Course Overview
This course is organized as a cultural history of peoples’ experiences with the objects, commodities, institutions, and lures of consumer culture. Although not entirely focused on the American scene, most of the work we examine will be the work of American historians and cultural critics, writing about consumer culture in the 19th and 20th centuries. We will consider the rise of consumer culture, the critical responses it has historically produced by intellectuals, moral guardians, and others, and the ways in which more recent scholars have attempted not just to theorize, but to understand the actual experiences of people who participate in, pursue, and consume the many products of consumer culture. In this respect, it is both an intellectual and cultural history of consumer culture as a central dimension of American life in the industrial and post-industrial eras.

Books (available for purchase at NYU Bookstore)
- Naomi Klein, No Logo (Picador, 2002)
- Tricia Rose, The Hip Hop Wars (Basic Civitas Books, 2008)
- Sidney Mintz, Sweetness and Power (Penguin, 1986)
- Victoria DeGrazia, Irrestible Empire (Belknap Press, 2006)

Week 1
1/21: Introduction


**Week 2**

1/28: The world of goods considered

pdfs: J. Brewer and Roy Porter, introduction to Consumption and the World of Goods

J. Christophe-Agnew, “Coming Up for Air”

M. Schudson, “Delectable Materialism”

C. Campbell, “Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming”

**Week 3**

2/4: Masculinist consumer culture and anxieties from the early national to the industrial era

pdfs

T. Breen, “Bauble of Britain: the American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century”

M. Swiencicki, “Consuming Brotherhood: Men’s Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930”

Heinze, “From Scarcity to Abundance; The Immigrant as Consumer”

Rosensweig, “The Rise of the Saloon”

*Lears, “No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture”

**Week 4**

2/11 Labor and the flow of commodities in the transatlantic Empire

Sidney Mintz, Sweetness and Power

*Schor and Holt selections:

**Week 5**

2/18 No Class Scheduled

**Week 6**

2/25 Gender and the landscapes of Consumption, pt II

pdfs

L Auslander, “The Gendering of Consumption in nineteenth Century France”

S Porter Benson, “Living on the Margin”

K Peiss, “Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Women’s Identity”

E. May, “The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home”

W. Leach, Land of Desire, chs 1-4

*Schor and Holt selections:

**Week 7**

3/4 Fordism, Mass Culture, and the Mass Society critique

pdfs

Rosenberg and White, et al., Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America

*Harvey, part II of The Condition of Postmodernity
**Week 8**

3/11 Americanism in Europe: Hegemony or Liberation?  
DeGrazia, *Irresistible Empire*, pt I

Pdfs  *J. Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony”*

**Week 9**

3/18 No Class: Spring Break

**Week 10**

3/25 Capitalism, Democracy, and Post-WWII Consumer Culture,  
Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*

**Week 11**

4/1 “The American Way of Life” goes abroad  
Victoria DeGrazia, *Irresistible Empire*, pt II

* M. Wiener, “Consumer Culture and Participatory Democracy: The Story of Coca Cola During World War II”  
* Schor and Holt reader

**Week 12**

4/8 Advertising culture and the incorporation of the cultural critique?  
Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*

Douglas, “Narcissism as Liberation”  
* Schor and Holt reader

**Week 13**

4/15 The Industrialization of Food and Taste  
Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*  
* Schor and Holt reader

**Week 14**

4/22 Resisting the Irresistible?  
Naomi Klein, *No Logo*  
* Schor and Holt reader

**Week 15**

4/29 Hip Hop culture and the discourse of race  
Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*  
* Schor and Holt reader

Presentation of research projects will be scheduled for the final exam period  
Final Exam/Final Papers due at **time of scheduled final exam**
Requirements and Grading

Attendance and Participation: 30%
You are expected to attend each class. Unexcused absences will affect your grade. You are expected to come to class prepared to participate in the discussions. You should have the reading completed, some questions to consider, and some observations to contribute.

Your participation grade will depend in part on your effective guidance of the class through a text of your choosing drawn from the Schor and Holt reader or elsewhere. If you select a reading that is not on the syllabus or part of our pdf library, please provide me a clean copy of the reading at least a week in advance of the day scheduled for its discussion.

Consumer’s journal: 30%
You are required to keep a journal of your life as a consumer this semester. Keep track of your consumer expenditures on a daily basis. What are you spending your money on? How are you paying for it? (cash, credit, barter exchange). Is it a purchase out of Necessity? Leisure? Pleasure? Obligation? Gift-giving?

Beyond that basic accounting of your expenditures, how do the historical, theoretical, and analytical readings we are considering inform your understanding of your own relationship to consumer culture? How do the materials we are considering better help you understand your own consumer behavior/habits/fantasies historically, culturally, ideologically? How do they better help you understand the larger social order and the political, economic, environmental implications of living in a consumer society? How does the current economic depression change your behaviors, attitudes?

You will be required to turn in your consumer’s journal at least once, if not several times during the semester. You should keep it up to date, readable, and use it as place to reflect on the readings in conjunction with your other consumer experiences.

This journal may well produce the kernel for an idea for your final research project.

Final Examination or Research Paper option: 40%
You may choose whether to write a final research paper (15-20 pp), pursuing a topic of your choosing, or you can choose a take-home final examination, due one week from the last day of class. If you choose the research paper option, you must submit a research plan and preliminary bibliography by March 29. Either option has the same weight.

I discourage incompletes. Complete your semester’s work.

Plagiarism will result in failure. Please understand what constitutes plagiarism. See University rules and guidelines on this matter. If you have doubts, ask.
Articles (available as pdfs on Blackboard):

- J. Brewer and Roy Porter, introduction to Consumption and the World of Goods
- C. Campbell, “Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming”
- M. Swiencicki, “Consuming Brotherhood: Men’s Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930”
- A. Heinze, “From Scarcity to Abundance; The Immigrant as Consumer”
- L Auslander, “The Gendering of Consumption in nineteenth Century France”
- S Porter Benson, “Living on the Margin”
- Kathy Peiss, “Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Women’s Identity”
- Rosenberg and White, et al., Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America
- J. Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony”
- Roy Rosensweig, “The Rise of the Saloon”
- J. Lears, “No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture”
- W. Leach, Land of Desire, chs 1-4
- Harvey, part II of The Condition of Postmodernity
- S. Douglas, “Narcissism as Liberation”
**Food**

- T. Breen, “Bauble of Britain: the American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century”
- NYTimes Mag (M. Pollan), “Our National Eating Disorder”
- NYTimes Mag (R. Skloot), “Two America’s, Two Restaurants, One Town”
- S. Mintz, “Food and Eating; Some Persisting Questions”

**Sports and Celebrity**

- D. Rowe, preface and pt I, *Sport, Culture and the Media*
- D. Anderson and S. Jackson, introduction, *Sports Stars*
- G. Whannel, intro-ch6, *Media Sports Stars*
- D. Andrews, “The Fact(s) of Michael Jordan’s Blackness”
- D. Kellner, “The Sports Spectacle, Michael Jordan, and Nike”
- Cathy Klaprat, “The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light”
- Neil Gabler, “Our Celebrities, Ourselves”
- Richard deCordova, “The Emergence of the Star System”

**Radio**

- B. Lenthall, “Critical Reception: Public Intellectuals Decry Depression-era Radio, Mass Culture, and Modern America”
- J. Loviglio, “Vox Pop: Network Radio and the Voice of the People”