

American Cultural History: Selected Topics Problems and Methods in Cultural History

COURSE GUIDE

History 546

Fall 2001

Prof. L. Tolbert
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Hours: Tues and Thurs, 10:00-11:00
and by appointment

I do not mind if you call me at home (856-7207) with questions regarding the course but please do not call after 9:00 p.m.

Scope of the Course

This course is designed as an advanced reading seminar focusing on the critical perspectives and methods of historians who study American cultural history. The course is designed with two basic goals in mind: 1. To introduce you to the interdisciplinary practice of cultural history, and 2. To explore key periods in the development of American culture from the colonial era to the early twentieth century. The course is organized into the following five topical and chronological units:

Unit 1: What is Cultural History? introduces the historiography of the field and evaluates arguments regarding the distinctiveness of American culture.

Unit 2: Consumer Revolution in the Eighteenth Century evaluates the origins of American consumer culture.

Unit 3: Identity Politics in the New Nation focuses on the meanings of new regional, racial and gender stereotypes that Americans constructed during the early nineteenth century as they contested power relationships in an expanding slave republic.

Unit 4. Power and Culture in Victorian America examines race, class and gender formation in an industrializing United States.

Unit 5: From Victorian to Modern continues to explore the previous themes of region, race, class, and gender in the context of a mass consumer society.

In addition to the themes described above, the course is also designed to introduce you to a wide variety of strategies for constructing research problems in cultural history. Cultural history is an interdisciplinary field of historical inquiry. This means that cultural historians borrow ideas and methods from other kinds of scholars—art historians, anthropologists, and geographers, to name a few. Through a series of methodology case studies, this course will introduce you to some of the interdisciplinary methods cultural historians have employed to interpret visual and material evidence as well as text-based sources.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester students should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skill development in the following areas.

- ?? Summarize and evaluate important developments in the historiography of American cultural history.
- ?? Evaluate key problems and arguments regarding the nature of American exceptionalism.
- ?? Explain distinctive periods in the development of American consumer culture from the eighteenth through the twentieth century.
- ?? Evaluate the variety of ways in which race, class, gender, and region have been culturally constructed during different periods in American history and explain how these contested meanings have embodied changing power relationships.
- ?? Describe the variety of sources and explain in detail the methods of interpretation employed by historians you encounter in the course.
- ?? Restate concisely and substantively central arguments of each reading assignment and evaluate major points of agreement or disagreement among particular authors.
- ?? Hone your writing skills by producing a concise analysis of a well-defined problem raised by each unit.
- ?? Improve your research skills by developing a working research bibliography and defining an original research topic.

Required Readings

Books: (available at UNCG Bookstore)

Garvey, Ellen Gruber. The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Grier, Katherine C. Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930.

Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, revised and slightly condensed version of Culture and comfort. Rochester, NY: Strong Museum, c1988.

Hunter, Tera. To 'joy my freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War.

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Johns, Elizabeth. American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

Kammen, Michael. American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Kasson, Joy. Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000

Roediger, David. The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class. London: Verso Press, 1999. (revised edition)

Required Readings (continued)

Journal Articles and Book Chapters:

Available in the Reserve Room of Jackson Library and on electronic reserves. Many of these articles are also available electronically on JSTOR.

Breen, T.H. "Creative Adaptations: Peoples and Cultures." In Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era, Jack P. Green & J. R. Pole, eds. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.

Carson, Cary. "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?" In Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century, Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994.

Crowley, John E. "The Sensibility of Comfort," American Historical Review (June 1999): 749-782.

Darnton, Robert. "Intellectual and Cultural History." In The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States. Michael Kammen, ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Davis, David Brion. "Some Recent Directions in American Cultural History," The American Historical Review, Volume 73, Issue 3 (Feb., 1968): 696-707. [JSTOR]

Faust, Drew. "Culture, Conflict, and Community: The Meaning of Power on an Antebellum Plantation," Journal of Social History 14, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 83-97.

Geertz, Clifford.

Glassie, Henry. "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact's Place in American Studies." In Material Life in America, 1600-1860, Robert Blair St. George, ed. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988.

Isaac, Rhys. "Ethnographic Method in History: An Action Approach." In Material Life in America, 1600-1860, Robert Blair St. George, ed. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988.

Jaffee, David. "One of the Primitive Sort: Portrait Makers of the Rural North, 1760-1860." In Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds. The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

Lears, T. J. Jackson. "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," The American Historical Review, Volume 90, Issue 3 (Jun., 1985): 567-593. [JSTOR]

Levine, Lawrence W. "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences." In The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Lovell, Margaretta M. "Reading Eighteenth-Century American Family Portraits: Social Images and Self-Images." In Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings. Mary Ann Calo, ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

Thornton, John K. "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," The American Historical Review, Volume 96, Issue 4 (Oct. 1991): 1101-1113. [JSTOR]

Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In

Tyrrell, Ian. "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," The American Historical Review, Volume 96, Issue 4 (Octo. 1991): 1031-1055. [JSTOR]

Vlach, John "American Folk Art: Questions and Quandaries." In Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings. Mary Ann Calo, ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

Evaluation

Participation	10%
Unit Papers	60%
Annotated Bibliography and research presentation	30%

Attendance Policy

Faithful attendance is essential for your learning in this course. Therefore, beyond the part attendance plays in the overall participation grade, **there will be a 3% reduction of the student's final grade for each absence after the first 3** Beyond even this penalty, a student who seriously neglects attendance and preparation risks failing the course.

Participation (10%)

This assessment will be based on three criteria:

1. Consistent attendance--This is a seminar, not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the readings and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else's notes. For this reason, consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course. See above for an explanation of the course attendance policy which has an impact on your overall grade in the course beyond its importance for evaluating your participation.
2. Thorough preparation for class--readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time.
3. Regular contributions to class discussions--the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers. Discussions will take place during every class meeting in both small group exercises and as a whole class. In order to create a good climate for everyone to participate, please follow these discussion guidelines:
 - ?? Be ready to share and explain your opinions. Feel free to disagree with others, but be specific in your own assertions and back them up with evidence.
 - ?? Listen carefully and respond to other members of the group. Be willing to change your mind when someone demonstrates an error in your logic and use of facts.
 - ?? Do not hesitate to ask for clarification of any point or term you do not understand.
 - ?? Make your point succinctly, avoid repetition, and stick to the subject.

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Unit Papers (60%)

Unit 1 due 4 September; Unit 2 due 18 September; Unit 3 due 4 October; Unit 4 due 25 October; Unit 5 due 20 November.

Thorough responses should present opposing viewpoints and substantive evidence.

Goals of this assignment: To help you define particular issues for substantive class discussion. To think carefully about each author's research strategy, methods, interpretation, and/or argument. To evaluate footnotes and evidence. To help you begin to draw comparisons between and among authors over the course of the semester.

Late assignments will be penalized. Assignments past due for more than a week will not be accepted for credit.

Evaluation (continued)

Annotated Research Bibliography (30%)

Due 27-29 November.

Develop a meaningful, well-constructed bibliography for a cultural history research project of your own design. Explain the subject and significance of your project in an introduction (2 pages maximum).

Undergraduates 10 sources minimum. Graduates 15 sources minimum. Annotations should describe the main point of the book and briefly explain how it relates to the research project.

Course Schedule

21 August Introductions

Unit 1. What is Cultural History?

23 August Historiography

Read:

Davis, David Brion. "Some Recent Directions in American Cultural History," The American Historical Review, Volume 73, Issue 3 (Feb., 1968): 696-707. [JSTOR]

Darnton, Robert. "Intellectual and Cultural History." In The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States. Michael Kammen, ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

28 August American Exceptionalism Part I: Transfer vs. Adaptation

Read:

Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In Breen, T.H. "Creative Adaptations: Peoples and Cultures." In Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era, Jack P. Green & J. R. Pole, eds. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.

30 August American Exceptionalism Part 2: Comparative History

Read:

Tyrrell, Ian. "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," The American Historical Review, Volume 96, Issue 4 (Oct. 1991): 1031-1055. [JSTOR]

Thornton, John K. "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," The American Historical Review, Volume 96, Issue 4 (Oct. 1991): 1101-1113. [JSTOR]

4 September **Methodology Case Study:** Ethnography and history

Read:

Isaac, Rhys. "Ethnographic Method in History: An Action Approach." In Material Life in America, 1600-1860, Robert Blair St. George, ed. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988.

Geertz, Clifford.

****Unit 1 papers due**

Unit 2: Consumer Revolution in the Eighteenth Century

6 September The Consumer Revolution

Read:

Carson, Cary. "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?" In Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century, Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994.

11 September The Consumer Revolution

Read:

Carson, Cary. "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?" In Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century, Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994.

13 September Culture and Comfort, Part 1

Read: Crowley, John E. "The Sensibility of Comfort," American Historical Review (June 1999): 749-782.

18 September **Methodology Case Study:** Material Culture

Read:

Glassie, Henry. "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact's Place in American Studies." In Material Life in America, 1600-1860, Robert Blair St. George, ed. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988.

****Unit 2 papers due**

20 September Library Workshop: Bibliographic development

Unit 3: Identity Politics in the New Nation

25 September **Methodology Case Study:** "Folk" Art

Read:

Lovell, Margaretta M. "Reading Eighteenth-Century American Family Portraits: Social Images and Self-Images." In Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings. Mary Ann Calo, ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

Vlach, John "American Folk Art: Questions and Quandaries." In Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings. Mary Ann Calo, ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

Jaffee, David. "One of the Primitive Sort: Portrait Makers of the Rural North, 1760-1860." In Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds. The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

28 September Genre Painting

Read:

Johns, Elizabeth. American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

2 October Genre Painting

Read:

Johns, Elizabeth. American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

4 October Race, Class, and Culture

Read:

Roediger, David. The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class. London: Verso Press, 1999. (revised edition)

****Unit 3 papers due**

9 October FALL BREAK

Unit 4: Power and Culture in Victorian America

11 October

Read:

David Roediger. The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class. London: Verso Press, 1999. (revised edition)

16 October **Methodology Case Study:** Cultural Hegemony

Read:

Lears, T. J. Jackson. "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," The American Historical Review, Volume 90, Issue 3 (Jun., 1985): 567-593. [JSTOR]

Faust, Drew. "Culture, Conflict, and Community: The Meaning of Power on an Antebellum Plantation," Journal of Social History 14, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 83-97.

18 October Culture and Comfort Part 2: Inventing the Middle Class Parlor

Read:

Grier, Katherine C. Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, revised and slightly condensed version of Culture and comfort. Rochester, NY: Strong Museum, c1988.

23 October

Read:

Grier, Katherine C. Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity. 1850-1930.
Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, revised and slightly condensed version of Culture and
comfort. Rochester, NY: Strong Museum, c1988.

25 October

Read:

Hunter, Tera. To 'joy my freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War.
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

****Unit 4 papers due**

Unit 5: From Victorian to Modern

30 October Hunter

Read:

Hunter, Tera. To 'joy my freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War.
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Preliminary annotated bib due.

1 November

Read:

Kasson, Joy. Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History. New York: Hill and
Wang, 2000

6 November

Read:

Kasson, Joy. Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History. New York: Hill and
Wang, 2000

8 November Women and Mass Consumer Culture

Read:

Garvey, Ellen Gruber. The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture,
1880s to 1910s. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

13 November **Methodology case study:** Folklore meets Popular Culture

Read:

Levine, Lawrence W. "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences." In The
Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History. New York: Oxford University
Press, 1993.

15 November Kammen

Read:

Kammen, Michael. American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

20 November

Read:

Kammen, Michael. American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Unit 5 papers due

22 November THANKSGIVING

27 November Research bibliography presentations.

****Research Bibliographies due.**

29 November Research bibliography presentations

****Research Bibliographies due.**

4 December No Class

6 December No Class

Reading Analysis Worksheet

Author's Thesis (main point) [two sentences maximum]

Describe the research problem the historian set out to study. What major issue or problem did the author seek to resolve? [one paragraph]

Describe most important types of primary sources (if applicable) [one paragraph]

What particular strategies of interpretation or methods of analysis does the author employ? Evaluate one or two specific examples to explain your reasoning. [one or two paragraphs]

Make one meaningful connection between this author and another historian we have read this semester. You may focus either on an argument or a methodological issue. Be as concrete and specific as possible. Identify authors and page numbers where appropriate. [one or two paragraphs]

Attach a bibliography of key secondary sources gleaned from footnotes—focus on sources the author uses to make major points (either agreement or disagreement) rather than sources related to peripheral points. [one page]

History 546. Annotated Bibliography Style Sheet

Bibliographies should be organized alphabetically by author.

basic format for a book

McPherson, James M. Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

book with two or three authors

Garza, Rudolph O. de la, Anthony Kruszewski, and Tomas A. Arciniega. Chicanos and Native Americans: The Territorial Minorities. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

book with four or more authors

Medhurst, Martin J., et al. Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor, and Ideology. New York: Greenwood, 1990.

Editor as author

Anderson, J. N. D., ed. The World's Religions. London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1950.

work in an anthology

Clinton, Michelle T. "For Strong Women." In Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology, edited by Barbara Smith. New York: Kitchen Table, 1983.

article in a journal

Darnton, Robert. "The Pursuit of Happiness." Wilson Quarterly 19, no. 4 (1995): 42-52.

Some instructions for annotating sources:

Annotations should be no longer than two paragraphs. Briefly describe the specific topic of the source, including: the author's main point or thesis; date range; geographic scope; important people or subjects covered.

Be sure that your annotations effectively describe the specific source under consideration. If you can apply your description to many other books on the subject then your

annotation is too broad. Try to focus on the specific the characteristics of the particular book you are annotating.

If you have selected sources according to a particular theme or rationale, it may be useful to discuss your selection criteria in a brief introductory paragraph.