

**HIST 3080 American Consumer Culture
WINTER 2021**

Professor Sarah Elvins

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Course Description

Welcome! This course will explore the emergence of the modern consumer society in the United States. A historical approach allows us to explore the changing relationship of Americans to consumer goods and the cultural transformations which went along with this change. The course is roughly chronological, with readings organized around a specific theme each week.

The course will be conducted through a distance learning format. Each week, you will watch short lecture videos that will be uploaded on UMLearn. You will also meet regularly online with the professor and your fellow students to engage in discussion of the readings and to ask questions about the course materials.

Students will be responsible for reading the assigned material each week, watching the lectures, and coming to Zoom meetings prepared to discuss the main issues raised by each author. This is good practice for taking history seminars; it can also be a lot of fun (really!). Do not be intimidated by the prospect of these class talks – if you are shy, we can work on this together.

Rules and Regulations

It pains me to have to repeat this, but all written work for the course must be original. Do not be tempted to “borrow” materials from the internet or other sources without attribution. If something looks suspicious, I will check! All assignments should be typed and double spaced. Further details about written assignments will be provided in class. You will be provided with

some evaluation before the Winter Term Voluntary Withdrawal (VW) date of March 31.

Pay close attention to due dates. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, if you contact me directly before an assignment is due. Papers are due on the date indicated, and must be uploaded in the correct format on UMLearn. Late papers will be penalized 2.5% per day. Students who wish to appeal a grade given for term work must do so within 10 working days after the grade for the term work has been made available to them.

The common penalty in Arts for plagiarism on a written assignment is a grade of F on the paper and a final grade of F (DISC) (for Disciplinary Action) for the course. For the most serious acts of plagiarism, such as purchase of an essay and repeat violations, this penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five (5) years from registration in courses taught in a particular department/program in Arts or from all courses taught in this Faculty. The Faculty also reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism or to other experts for authentication. The common penalty in Arts for academic dishonesty on a test or examination is F for the paper, F (DISC) for the course, and a one-year suspension from courses acceptable for credit in the Faculty. For more serious acts of academic dishonesty on a test or examination, such as repeat violations, this penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five years from registration in courses taught in a particular department or program in Arts or from all courses taught in or accepted for credit by this Faculty.

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Grade Breakdown

Class Participation	15%	
Book Review Assignment	15%	due February 23, 2021
Advertising Analysis (750-1000 words)	15%	due March 19, 2021
Research Essay (2500-3750 words)	25%	due April 16, 2021
Take-Home Final Exam	30%	due April 26, 2021

Grade Distribution

Exemplary	90 and above	A+
Superior	81-89	A
Very Good	75-80	B+
Good	70-74	B
Slightly above average	65-69	C+
Average	60-64	C

Marginal	50-59	D
Failure	below 50	F

Required Texts

Most of the readings in the course are available online, either through the library or on UMLearn. The following book is available at the campus bookstore. You can also purchase it as an e-book on Kindle.

Traci Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights from the 1930s to the 1980s*

Course Schedule

Each week will consist of a mix of recorded lectures, Zoom meetings in class time, and required readings. The class will be broken into smaller groups for some of the discussion sessions. You will receive more instructions during the introductory class on January 19.

Week 1

January 19 Introduction and Welcome – Zoom meeting 2:30 p.m.

January 21 Theoretical Frameworks (recorded lecture (rl) -on UMLearn)

Readings:

Frank Trentmann, “How Humans Became ‘Consumers’,” *The Atlantic* Nov. 28, 2106.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/11/how-humans-became-consumers/508700/>

Penne Restad, “The Third Sex: Historians, Consumer Society, and the Idea of the American Consumer,” *Journal of Social History* vol. 47 no. 3 (2014), pp. 769-786.

John Soluri, “Empire’s Footprint. The Ecological Dimensions of a Consumers’ Republic,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 25 no. 4 (2011): 15-20.

Week 2

January 26 Markets and trade in early America (rl)
 – **first assignment sheets handed out on UMLearn - I will meet with the entire class on Zoom at 2:30 to briefly discuss the assignment and answer questions**
 -for class discussion next week you will be put into one of two Zoom groups

January 28 Consumption and the American Revolution (rl)

Readings:

Vaughn Scribner, “Cosmopolitan colonists: Gentlemen’s pursuit of cosmopolitanism and hierarchy in British American taverns,” *Atlantic Studies* 10 (2013): vol. 4, 467-496.

Carl Robert Keyes, "Selling Gentility and Pretending Morality: Education and Newspaper Advertisements in Philadelphia 1765-75," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 141 no. 3 (October 2017); 245-274.

Week 3

February 2 Changing technology, changing trade (rl)
Zoom discussion of Scribner, Keyes, Axtell, Breen
– GROUP A 2:30 p.m.

February 4 **Zoom discussion of Scribner, Keyes, Axtell, Breen - GROUP B**
2:30 p.m.

Readings:

James Axtell, "The First Consumer Revolution" (available on UMLearn)

T. H. Breen, "Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 50 no. 3 (July 1993): 471-501.

Week 4

February 9 Branding and Mass Distribution (rl)
Zoom discussion of this week's readings (Perkins, Jaffee,
Bushman) – GROUP A 2:30

February 11 **Zoom discussion of this week's readings (Perkins, Jaffee,**
Bushman) – GROUP B 2:30

Readings:

Elizabeth A. Perkins, "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* Vol. 78, Issue 2 (Sept. 1991) 486-510.

David Jaffee, "Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860," *Journal of American History* Vol 78, Issue 2 (Sept. 1991), 511-535

Richard L. Bushman, Claudia L. Bushman, "The Early History of Cleanliness in America," *Journal of American History*, Volume 74, Issue 4 (Mar. 1988), 1213-1238.

Week 5 WINTER BREAK - FEB 16-19

Week 6

Book Review due February 23

February 23 Case Study: Coca Cola (rl)
Ad Analysis sheet available on UMLearn

Watch on Youtube: The Cola Conquest, Part 1 The Big Sell
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4kvX1kgJ8Q>

February 25 Leisure at the Turn of the Century (rl)

Watch on Youtube: silent movie footage of Coney Island in the 1900s
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQaqRQ-tVqw>

Readings:

Timothy B. Spears, "All Things to All Men": The Commercial Traveler and the Rise of Modern Salesmanship," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 45, Issue 4 (Dec. 1993), 524-557.

Paige Raibmon, "The Practice of Everyday Colonialism: Indigenous Women at Work in the Hop Fields and tourist Industry of Puget Sound," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, Vol. 3 no. 3 (2006): 23-56.

Week 7

March 2 Region and Retailing (rl)
Zoom meeting 2:30 – whole class to get further instruction about Ad Analysis assignment and ask questions

March 4 Mass Production (rl)

Readings:

William Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925," *Journal of American History* 71 No. 2 (September 1984) 319-342.

Emily A. Remus, "Tippling Ladies and the Making of Consumer Culture: Gender and Public Space in *Fin-de-Siècle* Chicago," *Journal of American History* 101 no. 3 (December 2014): 751-777.

Week 8

March 9 Shopping (rl)
Zoom discussion of Remus, Cohen, and Heaton – GROUP A 2:30

March 11 **Zoom discussion of Remus, Cohen, and Heaton**

– GROUP B 2:30

Readings:

Lizabeth Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: the Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 41 No. 1 (March 1989): 6-33.

John W. Heaton, “Athabaskan Village Stores: Subsistence Shopping in Interior Alaska, 1850-1950,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 43 (Summer 2012): 133-155.

Week 9

March 16 The Ad Man and the Audience (rl)

March 18 The Great Depression (rl)

Readings: Sarah Elvins, “Shopping for Recovery: Local Spending Initiatives and the Great Depression in Buffalo and Rochester, New York,” *Journal of Urban History* (September 2003): 670-693.

Traci Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement*, Intro and Ch. 1, 2.

***** Advertising Analysis due Friday March 19**

Essay assignment sheets available on UM Learn

Week 10

March 23 WWII (rl)
Zoom meeting 2:30 – whole class – instructions on Research Essay

Watch video on rationing and recycling, from Ken Burns PBS documentary
<https://www.pbs.org/video/war-rationing-and-recycling/>

March 25 Postwar Prosperity (rl)

Watch video on 1950s suburban living:
Living the American Dream, 1950s Suburb, thekinolibrary on Youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7qItGQFpuM>

Readings:

Traci Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement*, Ch. 3, 4

Week 11

March 30 TV and Malls (rl)

April 1 Creative Revolution (rl)

Readings:

Rebecca K. Shrum, "Selling Mr. Coffee: Design, Gender, and the Branding of a Kitchen Appliance," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 46. No. 4 (Winter 2012): 271-298.

Lizabeth Cohen, "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," *American Historical Review*, (October 1996): Vol. 101 no. 4: 1050-1081.

The readings are not long this week – make sure you finalize your essay topic. Contact me if you are having trouble.

Week 12

April 6 Feminism and Target Markets (rl)

Group A Zoom Meeting 2:30 – be prepared to discuss the Traci Parker book, Shrum, and Cohen

April 8 **Group B Zoom Meeting 2:30 – be prepared to discuss the Traci Parker book, Shrum, and Cohen**

Readings:

Finish Parker book.

Week 13

April 13 Consumption at the end of the 20th Century (rl)

April 15 Review – Zoom meeting – Entire class

*****Essays due Friday, April 16**

No readings this week – finish your research essay.

Take Home Exam handed out on UMLearn - due April 26