Fashion, Politics and Justice

Course #: IDSEM-UG 1836
Fall 2015
Washington Place, Rm.527
TTh: 3:30-4:45

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00 and by appointment
To Sign Up for Office Hours: https://goo.gl/abZnCI

This course offers an overview of the political economy of the 21st century fashion industry. Focusing on specific examples transnational supply chains, we follow the globalized production and consumption of garments and brands, and examine closely the debates about gender and globalization, economic and social development, labor standards, sustainability and activism. Some of the questions we will explore include: How do we account for the globalization of the garment industry? What are the politics of today’s global “fast fashion” industry both in the global South and in the North? Do alternatives such as ethical fashion initiatives by designers, programs for corporate social responsibility and campaigns of consumer activism offer meaningful interventions? What role do workers in the fashion industry—from garment workers, to retail workers to models—play in shaping discussions about a more just and sustainable future for fashion? We draw from interdisciplinary scholarship ranging from anthropology and sociology to media studies and race and ethnic studies.

Required books are available at NYU Bookstore 726 Broadway


Additional Chapters, articles and all On-line materials will be posted on NYU Classes Site. To navigate NYU Classes Please see: https://wikis.nyu.edu/display/nyuclasses/Student+Quick-Start
REQUIREMENTS

Requirements, Assignments and Grading

Attendance/Participation 20%

Punctual attendance and active participation is key to your success in this course. In order to help you organize your thoughts about the readings, highlight a quote or argument from the readings that raised an interesting question or comment regarding the theme for the day and come to class prepared to discuss. You will sometimes be given short in-class assignments based on the texts, films or online materials you have been assigned; this will count toward your participation grade. You are encouraged to be pro-active in your learning about topics that might be new to you and ask for extra background materials when necessary. You should also draw from your own as well as your classmates’ reaction posts to inform your class discussion.

Attendance is very important for this class and if you cannot attend because of illness or an emergency of some kind, please email me in advance. Outside of official holidays and religious observance, more than two absences without a reasonable excuse will result in a lowered grade.

Weekly Reaction Posts 10%

As a formal part of your reaction grade, you are required to submit a total of 10 brief, (1 page or 250 word) posts on the weekly readings between Weeks 2 (September 10th) and Week 13 (December 3rd). You can choose any 10 weeks that interest you over the course of the semester, and post your reaction paper on the NYU classes website by Thursday at noon. These posts should identify connections between one or more of the readings and themes that we are addressing for a particular week. Reactions are not summaries but rather critical and creative commentaries. The professor as well as your classmates will read through the weekly posts in order to better inform weekly class discussions.

Please note that these reaction posts are formal written assignments and you should pay attention to grammar, style and use of language as well as page/word limit. These posts will not be given a letter grade, but you risk losing a substantial component of your participation grade (at least 10 percent) if you do not submit 10 posts over the course of the semester.

Mid-Term Paper (10 Pages) 30%

The mid-term paper will be based on the texts and materials covering the historical and contemporary context of the modern global fashion industry. You will have a choice of at least two essay topics; detailed guidelines for this paper will be posted on the class website by October 5th. The paper should be submitted through the class website by the
beginning of class on **Thursday, October 15th**.

**Final Paper or Project** (12-15 Pages)  

Your final paper or project will explore in greater detail one of the themes and/or issues covered in the second half of the semester. You can choose to write a stand-alone research paper on a topic of interest, or submit a joint group project with another student. Detailed instructions on the final paper/project will be posted by **October 15th**. Your final paper or project will be graded based on a detailed outline (Due by the beginning of class on **November 10th**), brief presentations during the last two classes of the semester, along with the paper/project itself.

Your final paper should be submitted through the class website by 5:00 PM, **Monday, December 14th**.

**Extra Credit Assignments**  

Over the course of the semester, there will be opportunities for up to two extra-credit assignments (each counting for 5 %). These will generally take the form of additional book or film reviews, and or overviews of talks and or relevant events on campus or in New York. All extra-credit assignment options will be posted after October 15th.

**POLICIES**

*Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:*

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Suspected cases of plagiarism or other violations of academic integrity will be addressed according to Gallatin’s student discipline rules. For a full description of the academic integrity policy, please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website:  
[http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html](http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)

*Style for Assignments:*

Students will be asked to cite and reference their assignments in the APA (American Psychological Association) or MLA (Modern Language Association) styles, which will be reviewed in class.

*Electronic Devices:*

All electronic devices should be in the off or vibrate position and out of sight during class session. Laptops/Tablets should be used only to take notes and or access material directly relevant to class discussion.
**Turning in Papers and Assignments:**

**Late Assignments:**

It is difficult for the instructor to coordinate grading, ensure fairness, or return papers in a timely manner when assignments are not handed in on time. Each day that a paper is late, you will lose half a letter grade (An A paper will be graded as A-, etc). Papers will not be accepted more than 1 week after the assignment was originally due, unless there are extenuating circumstances (such as an illness that can be documented), in which case the student and instructor will come to an agreement together.

**Students with Disabilities:**

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities, with the advice and assistance of the appropriate services on campus.

**Syllabus Changes:** This syllabus is a contract between professor and students. However, it is subject to change with sufficient notice to students.
Weekly Outline

Week 1


I) Modern Fashion as Industry: A Historical Overview

Week 2

September 8th: Industrializing Fashion in the 20th century
September 10th: Gender, Migration and Labor in Paris & New York

Texts:

Week 3

September 15th: Sweatshops and Skills
September 17th: Race, Class and Gendered Labor

Texts:

II) Globalization and Fast Fashion

Week 4

September 22nd: Tracing Political Economic Shifts
September 24th: Labor Across Murky Supply Chains

Texts:
- Watch: China Blue, Micha Peled (2005)
Week 5
September 29th: Bangladesh, Gender and ‘Development’
October 1st: Rana Plaza as Turning Point?

Texts:

Week 6
October 6th: From Asia to Africa

Texts:

III) Pushing Back: New Labor Movements

Week 7
October 13th: Fall Break

Mid-Term Essay Due Beginning of Class

October 15th: Organized Labor in the Era of Globalization

Texts:

Week 8
October 20th: Rethinking Labor and Social Movements with Guest Speaker Professor Stephanie Luce, Professor, Murphy Institute, CUNY.

October 22nd: Global Labor Movements

Texts:
- Read Testimony by Kalpona Aktar (2014) Prospects for Democratic Reconciliation and Improving Workers’ Rights in Bangladesh, US Senate Foreign Relations Committee:
  
  http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Akter_Testimony.pdf

**Week 9**

October 27th: The Anti-Sweatshop Movement and the Politics of Solidarity with Guest Speaker Professor Dina Siddiqi, BRAC University, Dhaka.

October 29th: Labor Activism in the Digital Sphere, Guest Speaker from *Dissent Magazine’s Belabored* Podcast

Texts:


- Listen to: https://www.dissentmagazine.org/tag/belabored

**Week 10**

November 3rd: Retail Workers Building a New Movement

November 5th: Challenges and Spaces of Hope With Guest Speaker from Retail Action Project, New York.

Texts:

- Read and Explore: http://retailactionproject.org
- Read and Explore: http://modelalliance.org

**IV) Ethical and Sustainable Fashion?**

**Week 11:**

**FINAL PAPER/PROJECTS OUTLINE DUE**

November 10th: Ethical Consumption in Practice

November 12th: Fair Trade and Accountability

Texts:


Read and Explore: Read and explore: [http://www.cleanclothes.org](http://www.cleanclothes.org)

Read and explore: [http://asia.floorwage.org](http://asia.floorwage.org)

**Week 12:**

November 24th: Changing Fast Fashion Systems  
November 26th: Thanksgiving Holiday


**Week 13:**

December 1st: Detox the Catwalk Campaign: Beyond Conscientious Consumption?  
December 3rd: Presentations of Final Papers & Projects

**Texts:**


**Week 14:**

December 8th: Presentations of Final Papers and Projects & Wrap Up

**Final Papers or Projects Due by 5:00 PM, Monday, December 14th.**