

Class meetings: Thursdays, TLC 3205

Office hours: Mondays, 2-4; Tuesdays, 3-5, and Thursdays, 1-4, and by appointment, at the Center for Public History in the lower level of the Ingram library.

Course Description

“A method based on the document is prejudiced; fated to neglect the majority of people, for they were non-literate and, within the boundaries of literacy, to neglect the majority of people, for they did not write. Even today in societies of almost universal literacy, it is a rare soul who bequeaths to future historians a written account of his thought... How can you study a society if you attend only to the expressions of a small and deviant class within the whole?”

Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*

“Material culture is the study through artifacts of the beliefs—values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time.”

Jules David Prown, “Mind in Matter”

“Material culture...is not culture but its product. Culture is socially transmitted rules for behavior, ways of thinking about and doing things... Material culture is...that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behavior.”

James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*

“The study of American material life is grounded in the concrete, interwoven reality of men’s and women’s environmental, economic, and cultural circumstances.”

Robert Blair St. George, *Material Life in America*

The phrase “material culture” is a broad one. Perhaps the simplest way to define the term is that material culture represents the “things” or the “stuff” which we create and use on a daily basis, the *material* products of a culture. These “things” could range from the clothes in your closet to the dishes in your kitchen, large and often-costly items such as our cars and homes to less-expensive mundane artifacts like pocket knives or even the contents of a kitchen trash can. Some artifacts might be stylish, but others much less so. Some might be readily available and mass-produced, while others might be heirlooms or hand-crafted items. Some artifacts denote our class and social status, while others help us to accomplish a specific goal or to have fun. Most importantly, material culture tells us about a place and a time, about the people who created or used the artifacts, about change over time. Just as we create material culture, so too are we shaped by the material culture that surrounds us. As folklorist Henry Glassie argues, material culture often reveals much about a past that is difficult to study in other ways.

But the field is full of challenges. How do we study material culture? Some scholars argue that the artifact can “speak,” but does it? How do we interpret what the artifact or the collection of artifacts says? How can material culture help us address some of the larger questions and issues that we face as historians? What are the limitations of using artifacts? What are the limits of their value? The study of material culture is an interdisciplinary undertaking that benefits from methods and theories from a range of disciplines.

This class will involve both readings in the field as well as an individual research project. First, we will explore the ways in which scholars from different disciplines have studied material culture by reading

some of the work of leading practitioners in the field. I will ask you to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each scholar's approach, evaluate the success of his or her work, and identify his or her contributions to material culture studies. Second, each student will conduct an original research project utilizing material culture to study a historical topic. You must use primary sources, either actual artifacts or documents about material culture such as those used by scholars we have read.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will become familiar with the current scholarly literature about the methods and theories of studying material culture.
2. Students will be able to identify the methods by which scholars from different academic disciplines (e.g. history, anthropology, archaeology, folklore, art history, women's studies, history of technology, and cultural studies) analyze and utilize material culture in their studies.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze and interpret material culture orally and in writing.
4. Students will conduct original research utilizing artifacts or other primary sources related to material culture and will situate their research within the context of material culture scholarship.
5. Students will develop and support an argument and demonstrate clear analytical writing skills through the preparation of an essay that uses original primary sources.
6. Students will analyze how museums and other public history venues use and interpret material culture.

History Graduate Program Learning Outcomes Met By This Class

1. Conduct original historical research
2. Formulate and defend a historical argument in Standard English
3. To demonstrate knowledge of historiography and its changes over time
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the theory and practice of public history

Course Readings

Since this is a graduate seminar, there will be considerable reading. Besides the book list (below), additional readings will be available on the Course Den page.

Required books

- Andrews, Deborah, *Shopping: Material Culture Perspectives*. University of Delaware Press, 2015. **Selected chapters available on Course Den.**
- Cowan, Ruth Schwartz, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.
- Deetz, James, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1996. ISBN: 0-385-48399-6
- Glassie, Henry, *Material Culture*. Indiana University Press, 1999. **First three chapters are required and will be available on Course Den.**
- Grier, Katherine C., *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988.
- Hill, Sarah, *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Krill, Rosemary Troy and Pauline K. Eversmann, *Early American Decorative Arts, 1620-1800*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000.
- Marling, Karal Ann, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Press.

Darby Penney and Peter Stashy, *The Things They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic*. Bellevue Library Press, 2009.

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. New York: Vintage Books, 2001.

Course Requirements

The course will emphasize historiography of the field as well as research and writing. Approximately half of the course grade based on readings and related class discussions and half on the research project.

Research paper (35% of final course grade)

Each student will write an original research paper about 10-15 pages in length on a topic of the student's choice. Whenever possible, I encourage you to consider using this paper as part of your thesis or thesis/project research. In considering your research project, you might think about a grouping of material culture or one single artifact and the questions or issues that these objects help you explore. Students can select an object and research, analyze, and interpret that object in the final paper. Or you might come up with a question that you think you could answer using some type of material culture. Remember that the field of material culture is very inclusive; I encourage you to be as creative as you can in framing your project.

The research paper must be based on primary research. This research could include the ***artifacts*** themselves or it could involve ***documents*** that tell us about material culture of the past, such as wills or probate inventories, tax records, census data, popular magazines, Sears Catalogs, or other relevant types of records. You may utilize oral histories as a source for interpreting and analyzing the material culture in question. **However, material culture must be at the core of your project.** If you use artifacts in your analysis, please include photographs or other types of illustrations appropriate to the topic. If you use written documents, you might consider ways in which you could organize your data for the reader or perhaps relate what you are finding in the written records to the artifacts themselves (see Sweeney's article on New England furniture for an example).

The paper must also incorporate ***secondary sources*** to place your research into a broader context of material culture and history scholarship, both in methodology and in the topic under discussion. Students should consult at least five secondary sources. You may utilize up to two secondary sources from the readings, but you must also locate an additional three secondary sources relating to your topic. Always consider what contribution your work makes to the field and be sure to highlight that contribution in the introduction and conclusion of your paper.

Each research paper must include footnotes or endnotes and a complete bibliography of both primary and secondary sources and must follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* in the format and any other matters of style.

Throughout the semester, I will post discussion topics on Course Den related to your research paper. The purpose for these discussions is both to keep you on track to complete the paper on time but also to encourage you to think about the sources, interpretation, context, and other topics.

Research paper proposal (10% of final course grade)

To be sure that you are making progress on your research paper early in the semester, students will submit a three-page research prospectus on **March 3**. This prospectus should include

- the question that you are asking

- a description of the primary sources you are using
- a list of your five secondary sources
- the contexts in which you are interpreting this material culture
- the status of your research
- your preliminary observations
- any questions you have at this stage.

Class participation (20% of final course grade)

Since this is a graduate seminar, students are expected to read the required assignments in *advance* of the class meeting and to contribute to the class discussion. All of us will benefit if everyone comes to class prepared. Most significantly, *you* will have a better class experience. I know some of you are naturally quieter than others, but I expect every student to make at least one contribution to class discussion each week and also that no one student will dominate the discussion. One (or two) students will be assigned to assist with leading discussion each week.

As part of your class participation requirement, each student will bring in an example of material culture and interpret that artifact with the help of classmates. Each student will be assigned a specific class date to bring in an artifact.

Attendance is also very important. As a seminar, this class will emphasize discussion, rather than lecture, and this interaction would be impossible to “make up.” More than two absences will lower your final course grade.

Weekly written assignments (35% of course grade)

All students will be expected to write a two- to three-page, word-processed response paper to the readings every week. In these response papers, please be sure to evaluate the readings.

- If you are writing about a book, consider:
 - What is the author’s argument?
 - What do you think the author contributes to the field?
 - What is his/her discipline and what methods does s/he use?
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of his or her study?
- If there are multiple articles, consider:
 - What is the connecting thread/theme between these articles?
 - Compare the similarities and differences between how these authors approach the topic?
 - Which authors have the strongest arguments and studies, and why?

Every student is expected to turn in the weekly response papers even you are not in class. If you are unable to attend class or have any computer issues which prohibit printing a copy, please submit papers on Course Den by 5:30 on the day that they are due. Please do not send any papers by email.

Additional Announcements

1. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any plagiarized work will result in an “F” for the final class grade. Please review the AHA statement on plagiarism, available on the UWG History Department website, available at <http://www.westga.edu/~history/statementonplagiarism.pdf>
2. Please turn off your cell phones during class, unless you have prior approval from the instructor due to a family situation or emergency. Cell phones are distracting to all of us.

3. Our class page on Course Den will serve as the place for me to post additional guidelines for research papers, updates to the schedule or readings list, and any other announcements. All students are expected to check Course Den on a regular basis. Failure to read any announcements on Course Den does not relieve students of any responsibility in following these announcements or changes.

Class Schedule

Please note that this schedule is subject to change. Any changes to the readings or weekly response papers will be announced in class and posted on Course Den. All readings not in the books will be available on Course Den.

January 14: Class Introduction and Introduction to Material Culture

January 21: Material Culture and 9/11

View: Objects and Memory

To read more about this project, check out <http://objectsandmemory.org/about/About.htm>

Due: Please submit your ideas for your research project to Course Den by 8 p.m. today

January 28: Studying material culture

Cary Carson, "Doing History with Material Culture," in Ian Quimby, ed, *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* (New York: Norton, 1978)

Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, "Shaping the Field: The Multidisciplinary Perspectives of Material Culture," in *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997)

Jules Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method" in Robert St. George, *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*

E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model" in Thomas J. Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies in America*

Jennifer L. Roberts, "Lubrications on a Lava Lamp: Technocracy, Counterculture, and Containment in the American Sixties," in Prown and Haltman, *American Artifacts*

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "A Field Hock Dress, Fit for a Knockabout Sport," from Ulrich et al, *Tangible Things: Making History through Objects*

The above readings are all on Course Den

February 4: Material culture and social history

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*

February 11: Archaeological and anthropological approaches

James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*.

Visit <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/users/deetz/>, the "Plymouth Colony Archives"

Please look particularly at the probate records, which we will discuss in class.

This week's assignment. Drawing upon Deetz's book, please take three inventories from the website and analyze what they can tell us about seventeenth century New England

February 19: Style, connoisseurship, and "decorative arts": an art historical approach

"Interpreting Decorative Arts Objects" (chapter 1), "Looking at Objects," and "Understanding Style" (chapter 3) and read at least four of the later chapters (7-24) in Rosemary Troy Krill and Pauline K. Eversmann, *Early American Decorative Arts, 1620-1860*. Please also read, write

about, and be prepared to discuss at least two chapters that describe specific styles and periods.

Charles F. Montgomery, "The Connoisseurship of Artifacts," in Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies in America*

February 26: Class, status, "refinement" and the consumer revolution in eighteenth century America

Kevin Sweeney, "Furniture and the Domestic Environment in Wethersfield, Connecticut, 1639-1800", in Robert St. George, *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*

Ann Smart Martin, "Getting the Goods: Local Acquisition in a Tobacco Economy," from *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia*

Richard Bushman, "Bodies and Minds," from *The Refinement of America: Persons, House, and Cities* (please focus especially on sections about clothing and foodways)

Rodris Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: its Etiquette and Equipage" in Robert St. George, *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*

March 3: Folklife approaches

Henry Glassie, *Material Culture*, chapters 1-3

Michael Owen Jones, "Why Take a Behavioral Approach to Folk Objects?" in Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*

Due: Research paper proposal

March 10: Ethnographic approaches to Material Culture

Sarah Hill, *Weaving New Worlds*

March 17: Spring Break, No Class

March 24: Popular culture and consumerism

Katherine Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930*

Thomas J. Schlereth, "Country Stores, County Fairs, and Mail Order Catalogues: Consumption in Rural America," in Simon Bronner, Ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*

Note: This class may be held at the Goldworth Farm in Villa Rica

March 31: Technology and material culture

Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother*

April 7: Material Culture and Human Rights

Denney and Stashy, *The Things They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic*

Visit the companion website at www.suitcaseexhibit.org

April 14: Consumerism Revisited

Andrews, ed., *Shopping: Material Culture Perspectives*

April 21: Final papers due by 8 p.m.

April 25: Popular Culture

Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in 1950s America*

