

Sociology 195S.02 Consumer Culture Goes Global

Syllabus

John Wilson
Room 263, Building 9
Voice Mail: 660-5622
E-Mail: jwils@soc.duke.edu

Fall 2002

This course is about the role of consumption in international popular culture. What influence does consumerism have on popular culture the world over? What happens to local cultures as consumer culture spreads around the world?

The first half of the course introduces the concepts social scientists have developed to help us think about these issues. The third quarter looks at specific topics (e.g. sexuality). In the final quarter, students will give presentations on their research projects.

Except for the first, all sessions have required readings associated with them. These readings are accessible through the Electronic Reserve System in Perkins Library. You will be expected to post your reactions to these readings on Blackboard twenty-four hours in advance of the relevant session. I will read these reactions and use them as the foundation for class discussion. At the end of the course I will assign a grade for these comments. This grade will comprise 25% of your final grade.

There will be a mid-term examination. This will be held during the normal class period on September 30th. I will submit your grade on this examination as the mid-term grade required by the Registrar. The examination will ask you to write brief essays, focusing on the concepts we will have discussed up to that point. Your grade on this exam will comprise 25% of your final grade.

Each student will be asked to write a research paper. The final third of the course will consist of student presentations of the results of their research and comments from other students in the class. I will assign presentation dates at random. Presentations begin with the class dated November 13th. Depending on the number of students in the class, there will be two-three presentations each class. I will allocate research projects at the beginning of the course. I will also supply a list of recommended readings for each topic. Your grade on this assignment will comprise 50% of your final grade. No matter when you give your in-class presentation, your final report on your project will be due on **December 9th**. No exceptions will be allowed.

Theories and Concepts

August 28

How do you recognize a sociologist when you see one? Reading Ritzer's *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*.

September 4

How do sociologists define and study culture. Why is "high" culture considered better, or more desirable, than "low" culture? Why is "popular" culture often dismissed as unimportant?

John Fiske: *The Popular, Pluralism, and the Folk*.

September 9

Who produces, distributes and owns popular culture? What political messages are contained in popular culture?

John Fiske: *The Jeaning of America*

John Street: *Political Theories of Culture*

September 11

Where do the ideas and practices that make up popular culture come from? What effect do they have on our social and political lives? Whose interests are served by popular culture?

James Lull: *Hegemony*

September 16

What is distinctive about the culture of capitalism? Does capitalism encourage a new way of thinking about the world? How does it affect the way we think about our social relationships and how important possessions are in our life? Why does consumption have to grow? Why is economic growth a good thing?

Richard Robbins: *Capitalism and the Making of the Consumer*

September 18

What forces that drive economic globalization? How do we know when a country has become part of the global economy? How does entering the global economy affect the daily lives of people?

Chengze Fan: *Economic Development and the Changing Pattern of Consumption in Urban China*

Jeff Faux and Larry Mishel: *Inequality and the Global Economy*

September 23

What is global culture, and how is it different from national and international culture? Does globalization mean we will all think the same? What is the fate of local cultures in an era of globalization? Does “going global” simply mean being more modern, up-to-date? Or is it the case, as some critics charge, that it means becoming more American?

Mike Featherstone: *Global and Local Cultures*

Tom O’Dell: *Raggare and the Panic of Mobility: Modernity and Everyday Life in Sweden.*

September 25

How do people become part of the new global consumer culture? How do they learn to be consumers? How do they learn new “wants”?

Timothy Burke: *The New Mission: Advertising and Market Research in Zimbabwe, 1945-1979*

September 30

MID-TERM EXAMINATION

October 2

What is the power of the brand in consumer culture? Why is more and more marketing using branding as its favored strategy?

Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson: *Sign Wars*

October 7

Why are companies searching for global markets for their products and services? How do they think of global consumers? Does global marketing mean that all consumers have the same wants?

Michael Weiss: *The Clusters Go Abroad*

October 9

What is a global brand? To what degree have brands become the icons of international popular culture? Is it feasible to market the same product in the same way in many different countries?

George Ritzer: *Explorations in the Sociology of Consumption*

Chua Beng-Huat: *Singaporeans Ingesting McDonald’s*

October 14:

FALL BREAK

October 16

Why do “first world” countries import goods, services, and images from more “exotic” countries and regions? To what degree is US culture suffused with images, ideas and practices imported from other cultures? What happens to them as they are incorporated into American consumer habits?

William O’Barr: *Representations of Others*

October 21

Dennis O’Rourke: *Cannibal Tours* (video)

October 23

Why do we seem to hunger for authenticity, for the “real thing”? How does this hunger explain modern tourism?

Edward Bruner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: *Maasai on the Lawn*.

Erik Cohen: *A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences*

October 28

What happens to the artifacts and materials of “native” cultures when other, and more powerful, people buy, borrow, steal and copy them for their own purposes? To what extent is this act of “appropriation” an attempt to protect or save “authentic” cultures?

Deborah Root: *Conquest, Appropriation and Cultural Difference*

October 30

How smoothly has global consumer culture spread throughout the world? What are its current limits? What kind of resistance has there been to the spread of consumer culture and where has it come from? What happens to these acts of resistance?

James Lull: *Transculturation and hybridization*

Cotton Seiler: *The Commodification of Rebellion*

Identities

November 4

Globalized identities. Part 1: the sexual body. Sexual identities are social constructions. Each culture defines sexuality in different ways. What happens to the way we think about sexual differences when culture becomes globalized?

Dennis Altman: *The Globalization of Sexual Identities*

November 6

Globalized identities. Part 2: the beautiful body. The most potent symbol of our personal identity is our own body – how we adorn and present it to others. All cultures have their ways of prescribing – and proscribing – bodily appearances. What happens to these rules as more and more people come under the sway of consumer culture?

Shoma Munshi: *Marvellous Me: The Beauty Industry and the Construction of the 'Modern' Indian Woman*.

Perry Johansson: *Selling the 'Modern Woman': Consumer Culture and Chinese Gender Politics*.

November 11

Globalized identities. Part 3: the sporting body. Sport is largely a Western invention. It has become one of the leading components of global culture – a language spoken around the world. Is it foreseeable that there will be a “global sporting order” with global athletes?

David Andrews: *The (Trans)National Basketball Association*.

November 13-December 4

Presentations