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**
February 12

**Part I: The Rise Of A Mass Market At The Turn Of The Century**
Week Two: Downtown Shopping
February 20
Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, chps. 1-3, 5-8, 10, 12-14,

Week Three: Leisure Time
February 26

Week Four: The Business of Consumption
March 5
Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, chps. 28-39, 42, 44-47

**Part II: Making A Middle-Class Society In Interwar America**
Week Five: Roaring Twenties  
March 12  
Lewis, *Babbitt*, chps. 1-7

Week Six: Advertising the American Dream  
March 19  
Lewis, *Babbitt*, chps. 8-18

Week Seven: Abundance and Its Critics (I)  
April 2  
Lewis, *Babbitt*, chps. 19-34

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

Week Nine: Age of Television  
April 23  

**Part IV: Conspicuous Consumption at Century’s End**  
Week Ten: McDonalds, Microwaves, and the Mega-Rich  
April 30  
Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, Part I

Week Eleven: Abundance And Its Critics (II)  
May 7  
Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, Part II

Week Twelve: E-Bay and Beyond  
May 14

**Final Paper Due May 16**