

Northern Virginia Community College
History 187 – Interpreting Material Culture Syllabus
Spring Semester 2016

Class Schedule: Th 7:00pm – 9:45pm (HIS 187-001L (40580))
Location: L-Learning Commons / LC-0211
Instructor: Dr. Marc Dluger
Office: LR-136
Office Hours: See Blackboard
Email: mdluger@nvcc.edu

Course Description:

Surveys America's material culture and provides techniques to interpret artifacts. The course introduces students to material culture in its many forms, such as decorative arts, consumer objects, urban forms, vernacular architecture landscapes, body/dress, and toys, and builds a connection between those forms and values. This course will examine America's architectural, cultural, and historical resources and the historic, social, economic, political, and environmental forces that shaped them, as well as the means to interpret these artifacts. Furthermore, the course will consider the various ways scholars use material culture to "do history," with an emphasis on cultural artifacts as a way to explore cultural expression and social relations of early generations. Students will be able to identify various theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of material culture, use objects as sources in historical research, and apply those techniques to historical preservation and public history.

Course Prerequisites:

General college entrance competencies.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion, students should be able to:

- A) Develop research techniques to find sources of material culture
- B) Appreciate the relationship and meaning of artifact and historic preservation, and
- C) Identify and catalogue interior and hardware furnishings in case students.

Major Topics to be Covered Include:

Introduction and definition of terms; the search for material culture through oral tradition, documents, museums, and private holdings; the meaning of material culture and preservation (artifact and context, spatial relationship, hardware and interiors, furnishings, vernacular architecture, and impermanent structures); and, Virginia architecture and material culture.

Course Materials:

The following textbooks can be purchased at the bookstore:

- *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey, ISBN: 978-0415459327

- *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly, ISBN: 978-0759102514
- *Remembering Roadside America: Preserving the Recent Past as Landscape and Place*, John A. Jakle & Keith A. Sculle, ISBN: 978-1-57233-823-4

Optional textbooks:

- *Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms, 1600 – 1945*, John J.-G. Blumenson, ISBN: 978-0393306101

Additionally, numerous articles and other readings are located on Blackboard, under the Course Documents menu. They are organized by week on Blackboard and on the schedule, located at the end of the syllabus. You are required to bring in copies of those articles each week, either digitally or by printing them out.

Course Evaluation:

- 20% Five Object Personal/Family Story Website
- 20% Historic House Museum Assessment Project
- 20% Final Artifact Research Paper & Presentation
- 40% Discussions & Attendance

Five Object Personal/Family Story Website – Your goal is to select five objects that best represent you and/or your family and provide a material culturally analysis of those objects. Questions concerning that analysis include: What does that object mean to you? What does it represent? How does it represent broader interests, events, and/or personal history? Is there a relationship between the objects? What can outsiders learn about you and/or your family from these objects? Does the object's material, form, and function fit within the context of your historical narrative? You should apply this analysis to each of your five objects and then create a website highlighting this historical narrative.

Students can use Weebly (www.weebly.com), Wix (www.wix.com), or any other public website creation software/domain for this project. You must select five objects, photograph them (or use publically available images), post them to the website, and write your material cultural analysis about each one, creating an overarching historical narrative about yourself and/or your family. Keep in mind that these are public websites and that you may want to limit some of the information presented. After the project has been graded, you may remove the website at any time, or maintain it as an example of your work to share with others (and possible future employers). You are required to post a link on the appropriate Blackboard discussion board thread before the project's due date, allowing the rest of the students (and myself) to review your work and provide relevant feedback.

You will be required to present your website to the class the day it is do, highlighting your story and providing context for your object interpretation.

Due Date – February 11th

Historic House Museum Assessment Project – The goal of this project is to visit any one of the regions' numerous historic houses and craft an assessment of their historic interpretation. Please inform me of your possible selection before you begin the project. After your visit, you are required to write a 5 to 7 page review of the techniques used to interpret material culture at the

historic house museum. As you write your review, remember that there are many ways to exhibit and/or interpret material culture. Questions to consider for this assignment include:

- How did the site interpret the material culture it displayed (labels, audio/video components, tours, interactive displays, etc.)?
- If there was a guided tour, what themes were used to organize the information presented (specific individuals, events, etc.)?
- Was there a common theme for any of the exhibitions presented?
- Were there particular objects or settings that the tour guide or exhibition highlighted as relevant and important?
- Did the historic house museum create an "authentic" experience?
- How could the interpretation of the historic house museum be improved upon with either more or less examples of material culture?
- Finally, how would you grade the site's interpretation of its material culture collection?

You will submit your paper through the Blackboard assignment link. Hard copies or emailed versions will not be accepted.

Presentation component: you will present your historic house museum assessment to the rest of the class on the due date. It will be an informal presentation and you are not required to create a PowerPoint presentation; however, if you want to include visual aids and documentation, you can.

Due Date – March 17th

Final Artifact Research Paper & Presentation – This assignment requires you to conduct research on an artifact (or series of artifacts) of your choice, write a research paper, and create a visual in-class presentation. The object can also be an example of the built environment, such as a streetscape, buildings, town plans, monument, billboard, etc. The final research paper and presentation should provide analysis of the artifact(s) and places them in historical and cultural context. Among the questions you might consider are such issues as the role of the artifact in individual or group identity: how have individuals or groups of people interacted with and made meaning from the artifact(s); processes of production, marketing, consumption, or exchange; the significance of the object to local communities or institutions, or to broad patterns of American history, such as urbanization, leisure, reform, social conflict or mobility, changes in gender roles, etc. How does the artifact help illuminate the past? How does understanding the past help make sense of the artifact (placing the object in historical context)?

Your research paper should be approximately 7 to 10 pages in length, including images of the artifact(s), and a bibliography. The presentation part of the assignment should be approximately 7 to 10 minutes in length, having an overarching historical narrative, visual representations of your artifact(s), and a works cited acknowledgment page.

Due Date – May 5th

Discussion & Attendance – Class participation is a fundamental component in this course. Failing to actively participate in the classroom will severely hamper your ability to achieve a good grade in this course. Class participation turns history into an active and exciting subject, helping to facilitate your understanding of the topics at hand. Each week we will have a series of readings from the textbooks and relevant articles, accessible through Blackboard. Students must sign up to present information and analysis from those readings and share their interpretation

with the rest of the class in an informal presentation. Areas and topics that you should consider include, but are not limited to: summarizing the article/chapter; providing the thesis argument; is there a relationship between the themes presented in this particular article/chapter and the others from that week; is there a relationship found among the other articles/chapters already discussed this semester; and, does the it making a compelling and convincing argument.

You will have multiple opportunities to lead the class in discussion throughout the semester. As the discussion lead for that reading assignment, it is required that you generate at least three questions to help spur on the discussion and involve your fellow classmates to actively engage the subject material.

Due Date – Multiple dates throughout the semester, based on student choice

Graded materials will be returned to the students as soon as possible during the course of the semester, hopefully within a week.

Grade Scale:

90-100%	A
80-89%	B
70-79%	C
60-69%	D
Below 60%	F

Grading Standards for all Assignments in this Class:

These characteristics describe common traits of the grade given.

Grade ="A"

- This assignment specifically and fully answers all parts of the question or questions asked.
- Conclusions, opinions stated, or evaluations called for in the question are supported by appropriate analysis and a good range of specific facts.
- This assignment is clearly written in full sentences without major grammatical errors.
- An introduction, body, and conclusion are clearly evident.

Grade ="B"

- This assignment specifically answers all parts of the question or questions asked.
- Conclusions, opinions stated, or evaluations called for in the question are supported by adequate understanding of the text and common sense.
- May demonstrate general knowledge but often lacks a full range of specific facts.
- This assignment is clearly written without major grammatical errors.
- An introduction, body, and conclusion are clearly evident.

Grade ="C"

- This assignment may only answer part of the question or questions asked.
- Conclusions, opinions stated, or evaluations called for in the question are supported by some understanding of the text.
- This assignment may include factual errors, or not demonstrate adequate understanding of the historical period.

- The assignment may be poorly written, and contain serious grammatical errors.
- Or this assignment may simply list or describe historical facts without specifically relating them to the question or questions asked.
- An introduction, body, and conclusion are not clearly evident.

Grade ="D"

- Opinions stated, or evaluations given are not called for in the question or are not supported by an understanding of the period.
- This assignment may be poorly written, and contain many spelling and grammatical errors.
- The essay is one long paragraph.

Grade ="F"

- The assignment ignores the question or questions.
- This assignment contains many serious factual errors or no accurate facts.
- The assignment may be difficult or impossible to understand because of grammatical or usage errors.
- This essay is mostly sentences copied directly or very closely out of the text.
- The essay is one short paragraph.

Class Policies:

Conduct – You are expected to be respectful of everyone in the classroom. Disrespectful actions, through verbal, written, or any other ways, will not be tolerated and will be subject to discipline as documented in the Northern Virginia Community College student handbook.

Cell Phones and Electronic Devices – All cell phones and electronic devices must be turned off and put away. Laptops and tablet devices can be used for note taking only. Cell phones and electronic devices cannot be used to record lectures/discussions (either through audio, video, or still photography) in any way. Any cell phone left on the desk does not meet the above requirements.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is required. If you know you will be absent because of a legitimate reason, please inform the instructor through email as soon as possible. Excused absences will be tolerated on an extremely limited basis. More than three unexcused absences will count against your grade by one full letter. It is your responsibility to get the information discussed during any class missed.

Repeated tardiness will also reflect poorly on your participation grade. Being tardy to the exams or for your Primary Source Evaluation may impact your grades on those assignments.

Makeup Policy:

Late work will not be accepted. All work must be submitted through Blackboard before the start of class. If you fail to attend class on the day of your presentations you will receive a zero for that part of assignment. All assignment due dates are listed in the Schedule Section at the end of this Syllabus. It is your responsibility to know these dates and mediate any potential conflicts.

Late Withdrawal Policy:

The last possible day to withdraw from the class is March 22nd without a grade penalty. Financial compensation (or partial refund for the class) from the college will only happen if you withdraw before January 28th (census date). Please consult the Northern Virginia Community College website for exact refund options.

If you are concerned about your grade, please schedule a time to visit with me.

Incomplete Policy:

Incompletes are rare occurrences and can only occur when a student can document an extenuating circumstance. Two-thirds of the assignments and the class must be completed with a grade of at least a “C” for such a condition to be even initially considered. Special arrangements must be made before an incomplete can be granted.

Plagiarism and Dishonest Conduct:

This class follows the rules as outlined in the Northern Virginia Community College Student Handbook.

Academic dishonesty includes: dishonest use of course materials, such as student papers, examinations, and reports; knowingly assisting others in the dishonest use of course papers, examinations, and reports; and knowingly presenting course materials such as papers, lab data, reports, and/or electronic files and sources used by another students as that student’s own work.

Plagiarism occurs when a student uses language or ideas from materials without acknowledgement and/or when the work is copied from other sources and is submitted as the student’s own. Examples include: copying a phrase, sentence, or longer passage from a source and submitting it as one’s own; summarizing or paraphrasing someone else’s ideas without acknowledging the source; and, submitting group assignments individually as one’s own independent work. When in doubt, **footnote** the source in written reports! If you have any questions or concerns, consult with the instructor beforehand or seek advice from the Writing Center. The Library’s website has information as well if students have any further questions.

Any student who submits an assignment and is found guilty of academic dishonesty or plagiarism, will fail that assignment, the course, and face academic probation.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

The college is committed to the goal of providing each qualified student an equal opportunity to pursue a college education regardless of disability. Disability services are available to the student upon the provision of clear and specific evidence that documents a formal diagnosis of a disability from a qualified professional. Students should contact the Loudoun campus Student Services Center, 703-450-2501, for further information. Students who wish to obtain their services must contact them at the start of the semester. A Memorandum of Accommodation, if required, must be presented to the instructor at the beginning of the term.

Schedule

- Week 1 January 14 Class Introduction**
E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," in Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies in America*, pp. 162-173.
- Week 2 January 21 Approaches to Artifact Studies and Thinking about Objects**
History and Material Culture – Introduction, Chapter 1
Interpreting Historic House Museums – Introduction, Chapter 1
"AHR Conversation: Historians and the Study of Material Culture," AHR (December 2009): 1355-1404.
John Schlebecker, "The Use of Objects in Historical Research," in Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies in America*, pp. 106-113.
Sherry Turkle (ed.), *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), "Introduction: The Things That Matter," p. viii-10; "The Archive," p. 31-38; "The Radio," p. 102-109; "The Vacuum Cleaner," p. 136-142; "What Makes an Object Evocative," p. 307-326.
- Week 3 January 28 The Domestic Sphere and Victorian Culture**
Interpreting Historic House Museums – Chapter 6
Ellen Marie Snyder, "Innocents in a Worldly World: Victorian Children's Gravemarkers," in *Cemeteries & Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture*, pp. 11-29.
Diana Strazdes, "The Millionaire's Palace: Leland Stanford's Commission for Pottier & Stymus in San Francisco," *Winterthur Portfolio* 36 (Winter 2001): 213-243.
- Week 4 February 4 Dress and Body: Interpretation of Race, Gender, and Class**
History and Material Culture – Chapter 4
Interpreting Historic House Museums – Chapter 4
Carole Turbin, "Fashioning the American Man; The Arrow Collar Man, 1907-1931," *Gender and History* 14 (November 2002): 470-491.
Nan Enstad, "Fashioning Political Identities: Cultural Studies and the Historical Construction of Political Subjects," *American Quarterly* 50 (December 1998): 745-782.
- Week 5 February 11 Five Object Personal Family Story Website**
In-class presentations of your websites
- Week 6 February 18 Urban Form and the Built Environment**
History and Material Culture – Chapter 5, Chapter 7
Interpreting Historic House Museums – Chapter 2, Chapter 3
Remembering Roadside America – Chapter 1, Chapter 2
- Week 7 February 25 Landscapes and the Public Space**

History and Material Culture – Chapter 3
Interpreting Historic House Museums – Chapter 5
Remembering Roadside America – Chapter 4, Chapter 6
Joseph Heathcott, "Reading the Accidental Archive: Architecture, Ephemera, and Landscape as Evidence of an Urban Public Culture," *Winterthur Portfolio* 41 (Winter 2007): 239-268.

Week 8 March 3 Historic House Museums and Preservation
Interpreting Historic House Museums – Chapter 7, Chapter 9, Chapter 10, Chapter 13

Week 9 March 10 Spring Break

Week 10 March 17 Historic House Museum Assessment Project
In-class presentation of your historic house museum assessment project

Week 11 March 24 Consumerism
Ann Smith Martin, "Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework," *Winterthur Portfolio* 28, nos. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 1993): 141-157.
Karal Ann Marling, "Hyphenated Culture: Painting by Numbers in the New Age of Leisure," in *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*, pp. 50-85
Karal Ann Marling, "Disneyland, 1955: The Place That Was Also a TV Show," in *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*, pp. 86-128.
Fred R. Myers, "Representing Culture: The Production of Discourse(s) for Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings," in *The Traffic Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, pp. 55-95.

Week 12 March 31 Cooking & Food: Form, Technology, & Meaning
History and Material Culture – Chapter 6
Susanne Freidberg, "Eggs: Shell Games," in *Fresh: A Perishable History*, pp. 86-121.
Pamela H. Simpson, "Butter Cows and Butter Buildings: A History of an Unconventional Sculptural Medium," *Winterthur Portfolio* 41 (Spring 2007): 1-20.

Week 13 April 7 Toys!: Material Culture of Childhood
Karen J. Hall, "A Soldier's Body: G.I. Joe, Hasbro's Great American Hero, and the Symptoms of Empire," *The Journal of Popular Culture* vol. 38, no. 1 (2004): 34-54.
Christie D. Jackson, "From the Collection: With Paper and Glue: Building the Commercial Success of an Arts and Crafts Toy," *Winterthur Portfolio* 44 (Winter 2010): 351-386.
Kathy Merlock Jackson, "From Control to Adaptation: America's Toy Story," *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 24 (Spring/Summer 2001): 139-145.

Jo B. Paoletti, "The Gendering of Infants and Toddlers Clothing in America," from *Material Culture of Gender*.

Week 14 April 14 Souvenirs, Collections, and Relics

History and Material Culture – Chapter 9

Susan M. Pearce, "Making Museums Meanings," in *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study*, pp. 118-143.

Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire," in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, pp. 132-169.

Andrea L. Volpe, "Collecting the Nation: Visions of Nationalism in Two Civil War-Era Photograph Albums," from *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, pp. 89-111.

Week 15 April 21 Monuments and Memory

Remembering Roadside America – Chapter 5

Teresa Barnett, "Tradition and the Individual Memory: The Case of Christian C. Sanderson," from *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, pp. 221-235.

Gregory Maertz, "Exhibiting Nazi Artifacts and Challenging Traditional Museum Culture: A Conversation with Mitchell Wolfson Jr.," from *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, pp. 267-285.

Barbara Rotundo, "Monumental Bronze: A Representative American Company," in *Cemeteries & Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture*, pp. 263-291.

Week 16 April 28 Protecting the Past & Discarding the Future

History and Material Culture – Chapter 10

Interpreting Historic House Museums – Chapter 12

Remembering Roadside America – Chapter 7

Lisa A. Long, "All Buy Our Selves at Household Auctions," from *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, pp. 236-254.

Week 17 May 5 Final Presentations