Technology and American Identity

History 615, section 4. George Mason University. Spring 2005

Thursdays, 7:20 – 10 pm. Innovation Hall 205.
Course website: http://mason.gmu.edu/~zschrag/hist615spring05/home.htm

Prof. Zachary M. Schrag
Robinson B 375C. Tel. 703/993-1257. www.schrag.info
E-mail: zschrag@gmu.edu (please include “615” in subject header).
Office Hours: Mondays 2:15 – 4:15 pm and by appointment.

Syllabus updated: February 1, 2005

Since the creation of the United States, Americans have used technology not only to solve problems, make money, and have fun, but also to define themselves as individuals, as groups, and as a nation. This course will explore the relationship between tools and identity, using a broad definition of identity that includes questions of nation, region, labor, class, gender, and consumption. In doing so, it will also introduce students to some of the key methods, sources, and ideas used by historians of technology.

Books

*Note: The Second Self is out of print, so please order a used copy from bookfinder.com or some other source early in the semester. The other books have been ordered at the university bookstore in the Johnson Center.

Requirements

Reading responses (70 percent)
Each week, each student will write a 750-1000 word reaction essay to the assigned book. The essays should not summarize the reading. Rather, they should critique it, explaining its significance, noting its weaknesses, and relating it to other reading the student has done within the course and without. The essays should be designed to stimulate class discussion by provoking other students. In short, they should serve as the good part of a book review. See http://www.schrag.info/teaching/review.html
for some ideas on how to approach this. We will read thirteen book assignments (plus one museum exhibit review), but only ten responses are required, to allow for illness, family emergencies, and other problems.

Please e-mail the responses to zschrags@gmu.edu by **9am** on the day of the discussion. Please send them as a plain-text e-mail message (no attachments) with a subject header that includes “615” and the name of the author whose book you are reading. Formal footnotes are not required, but please provide page numbers for quotations and key facts.

**Discussion leading (15 percent)**

Twice during the semester, each student will join with one or two others to lead the seminar. This will require reading an article-length work (listed under “additional reading”) in addition to the assigned book, presenting that additional work to the class, and preparing discussion questions for the group.

**Discussion participation (15 percent)**

Students are expected to be in their seats and ready to take notes at the start of class, and to participate actively in class discussions.

**Basic classroom rules**

- Bring the books we are discussing to class each week.
- Do not eat in the classroom, before or during class.
- Turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other noisemakers.

---

**Policies**

All assignments are governed by the George Mason University **honor code**, online at http://www.gmu.edu/departments/unilife/honorcode.html. You are expected to work independently and to acknowledge all sources, including assigned texts and materials found online. Consult Gordon Harvey’s “Writing with Sources,” http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources for instructions on when and how to cite, and ask me if you need clarification. In general, any sentence in your work that can be traced to a single sentence in someone else’s work should bear a footnote. Any collaboration, such as consultation with the Writing Center, should also be acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the administration and may result in grade penalties, including failure of the course.

In case of **inclement weather**, please call the main switchboard at 703-993-1000 or consult the main web page at http://www.gmu.edu/ to see if classes are cancelled. I expect to cancel class only when the university cancels all classes.

If you are a student with a **disability** and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

All students are expected to check their **gmu.edu e-mail** regularly and are responsible for information sent to their GMU addresses.
Schedule

Note that Technology and Culture articles may be downloaded from JSTOR (up to 1998) or Project Muse (since 1998). Other readings have URLs or will be posted on electronic reserve or the course website.

1. January 27. Approaches

- Smith and Marx, eds. Does Technology Drive History?

2. February 3. Nation

- Nye, America as Second Creation

Additional reading:


3. February 10. Region

- Smith, Mastered by the Clock

Additional reading:


4. February 17. War

- Mindell, War, Technology, and Experience
- Wells, H. G. “The Land Ironclads” (1903), on course website.

Additional reading:

5. February 24. Law

- Welke, *Recasting American Liberty*

Additional reading:


6. March 3. Invention


Additional reading:


7. March 10. Production


Additional reading:


- Lindstrom, Richard. “They all believe they are undiscovered Mary Pickfords: Workers, Photography, and Scientific Management.” *Technology and Culture* 41, Number 4, October 2000, pp. 725-751


March 17 NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

8. March 24. Profession

- Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine*

Additional reading:


9. March 31. Consumption

• Kline, *Consumers in the Country*


Additional reading:

• Greenberg, Joshua Mark. “From Betamax to Blockbuster: Mediation in the Consumption Junction” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2004), chapter 1.


10. April 7. Labor

• Sandelowski, *Devices & Desires*

Additional reading:


11. April 14. Fantasy

• McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination*

Additional reading:


12. April 21. Exhibition


Attend one museum exhibit or historic site with a technology theme, and write up a review in the style of a Technology and Culture exhibit review. (For examples, search the T&C database within Project Muse for “exhibit review.”)

13. April 28. Simulation

• Turkle, *The Second Self*
Additional reading:


14. May 5. Choices

- Brende, Better Off

Additional reading:
