

From: Katherine Hjar
Sent: Monday, April 25, 2016 3:44 PM
To: Yvonne Meulemans
Cc: Virginia Mann
Subject: Re: HIST300-13
Attachments: History of the Fork Flyer Text 6a.pdf

Hi, Yvonne,

I'm so glad to receive this question, and I apologize for the delay. [Thanks for the nudge, Virginia!]

I can see why the committee is mystified by my incomplete answer to #6.

In this course, students will address issues involving both the cognitive and affective aspects of human experience by learning how objects can be understood as expressions of human social and cultural values; signifiers of ideological principles; and reminders of specific, lived human experiences that can be linked with a given object.

Here are a few examples:

The fork.

We will consider the adoption of the fork among European nobility as part of a larger move by elites to differentiate themselves from members of the "lower" classes. We will see how, over time, social manners became increasingly important in European and American society, as a way to differentiate among social classes. So, in these ways, the fork becomes not just an object, but a signifier of ideologies and cultural practices that were (and are) meant to differentiate among socio-economic classes, and reinforce and maintain the privilege of some over others.

Students will read passages from anthropologist Norbert Elias that describe the introduction of the fork into European elites' dining practices, along with other new social rules, and the advice literature that promoted these ideas. We will consider some kind of theory or analytical method (suggestions welcome!!), and then apply it, along with Elias's insights, to students' understanding of when a fork can be not just a fork.

An African-style drum, made in Cuba.

This is an excuse to show one of the most amazing documentaries I've ever seen, *They Are We*. Long story short, with a spoiler: Historian at Sydney University tracks down the Sierra Leone tribe from which a community of Cubans are descended. This community has distinctive music and dance traditions, and (in the documentary) when the historian shows the African community a video of the Cubans dancing and singing, one of the Africans jumps up, points, and exclaims, "They are we!"

So, this example will permit us to explore what it means to trace cultural connections over time, across great spatial, social, and cultural differences. Seeing how the participants themselves are affected by learning about, seeing, and meeting each other (not to mention making music together!) can potentially spark students' understanding of a whole variety of perspectives. The documentary, accompanying readings about the

histories of Caribbean slavery and Afro-Cuban music, and music samples will give students some frameworks for understanding and making meaning out of this story and its context.

In general,

my plan is to help students see and understand objects as entry points for deeper understanding of the hidden histories that the object can represent. A thing can be understood as the result of human labor and its exploitation in specific contexts; an instrument for practical use that has/had profound effects; a symbol of an identity and its opposite, of social inclusion and exclusion; as markers of both continuity and change over time.

I hope this helps! I'll be happy to address any other concerns that the committee might have. My thanks to all of you for your service! Oh, and I've attached a copy of the course flyer, in case anyone's interested. You'll see that I went ahead and advertised it as a GE class.

With my best,
Katherine

From: Yvonne Meulemans
Sent: Thursday, April 14, 2016 12:36 PM
To: Katherine Hajar
Subject: HIST300-13

Hi Katherine:

GEC reviewed your proposal for HIST300-13 and was really enthusiastic about it. Several of us wanted to take the course! The committee did have one request for further information:

In your response to Q6 on the form, the committee would like more in your response to address the "...cognitive and affects aspects of human experience..."

The committee feels this is a significant aspect of CC courses and some additional information would be helpful.

Please let me know if this makes sense or not. I'm happy to speak f2f or by phone if you think that would be helpful.

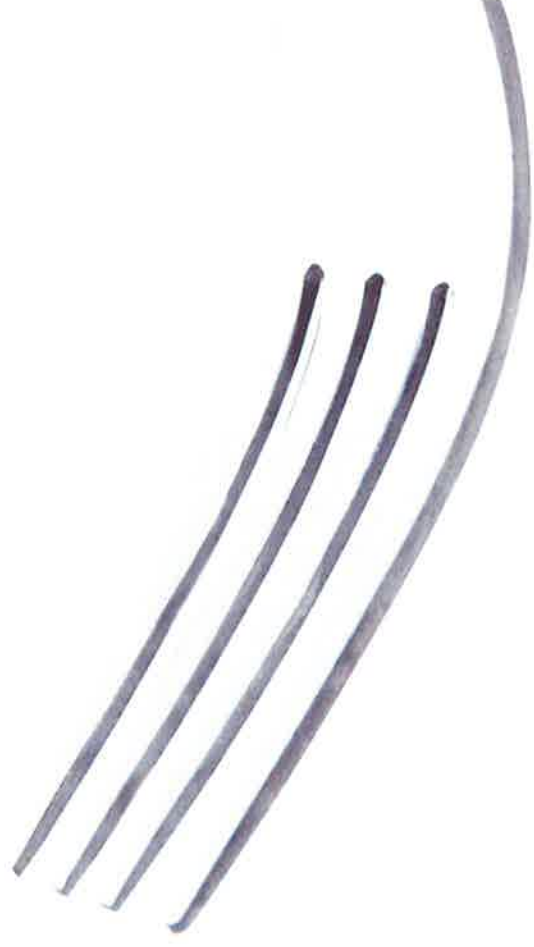
Thanks,
Yvonne

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The Surprising History of the Fork and Other Strange Objects: Material Culture, Human Societies, and Digital History

A history of things as a way to understand the past, its lessons, and its impact on the present.

*M/W/F 11:30 am – 12:20 pm
with Prof. Katherine Hajar*



This interdisciplinary General Education History course is designed for non-majors and History majors alike. We will study various objects made by humans, using them as starting points to investigate how objects can help us better understand histories of human experience, complex processes of historical change, and the impact of the past on the present. In addition to learning about the history of the fork, we will consider African-style drums

made in Cuba, Tupperware, a well traveled t-shirt, and much more. With a focus on applying the scholarly methods of historians, we will also apply insights and methods from archaeology, cultural studies, investigative journalism, forensic anthropology, and museum studies. Students will learn to use simple software tools to present their own research findings, according to cutting-edge practices in the field of Digital History.