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HIST 487/687
Spring 2012, Syllabus
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Clothing and American Culture

From rolled stockings and bobbed hair to afros and dashikis, clothing and appearance serve as indispensable markers of the last century's sweeping social change. This course examines how key social and cultural developments came to influence fashion trends and presents how a diverse cross-section of Americans used personal appearance to define and display who they were. It begins with the redefinition of masculinity and femininity that was linked to the emergence of sports culture at the turn of the century and it concludes with the rise of the "hip-hop nation," whose cultural influence defies race, class, and geography.

The course juxtaposes broader trends such as modernization, immigration, and urbanization with the role that personal appearance played in the everyday lives of a range of Americans. The histories of the body, gender, and sexuality are integrated with topics including social stratification, ethnic identity, race, consumption, and material culture.

This course culminates in a student-curated exhibition entitled "Vegas Style," to be opened in the Fall of 2012. This exhibition will feature costumes borrowed from local and regional collectors. During this semester, students will identify themes, conduct archival research to develop these themes, and help to select object for exhibition.

Assignments and Grading: As this is a hands-on course, 40% of the grade will come from participation in the research groups, group discussion, and class attendance. As many students are uncomfortable speaking up in class, I will accept a 1-page commentary on lecture or readings in lieu of in-class comments. This should be turned in within 24 hours of class.

Additional writing assignments may be given as the semester progresses. I will give students ample time to research and complete these assignments.

Weekly Schedule:

Jan. 18: Introduction to Course

Jan. 23: “Of Sex and Money: Theories of Fashion Change and Personal Adornment”
READING DUE: Selections of *Theory of the Leisure Class* and *Sex and Suits*

Jan. 25: Show and Tell: What Does Your Object Say about the 20th Century?
READING/ASSIGNMENT DUE: “Costume as Material Culture” and 2-page paper on cultural meaning of object

Jan. 30: NO CLASS

Feb. 1: “Athletes and Amazons: Redefining ‘Masculine’ and ‘Feminine’”
READING DUE: Lewis’ “Sport Youth Culture and Conventionality 1920-1970” in *Journal of Sport History* (Fall 1993) and Dryerson’s “The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s” in *Journal of Sport History*, Winter 1989

Feb. 6: The Exhibition Process: Themes for “Vegas Style” and Creating the Teams: Curatorial, Design, and Event Groups

Feb. 8: “The Coming of Casual: College Kids and American Style”/Discussion of *Looking Good* READING DUE: *Looking Good: College Women and Body Image, 1875-1930*

Feb. 13: Class excursion: The Liberace Museum

Feb. 15: “The Falicy of the Flapper: Five Untruths of an American Icon”
READING DUE: “Prosperity’s Child” by Yellis and *The Great Gatsby*

Feb. 20: NO CLASS

Feb. 22: Documentary: The Making of the It Girl: Clara Bow

Feb. 27: Class excursion: Hard Rock Hotel, meet at the leather jackets

Feb. 29: The Fallacy of the Flapper: Five Untruths of an American Icon”

March 5: Silent Film and American Fashion – Guest Lecture by Dr. Jeff Crouse
READING DUE: Selections from Berry’s *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* available online through UNLV library. Grad students read entire book; undergraduate read Intro and Chapter One

March 7: Outline of final projects; discussion of primary sources

March 12: “Travel & Leisure: Miami and the American Sportswear Industry”
READING DUE: Chapters 1, 2, 8, and 12 of *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West*, Wrobel (editor).

March 14: Documentary: Bill Cunningham New York

March 19: “Personal Appearance and Southern Girl Strikers in Textile Strike of 1934”;
READING DUE: J. D. Hall’s “Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South,” *Journal of American History*, v. 73, n. 3 (Sept 1986).

March 21: “Fashion on the Home Front: World War Two and American Style”

March 26: Discussion of *Zoot Suit*

March 28: A Silent Lecture: Fashions from the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.
READING DUE: Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of *Nylon: A Fashion Revolution* by Handley

SPRING BREAK

April 9: Exhibition Writing Workshop. BYOO (Bring Your Own Object) and associated research and be ready to write labels.

April 11: Handling Historic Costume

April 16: Trip to State Museum of Nevada (20 minute commute from campus).

April 18: NO CLASS: Research session on your own

April 25: Class Project Presentation

April 30: Class Project Presentation

May 2: Class Project Presentation