning Goals Met by this Course:

Students will learn to synthesize interdisciplinary sources and methods in order to analyze consumption as a form of politics, ideology, and citizenship. Students will learn to use scholarship in history, politics, literature, and art in order to understand the significance of consumption to American culture and history. Students will be able to write well; speak articulately; and think critically, analytically, and creatively.

History Department Learning Goals Met by this Course:

Students who study history at Rutgers can expect to develop and understanding of the following concepts:

- 1.) How individuals are shaped by their own past and by the past of their society and institutions;
- 2.) The role of human agency in bringing about change in society and institutions;

- 3.) The operation of large-scale forces responsible for causing change over time;
- 4.) The role of diversity and difference in shaping human experience;
- 5.) The nature of cause-and-effect relationships in human affairs as they have played out over time and as they continue to operate in the present.

Students who study history at Rutgers can also expect to develop the following practical skills:

- 1.) The ability to read and understand a variety of literary forms, including primary sources, as well as secondary sources written in academic prose;
- 2.) The ability to analyze information effectively and to construct cause-and-effect relationships from disparate data sources;
- 3.) The ability to write persuasively and communicate effectively;
- 4.) The ability to work independently and to conduct independent research.

Learning Goals Specific to this Course:

- a) To explore how the production and consumption of relates to the construction of racial, ethnic, gendered, and sexual identities.
- b) To think critically about the everyday exchanges that take place in a capitalist economy and what it means – both in the past and present – to be market actors.

Required Readings

- Sindy W. Mintz, *The Sweetness and the Power* (Penguin, 1985), ISBN#: 9780140092332
- Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (Random House, 2001 [1917]), ISBN#: 9780375757983
- Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (UPENN, 2011), 9780805055511

In addition to the above books, the assigned chapters, articles, and primary sources for this class are posted as .pdf files on the course's SAKAI site, under the heading "Resources."

Readings correspond to the day they will be discussed and need to be completed before class. You are required to bring readings to class with you, since we will refer to the text directly.

Assignment and Grading Overview

Additional information on the assignments will be provided in separate handouts.

Short Essays - 45% (Three, 15% each)

- Essay 1, due Monday, Sept. 22, by 11:59PM, posted to SAKAI
- Essay 2, due Monday, Oct. 20 by 11:59PM, posted to SAKAI
- Essay 3, due Monday, Dec. 15, by 11:59PM, posted to SAKAI

Online Discussion - 15% (Three posts, 5% each)

In order to ensure that you are doing the readings and engaging them critically, students will take turns - according to their assigned group (A-C) - posting QUIPs (Questions, Issues, or Problems) that relate to the week's readings. QUIPs must be posted by no later than 11:59PM on the night before class meets, and should cover the readings for both Tuesday and Thursday, except where noted.

Students will also be responsible for providing a "Connection." Connections should address ongoing news stories, websites, popular culture material, etc., which relate to the themes that the readings address and discuss. The goal is to be creative here: how can you connect the relevance of what we are talking about in class to other areas of intellectual and scholarly inquiry?

For a QUIP and Connection example that I have provided, please see the "Forum" section of our SAKAI site.

Midterm Exam - 10% - Tuesday, Oct. 28, in-class

Final Exam - 15% - Friday, Dec. 19, 8 - 11AM

Participation/Attendance - 15%

This is a seminar, and the expectation is that you will both attend all the classes, and regularly participate.

Grading Scale:

92-100=**A**; 87-91=**B+**; 81-86=**B**; 77-80=**C+**; 70-76=**C**; 60-69=**D**; 0-59=**F**

Note: there are no minus grades at Rutgers.

Class Policies

Please make sure that you are receiving and checking SAKAI announcements via email.

I regularly use the site to update class information, assignments, etc. **You are responsible for keeping up-to-date with class information and making sure that you are connected.**

Attendance in the seminar is mandatory.

Each student is allowed one unexcused absence during the semester. Each additional unexcused absence will result in deductions from your participation grade.

If you have to miss class due to sickness, an emergency, or another excused reason, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

Unexcused late assignments will receive a deduction.

Please do not text, use the internet, chat online, etc. during our seminar. If you do you will be marked as absent for that class.

Special Accommodation Requests:

All special accommodation requests must be brought to my attention during the first two weeks of class. Full disability policies and procedures are available for review at: <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/>.

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/request.html>

Academic Integrity Policy:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml>

Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

Honor Pledge:

I pledge on my honor that I will adhere to all aspects of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy

By accepting this syllabus and enrolling in this course, you assume responsibility for knowing the above policies and the possible penalties – including suspension and expulsion – should you violate the Honor Pledge.

Take an interactive tutorial on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

<http://sccweb.scc-net.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/Intro.html>

Class Schedule and Assigned Readings

Tuesday, Sept. 2

Introductions

Thursday, Sept. 4

- Adam Smith, "Of the Origin and Use of Money" and "Of the Component Parts of the Price of Commodities," from *Wealth of Nations* (1776)*
- Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," from *Capital, Volume 1* (1867)*

Tuesday, Sept. 9

- Steven Topik, "Historicizing Commodity Chains: Five Hundred Years of the Global Coffee Commodity Chain," in *Frontiers of Commodity Chain Research*, ed. Jennifer Bair (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).*
- John Lauritz Larson, "The Market Revolution in Early America: An Introduction," *OAH Magazine of History* (2005)*
- Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, Introduction & Ch. 1

Thursday, Sept. 11 (GROUP A)

- Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, Ch. 2

Tuesday, Sept. 16

- Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, Ch. 3

Thursday, Sept. 18 (GROUP B)

- Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, Chs. 4 & 5

Tuesday, Sept. 23

- Peter Andreas, "Illicit Slavers and the Perpetuation of the Slave Trade," from *Smuggler's Nation* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 130-53.*
- George Fitzhugh, excerpts from *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves Without Masters**
- Solomon Northrup, Ch. XIII, from *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853)*

Thursday, Sept. 25 (GROUP C)

- John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Porcelain, Tea, and Revolution," from *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3-24*
- Eric Lott, "Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in American Culture," from *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 16-38*

Tuesday, Sept. 30

- Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Books I - IV

Thursday, Oct. 2 (GROUP A)

- Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Books V - VII

Tuesday, Oct. 7

- Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Books VIII - IX

Thursday, Oct. 9 (GROUP B)

- Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Books X - XI

Tuesday, Oct. 14

- Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Book XII

Thursday, Oct. 16 (GROUP C)

- Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Books XIII - XIV
- Phillip Barrish, "'The Genuine Article': Ethnicity, Capital, and The Rise of David Levinsky," *American Literary History* 5, no. 4 (1993): 643-662.*

Saturday, Oct. 18 - OPTIONAL CLASS FIELD TRIP

Tuesday, Oct. 21

- "The Great Sixth Avenue Bazaar," *New York Times*, April 4, 1878
- Lizabeth Cohen, "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (1996): 1050-1081.*

Thursday, Oct.23 - NO CLASS

Tuesday, Oct. 28

MIDTERM EXAM

Thursday, Oct. 30

- Elaine Tyler May, "The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home," in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 1990), 143-162*
- Andrea Dworkin, excerpt from *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981)*
- Robin Morgan, "'No More Miss America!'" (1968)*

Tuesday, Nov. 4

- Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, Intro, chs. 1 & 2

Thursday, Nov. 6 (GROUP A)

- Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, chs. 3 & 4

Tuesday, Nov. 11

- Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, chs. 5 & 6

Thursday, Nov. 13 - NO CLASS

Tuesday, Nov. 18 (GROUP B - covering readings from 11/11 as well)

- Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, chs. 7 - end

Thursday, Nov. 20

NO READING, IN-CLASS FILM

"They Live" (dir. John Carpenter, 1988)

Tuesday, Nov. 25

- Thomas Frank, "Why Johnny Can't Dissent," *The Baffler* (1995)*

Thursday, Nov. 27 - NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING

Tuesday, Dec. 2 (GROUP C – covering reading from 11/25 and film from 11/20 as well)

- Amy Merrick, “Why Students Aren’t Fighting Forever 21,” *The New Yorker*, June 6, 2014 (<http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/why-students-arent-fighting-forever-21>)
- BDS statement on the Consumer Boycott of Israel:
<http://www.bdsmovement.net/activecamps/consumer-boycott>
- Ari Kelman, “Engage, Don’t Boycott: An Open Letter to the American Studies Association,” *The Nation*, Dec. 13, 2013
(<http://www.thenation.com/article/177590/engage-dont-boycott-open-letter-american-studies-association>)
- Judith Butler's Remarks to Brooklyn College on BDS,” *The Nation*, February 7, 2013 (<http://www.thenation.com/article/172752/judith-butlers-remarks-brooklyn-college-bds>)

Thursday, Dec. 4

NO READING, IN-CLASS MOVIE

“Maxed Out: Hard Times, Easy Credit and the Era of Predatory Lenders,” (dir. James Scurlock, 2006)

Tuesday, Dec. 9

- Henry David Thoreau, “Economy,” excerpt from *Walden* (1854)
(<http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden1a.html>)