"A method based on the document is prejudiced; fated to neglect the majority of people, for they were non-literate, and, within the bounds of literacy, to neglect the majority of people, for they did not write.

Henry Glassie
Folk Housing in Middle Virginia

Our Shared Purpose

The aim of this course is to introduce students to study of “history from things,” or material culture. Throughout the semester, we will attend both to the methods by which material culture can be harnessed for historical analysis and to significant genres or avenues of inquiry undertaken by scholars working with material culture sources. Students will gain familiarity with the most significant literature in material culture studies, major trends in material culture historiography and methodology, and the leading figures who have given the field its shape and direction. Because my interests tend to center on the US before the Civil War, and because that is the strength of area museum collections, the course will focus on that period, though students are invited and encouraged to range more widely in their written assignments.

The course will also contribute to the department’s participation in Global Dialogues on Incarceration, a project of the New School’s Humanities Action Lab: [http://humanitiesactionlab.org](http://humanitiesactionlab.org)

Assignments: Readings, Writings, Discussions

Readings:

Book-length readings that are recommended for purchase include


Other books we will consult:
- Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America*, has been placed on RESERVE
- William Hosley, *The Great River* (Art collection; does not circulate)
- Styles & Vickers, *Gender, Taste & Material Culture* has been placed on RESERVE

Writings: There will be three short writing assignments and one major piece of writing.

Assignment #1: Browse the Winterthur Portfolio and the Journal of Design History. In two pages, describe what you observe, and assess the most effective methods currently in play.
Assignment #2: in five pages, compare the methodological choices across the assigned readings, and assess the relationship of those choices to the author’s subject matter and argument.

Assignment #3: in five pages, review Robert Blair St. George’s *Conversing by Signs*. This paper caps Part I of the course, which aims to consider the several landmark statements and illustrations of methodology; this being so, your review should engage with specificity the other authors read before this date. To what degree does St. George rely on, and depart from, scholarship that has come before?

Assignment #4: Prepare a traditional AHR-style 800-word book review of one title from the list of options at the end of this syllabus. This can be self-scheduled, due any time during the semester.

Seminar-length project:

Option #1: Write a historiographical paper (ca. 20-25 pages) on how historians have engaged material culture to illuminate larger subjects of scholarly inquiry. These papers should be thematic, rather than based in any genre of artifact. Topics might include, for example, the Material Culture of Childhood, the Material Culture of Faith, the Material Culture of Race, etc.

Option #2: Contribute to the department’s ongoing exploration of histories of incarceration by developing a paper (historiographical or research) on material cultures of incarceration. Appropriate subjects would include clothing history of incarceration (an overview of the history of prisoner’s uniforms, including some investigation of how prisoner apparel is fabricated today); prisoner art; or material cultures of confinement (shackles, restraints, etc).

Proposals due Feb 24. Proposal should be 2 pages, and convey all the secondary literature to be reviewed, and a description of the nature and access to a primary source base if a student is pursuing a research paper under Option 2.

Policies

**Academic Honesty:** Here is the Graduate School Interim Statement on Academic Honesty: It is expected that all graduate students will abide by the Graduate Student Honor Code and the Academic Honesty Policy (available at the Graduate Dean’s Office, the Academic Honesty Office (Ombuds Office) or online at [http://www.umass.edu/gradschool/handbook/univ_policies_regulations_a.htm](http://www.umass.edu/gradschool/handbook/univ_policies_regulations_a.htm). Sanctions for acts of dishonesty range from receiving a grade of F on the paper/exam/assignment or in the course, loss of funding, being placed on probation or suspension for a period of time, or being dismissed from the University. All students have the right of appeal through the Academic Honesty Board.

Plagiarism is a serious offense that will result in a failing grade for this course and may lead to your expulsion from the university. If you are having trouble in this class let me know. We can address the problem together. Whatever difficulties you are having will be much easier to fix than the problems that will arise from a charge of plagiarism.

**Statement on Disability:** The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.
Schedule

Wed Jan 20: Introductions

Readings:
Harvey Green, “Cultural History’s Material ‘Turn,’” Cultural History 1.1 (2012), 61-82
Sophie White, “Geographies of Slave Consumption,” Winterthur Portfolio, Vol. 45, No. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 2011), pp. 229-248,

PART ONE: METHODS, MANIFESTOES

Wed Jan 27: First Things First

Reading:

Also Browse: AHR Conversation: Historians and the Study of Material Culture
Leora Auslander, Amy Bentley, Leor Halevi, H. Otto Sibum and Christopher Witmore The American Historical Review Vol. 114, No. 5 (December 2009), pp. 1354-1404

PAPER DUE: Assignment 1: Browse the Winterthur Portfolio and the Journal of Design History. Come to class ready to share 2 specific examples that suggest to you the most effective methods currently in play.

Wed Feb 3: A Foray into Comparative Methodology: Approaches to/from the Architectural Record

Reading:
Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia (SELECTIONS).
Dell Upton, “Black and White Landscapes in Early Virginia” in St. George, Material Life in America
Michael Ann Williams, Homeplace (SELECTIONS).

PAPER DUE: Assignment #2 (as above)

Wed Feb 10:
Reading:
Bushman, Refinement of America  RESERVE

Wed Feb 17: And now for something completely different...
Reading:
Robert Blair St. George, Conversing by Signs

PAPER DUE: Assignment #3 (as above)

Wed Feb 24: FIELD TRIP: Learning to Look (with Bill Hosley): Hadley Historical Society

In this class period, we will join Bill Hosley, curator of the landmark exhibition and catalog The Great River: Art and Society of the Connecticut Valley, on an exploration of the artifacts preserved in the Hadley Historical Society, focusing on wooden objects, including furniture, tools, and architectural fragments.

Reading:
Hosley, The Great River: Art and Society of the Connecticut Valley. This book is held by our library, but doesn’t circulate. Read each of the four intro essays, and the catalog entries as well for furniture, architecture, and a third category of your choosing.

PROPOSALS FOR LONG-TERM PROJECTS DUE.

Wed March 2: Into the 19th Century

Reading:
David Jaffee, A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America
Wed March 9:
FIELD TRIP: Learning to Look (with Lynne Bassett): Hadley Historical Society

In this class period, we will join Lynne Bassett, one of the region’s leading costume historians, as she encounters for the first time the collections of the Hadley Historical Society. In watching her examine the collection, we’ll learn how experts “see” objects, while also learning about the history of apparel in the Valley. We’ll also learn about object handling, and the proper care of historic garments.

Reading:
Jane Nylander’s section in Hosley, The Great River
Linzy Brekke, “To make a figure”: clothing and the politics of male identity in eighteenth-century America,” in Styles & Vickery, eds., Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830
Joan Severa, Dressed for the Photographer RESERVE

PART TWO: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

March 23: Putting it all Together I: Material Culture and the study of Women’s History

Reading:
Sarah H. Hill: Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and their Basketry
Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, “Collaborative Consumption and the Politics of Choice in Early American Port Cities,” in Styles & Vickery, eds., Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830

[Review Adams, Williams, Miller, White, Brekke and other readings that engaged women’s history; we will return to these as well during this discussion]
March 30: Putting it all Together II: Material Culture and the Carceral State

Reading:
Tyler Rudd Putman "Every Man Turned Out in the Best He Had": Clothing and Buttons in the Historical and Archaeological Records of Johnson's Island Prisoner-of-War Depot, 1862-1865 *Northeast Historical Archaeology* Vol 40, No 1
Juliet Ash, *Dress Behind Bars: Prison Clothing as Criminality* [SELECTIONS]
Rory Stott, *The Architecture of Incarceration: Can Design Affect the Prison System?*”

Please also review the catalog for “BobBarker: America’s Leading Detention Supplier”
https://www.bobbarker.com/


April 6: NO CLASS

April 13: Putting it all Together III: Material Culture and the study of Disability History
Guest: Molly Stothert-Maurer, Archivist, Perkins School for the Blind


Robert B. Irwin, “The War of the Dots,”

And TBA

2:30-3:45 class
4:00-5:00 public lecture, “The Topography of Literacy: The Early History of books and tactile graphics for the blind.”

April 20: NO CLASS (Monday Schedule)

April 27: LAST CLASS: Presentation of semester-long projects


Bernard L Herman, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830*


