HIST 3396-Selected Topics in Latin American History
Consumer Culture in Latin America
University of Houston
Spring 2010

Prof. Natalia Milanesio
Email: nmilanesio@uh.edu
Office Hours: M-W 2.30-3.30 p.m. or by app.

Class meetings:
Agnes Hall 322, M-W 4-5.30 p.m.

Course Description

Consumption is an essential aspect of modern culture. Through the consumption of food, clothing, technology, entertainment and more, people satisfy basic needs, show what groups they belong to, express their personality, and make ideological statements.

In this course, we study consumption in Latin America as a historical experience that went beyond the mere economic act of purchasing to include what Latin Americans did with what they bought, that is, their experience of using and transforming consumer goods. From a historical and transnational perspective, this course explores the role of consumption in the construction of gender, class, national, racial, and ethnic identities; the transformation of shopping and advertising over time; and the roles of men, women and children in purchasing and using consumer goods. Equally important, this course analyzes the historical role of Latin America as a producer and consumer in the global economy and the relation between consumption and politics.

By focusing on consumer culture, we will examine key aspects of modern world history—labor unionization, nationalism, feminism, and anti-imperialism—and crucial topics in modern Latin American history such as the role of imports as “civilizing goods”; import substitution industrialization; the impact of coffee, sugar, and beef in the creation of national economies, and the effect of international tourism on local cultures, among others.

Learning Objectives

1. Reflect on the historical transformation of production, consumption, shopping, and advertising in Latin America
2. Increase students’ historical knowledge of the formation of national and regional markets, the development of commodity chains, and the emergence of consumer societies in the region
3. Deepen conceptual and historical understanding of gender, race, and class in relation to consumer culture
4. Analyze the historical roots of contemporary issues, especially globalization, tourism, fair trade, and different expressions of popular culture including cinema, music, and the printed media
Course Assignments

Class attendance and participation: 200
Ten (10) 1-page response papers: 250 [25 points each]
One (1) oral presentation: 100
Take-home midterm: 200
Take-home final essay: 250
Total: 1000 points

STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO COMPLETE THE READINGS BEFORE CLASS to be prepared to engage in informed conversations. Both the quality and quantity of participation is important.

No make-up exams or assignments will be given except in extraordinary cases that can be documented. ABSOLUTELY NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

PLAGIARISM will not be tolerated. For information about plagiarism and UH policy, see:
http://www.class.uh.edu/wconline/plagiarism/
http://www.uh.edu/academics/catalog/policies/academic-reg/academic-honesty/index.php

Ten (10) 1-page response papers: 250 [25 points each]
The professor will email and post on Blackboard a short question for each response paper. Readings that require a 1-page response paper are marked RP (See course schedule). Response papers MUST NOT EXCEED one (1) page. Use single line spacing if necessary. Students must turn in printed papers at the beginning of class on days marked RP. No late response papers will be accepted.

One (1) oral presentation: 100
Each student will sign up to give an oral presentation any class that IS NOT MARKED RP. Students will summarize the readings and post questions to the class. Students will work on the presentation in consultation with the professor.

Take-home midterm: 200
Questions for the midterm will be posted on Blackboard well in advance. The midterm is due uploaded on Blackboard on March 12, 2010 by 5.00 p.m.

Take-home final essay: 250
The final paper is due uploaded on Blackboard on May 3, 2010 by 5.00 p.m.

Course Requirements

BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM: Students are expected to attend class daily and to arrive on time. Students must not engage in any disrupting behavior—for example, talking during lectures, texting, arriving late, leaving early, reading newspapers, listening to headphones, surfing the internet etc. Please turn off all electronic devices before the beginning of class, including cell phones, iPods, pagers, etc. Voice recorders are not allowed. Laptop computers may be used only for taking notes. Disruptive students will be asked to leave the classroom. The professor reserves the right to drop disruptive students from the course.

BLACKBOARD IS AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF THIS COURSE: Students must check Blackboard regularly for updates and announcements regarding assignments, readings, and general messages.

EMAIL ETIQUETTE: Since you are communicating with professors and classmates in an academic environment, address professors and students directly by name or title, choose an appropriate greeting, be polite, and sign your emails. The professor will not reply emails that do not meet these conditions. Students must check their Blackboard email account regularly.

The professor WILL NOT post lectures online. Students must ask classmates for their notes if they were unable to attend class.
Students with a disability or other condition that requires special treatment must advise the instructor so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Readings

Both REQUIRED and OPTIONAL readings are posted online. Check Blackboard, http://www.uh.edu/webct/ or Electronic Reserves at www.library.uh.edu, UH-Main, Course Reserves.

PRINT all readings AND BRING them to class!

Course Schedule

Week 1:
1/18: Martin Luther King Day: No class
1/20: Introduction

WHAT IS CONSUMPTION?

Week 2:
1/25: The Myths of Consumption
1/26: Consumption: Good or Bad?

THE WORLD OF GOODS IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Week 3:
2/1: Material Culture in the Colonies

2/3: Colonial Goods, European Markets

CONSUMPTION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Week 4:
2/8: Markets and Consumers after Independence
2/10: Imports as Civilizing Goods

Week 5:

2/15: Women in Commerce

2/17: Household Economy

CONSUMPTION IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Week 6:

2/22: Consumption and the Search for Modernity

2/24: The First Department Stores

Week 7:

3/1: Shopping and the Construction of Femininity

3/3: Consumption and Class Identity

Week 8:

3/8: Advertising

3/10: Creating an Audience

Week 9: SPRING BREAK
THE EMERGENCE AND CONSOLIDATION OF MASS CONSUMPTION

Week 10:

3/22: State Intervention in the Marketplace

3/24: The Mobilization of Women Consumers

Week 11:

3/29: American Business in Latin America

3/31: Conflicting Values: Materiality vs. Spirituality
Julio Moreno, “Industrial Capitalism, Antimodernism, and Consumer Culture in 1940s Mexico,” in Yankee Don’t Go Home, pp. 207-228.

Week 12:

4/5: Domestic Technology

4/7: The 1960s youth culture and the consumption of rocanrol

Week 13:

4/12: Tourism I

4/14: Tourism II

GLOBAL CONSUMPTION FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Week 14:

4/19: Commodity Chains. Case Study I: Bananas
4/21: Commodity Chains. Case Study II: Coca and Cocaine

Week 15:

4/26: Global Consumers and Global Goods

4/28: International Shopping

Week 16:

5/3: Wrap up. Final Essay Due at 5.00 p.m.