

Fullilove HIST 239: The Long 19th c. in the US
Object Exercise Assignment

NB: This exercise is based on a series of "biography of a thing" assignments developed by Jason Petrusis (Colgate University) for his commodity history course.

Object exercise (25%)

The second meeting of each week of the course (Wednesday) will be student-run, collaborative lecture presentations based on objects associated with the week's topic. You will select your object (plant, animal, foodstuff, clothing, machine, etc.) from primary source documents associated with the week's topic. These will consist largely but not exclusively of inventories of transit (ship manifests, estate inventories, ledgers, diaries and personal logs, etc.).

Each student is responsible for a 15-minute in-class presentation or a comparable portion of a collaborative lecture, as well as an essay (20% of course grade) on an object selected from primary source documents associated with the week's lecture topics and course readings. Students are encouraged to work together on their in-class presentations, integrating your object analyses into a single lecture on the week's theme. Documents will be posted to moodle on Monday the week before the student lecture, and students must meet with me as a group the Monday before their lecture presentations. E.g. the document for a Wednesday, Feb 11 lecture will be available on Monday, Feb 2; and students will meet with me on Feb 9. Students may select objects independently or in consultation with your lecture collaborators. We can discuss your choice of objects during office hours the Monday before your presentation.

Your 5-7 page "biography of a thing" essay is due one week following your in-class lecture. I.e. Students who presents on Feb 11 will submit their papers on Feb 17, by 11:59 PM, on moodle. Essay guidelines will be distributed the second week of class. Although I encourage collaboration on the lecture session and discussion of shared readings and themes, your essay should be authored individually.

Your essay should convey how your object can be used to write a history of the United States in the 19th century. What problems, conflicts, movements, or changes does it represent? How does the primary source you've selected shed light on its history and significance? These may include conditions of production, consumption or use, exchange or circulation, transformation or translation, and destruction or end.

Broadly construed, Sven Becker's Empire of Cotton fits this model . Or consider Jill Lepore's review of Lincoln's Body: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/books/review/mourning-lincoln-and-lincolns-body.html?_r=0. The point is to start with an object of material and think about the historical questions and problems it suggests.

Guidelines:

- This is an analytical rather than a descriptive essay. Your essay must have a **thesis/argument**, and the bulk of the essay should support it. You must have concrete **evidence**, and you must analyze that evidence rather than simply presenting it as fact.
- Your analysis must make extensive use of the primary source you have chosen to analyze.
- Use **course readings, discussions, and outside readings** to support your argument. Note that significant outside research will be required for this assignment.

Remember to:

- **Include a title** that relates to your argument.
- **Double space**, standard font, with 1 inch or 1.25 inch margins.
- Consistently **footnote** all sources using MLA or Chicago style (no interior citations).