

Calling All Consumers:  
Interdisciplinary Approaches to Consumption  
xxxx.xx | Semester

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Office Hours: By appointment

### Course Description

In this course we will explore the many processes by which *markets* for various types of commodities are created, are sustained, and change over time. We will consider: the labor which transforms resources - including nature and knowledge - into commodities; the organizational networks through which commodities circulate and arrive at marketplaces; the meanings people generate and reproduce through shopping for and consuming everyday items, as well as fashionable and luxury goods; and, finally, the question of how *consumers* themselves are constituted. Central to our inquiries and discussions is the idea that sites of consumption are not only geographically, historically, and socially linked to sites of production, but markets and consumers must also *be produced*. Traversing the fields of ecology, environmental history, anthropology, sociology, and ethnic and cultural studies, the readings and discussions for this course will help us take a critical approach to two vexing questions: Is consumption a practice with liberatory, resistive potential, or one that reproduces dominant modes of power? Can local and global struggles for social and environmental justice be waged through and in relation to consumption?

### Readings

Readings for this course are available via Blackboard (*and/or a Course Packet*).

### Assignments

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings by class time on the dates indicated by the syllabus, and participate in in-class discussions. In addition, students must complete two 3-4 page papers in response to prompts (to be determined), and to be handed in on the dates indicated below. **Final»** Students are required to complete an 8-10 page final paper on a topic or issue of their choice.

### Week 1: Labor, Nature, Networks

#### *Monday and Tuesday*

Cronon, William. "The Wealth of Nature: Lumber," in *Nature's Metropolis Chicago and The Great West* (1991); **or "Annihilating Space: Meat"**

Scott, James C. "Nature and Space," in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press (1998).

Shiva, Vandana. *Stolen Harvest*. **Selections TBD**

Locke, John. *Two Treatises on Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (2005 [1689].) **Selections TBD**

#### *Wednesday and Thursday*

Brandt, Deborah. «Picking and Packing for the North: Agricultural Workers at Empaque Santa

- Rosa» in *Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization on the Tomato Trail*. Rowman and Littlefield (2000).
- Alvarez, Robert. *Mangoes, Chiles, and Truckers: The Business of Transnationalism*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press (2005). **Selections TBD**
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*. Ben Fowkes, trans. London: Penguin Classics. 1867 [1990]. **Selections from «The Commodity» TBD**

## Week 2: Mass Consumption and American Landscapes

### Monday and Tuesday

- Cohen, Lizbeth. “Residence: Inequality in Mass Suburbia,” in *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. Vintage. 2003.
- Hayden, Dolores. “Decoding Everyday American Landscapes,” in *A Fieldguide to Sprawl*. Photographs by Jim Wark. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.

### Wednesday and Thursday

- Morris, Meaghan. “Things to Do With Shopping Centers,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed, Simon During. London and New York: Routledge (2003)
- Screening: “Extreme Make Over: Home Improvement,” from ABC Network Television
- Writing Prompts 1 – Handed Out In-Class**

### Other Readings TBD♦

## Week 3: Race, Nation, Colonial Contexts

### Monday and Tuesday

- McClintock, Anne. “Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising,” in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Colonial Context*. New York: Routledge. (1995)
- Burke, Timothy. “Bodies and Things: Toiletries and Commodity Culture in Postwar Zimbabwe,” in *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, & Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*. Raleigh and Durham: Duke University Press (1996)

### Wednesday and Thursday

- Goswami, Manu. “Territorial Nativism: *Swadeshi and Swaraj*,” in *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*
- Primary Sources from American Colonial Era in the Philippines, **TBD**

## Week 4: Identities, Boundaries, Hierarchies

### Monday and Tuesday

- Bourdieu, Pierre. «The Sense of Distinction» and “The Habitus and the Space of Life-Styles” in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Richard Nice, trans. Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College (1979 [1984]) **or selections from “The Aristocracy of Culture”**
- Liechty, Mark. “Middle-Class Consciousness: Hanging Between the High and the Low,” in *Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class Culture in a New Consumer Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (2001)

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♦ To Be Determined

*Wednesday and Thursday*

Freeman, Carla. "Fashioning Femininity and 'Professional Identities: Producing and Consuming Across Formal and Informal Sectors,'" in *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy*.

Dávila, Arlene. *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and the Making of a People*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. (2001) **Selection TBD**.

**Writing Prompts 2 – Handed Out In-Class**

**Week 5: Making Markets, Marketing Culture**

*Monday and Tuesday*

Dávila, Arlene. "Selling Marginality," in *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and the Making of a People*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. (2001)

Cohen, Lizbeth. "Culture: Segmenting the Mass," in *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. Vintage. (2003)

*Wednesday and Thursday*

Dávila, Arlene. *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. **Selection TBD**.

Myers, Fred. "Wizards of Oz: Nation, State, and the Production of Aboriginal Fine Art," in *Empire of Things*

**Week 6: The Next Industrial Revolution/The Revolution Will Not be Marketed?**

*Monday and Tuesday*

Hawken, Paul, Amory Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins. *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution*. New York and Boston: Little, Brown, and Company (1999). **Selections TBD**.

Daly, H.E. (2002). "Sustainable Development: Definitions, Principles, Policies." Washington, D.C.

Marx, Karl. "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret" and **other selections from «The Commodity»**

Screening: «The Next Industrial Revolution»

*Wednesday and Thursday*

Dávila, Arlene. «Conclusion,» in *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and the Making of a People*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. (2001)

Harvey, David. "Chapter 2," in *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. (2000)

Brandt, Deborah. «Picking and Packing for the North: Agricultural Workers at Empaque Santa Rosa» in *Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization on the Tomato Trail*. Rowman and Littlefield (2000). **OR**

«Conclusion», in *Inside Toyland*

Bookchin, Murray. "An Open Letter to the Ecology Movement"

**Final Paper Topics Discussed**