This class examines how and why twentieth-century Americans came to define the "good life" through consumption, leisure, and material abundance. We will explore how such things as department stores, nationally advertised brand-name goods, mass-produced cars, and suburbs transformed the American economy, society, and politics. The course is organized both thematically and chronologically. Each period deals with a new development in the history of consumer culture. Throughout we explore both celebrations and critiques of mass consumption and abundance.

The requirements for this class are a primary sources journal (25%), class discussion (25%) and a final research paper (50%). Throughout the semester, students will be expected to have completed the readings before class, gather primary sources, and come prepared to engage in discussion.

Readings will include novels and non-fiction books. All materials are available for purchase at the MIT bookstore:

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900)
Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (1922)
Vance Packard, *Status Seekers* (1959)

**Week One**: *Introduction to the World of Goods*
September 11

**Part I: The Rise Of A Mass Market At The Turn Of The Century**

**Week Two**: Downtown Shopping
September 18
Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, chps. 1-3, 5-8, 10, 12-14,

**Week Three**: Leisure Time
September 25

**Week Four**: The Business of Consumption
October 2
Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, chps. 28-39, 42, 44-47

**Part II: Making A Middle-Class Society In Interwar America**

**Week Five**: Roaring Twenties
October 16
Lewis, *Babbitt*, chps. 1-7

Week Six:
October 23
NO CLASS: meet to discuss papers

Week Seven: Advertising the American Dream
October 30
Lewis, *Babbitt*, chps. 8-18

Week Eight: Abundance and Its Critics (I)
November 6
Lewis, *Babbitt*, chps. 19-34

**Part III: Mass Culture In Postwar America**
Week Nine: Status Seeking in the Suburbs
November 13
Packard, *Status Seekers*, chps. 1-7, 9-12, 20-21

Week Ten: Age of Television
November 20

**Part IV: Conspicuous Consumption at Century’s End**
Week Eleven: McDonalds, Microwaves, and the Mega-Rich
November 27
Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, Part I

Week Twelve: Abundance And Its Critics (II)
December 4
Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, Part II

Week Thirteen: E-Bay and Beyond
December 11

**Final Paper Due December 14**