

## **HPSS S732 Witness Tree Project: Makers and Markets**

[In conjunction with FURN 2451, instructors Dale Broholm and Ben Watkins]

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Office hours: By appointment

Class: ProvWash237A, Mondays 9-12

Witness trees, as designated by the National Park Service, are long-standing trees that have “witnessed” key events, trends, and people in history. In this joint studio/liberal arts course, students have the unique opportunity to study and work with fallen trees shipped to RISD from the Thomas Edison National Historical Park. The TENHP, located in West Orange, New Jersey, was the site of inventor and businessman Thomas Edison’s home and laboratory from 1887 until the end of his life in 1931. The course will involve three components: 1) a field trip to the park at the beginning of the semester; 2) classroom-based reading and discussion about invention, labor, and consumption; and 3) studio-based building of a series of objects, in response to the tree, the site, and students’ class - room study.

Edison’s West Orange facility operated at a time when capitalist industrialization was remaking daily life in the United States. Focusing on 1880-1915, we will use the park site as a starting point and touchstone to explore those changes by looking at both the people who made products such as light bulbs, batteries, phonographs and movies, and the markets for those goods once they left the factory. While Edison is famous as an inventor and “self made man,” his creations were by and large designed for mass production. Taking our cue from the historical architectural organization of the site (“factories to manufacture Edison inventions were built around the laboratory”), we will consider Edison as a maker of technology and business person while simultaneously examining the lives and experiences of other makers, the workers who labored in industrial manufacturing. We will consider topics in labor history including the labor movement, changing quotidian experiences of work, and occupational health. Finally, we will explore the development of markets for industrially-produced goods, including the integration of those goods into household routines and new leisure habits, emergent national distribution networks and national brands, and the search for consumers of industrial goods beyond the borders of the US nation.

### **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES**

Reasonable accommodations will be made for people with disabilities or special needs who request assistance. These accommodations may include relocation of the class, program, event or service, if necessary; duplication in an accessible location; provision of a comparable

substitute at a fully accessible institution; and/or interim measures authorized by federal law. If you need assistance to participate in any class, program, event or service offered at RISD, you must make an appointment with Student Development and Counseling to receive needed accommodations.

### **QUOTATIONS, PARAPHRASING AND PLAGIARISM**

All work completed for this class must be your own. Please familiarize yourself with RISD's Academic Code of Conduct at [http://www.risd.edu/Policies/Academic/Code\\_of\\_Conduct/](http://www.risd.edu/Policies/Academic/Code_of_Conduct/) In case of violations of the academic code, consequences will adhere to the full extent of the academic code.

### **ATTENDANCE**

You are required to attend every class session. Three or more unexcused absences constitute grounds for automatic failure. Please arrive on time. Coffee is welcome.

### **ELECTRONICS POLICY**

Computers or tablets may be used in class to read documents or assist in class activities as assigned but MAY NOT be used to connect to the internet, send personal messages, etc. If your attention seems to be directed more to your computer than to classroom discussion, you will be asked to put away your computer and bring printed readings to class. Mobile phones MAY NOT be used in class at any time.

### **COURSE TEXTS**

Please purchase the following text online. PLEASE ORDER NOW TO AVOID DELAYS.  
John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*

Additional readings are available online, on reserve in the library and/or through the Digication course website.

### **DIGICATION SITE**

On Digication, you will have on-line access to handouts and other links specific to course, as well as the ability to engage in discussion about specific topics and submit papers online. In the second week of the semester, everyone will be given instructions for obtaining access to the site.

### **GRADING**

Grades will be based on a traditional A-F scale, where "C" equals "meeting the basic requirements of the course."

Final grades will be determined as follows.

Classroom participation—10%

Three assignments—30% of grade each.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

All assignments are due via email to [sbohme@risd.edu](mailto:sbohme@risd.edu) by midnight on their due date. Late assignments will be graded down half a grade for each day they are late.

Assignment 1: In this assignment you will use approaches discussed in our mapping workshop with Marie Cieri to create a map of EITHER the physical space of the Thomas Edison Historical Park, OR of the geographic and chronological process of invention and implementation of electric light in the US. **Due March 17.**

Assignment 2: What film would Wobblies, “radium girls” or other workers we’ve studied make if they had access to Edison’s “Black Maria” studio? Following the basic conventions of “Children who labor” or “Hungry Hearts,” and/or drawing on the Paterson Pageant, write a 5-7 page treatment\* for that movie, including a character list, a description of setting(s), a narrative description of action, and intertitles. Your script should strive for historical verisimilitude by drawing on the readings we’ve done in class and two other relevant sources you find online or in the RISD or Brown libraries. Sources must include at least one primary document and your treatment must include a bibliography. (\*A “treatment” is a piece of prose, typically the step before the first draft of a screenplay. Treatments read like a short story, except they are told in the present tense and describe events as they happen. For more on film treatments, see <http://www.toddalcott.com/screenwriting-101-the-treatment.html>.) **Due April 14.**

Assignment 3: The goal of this assignment is to build skills in developing an historical argument and using analysis of primary and secondary texts to support that argument. To do so, you will write a 5-7 page, thesis-based analytical paper relating to the themes and texts we’ve read so far in class, along with other secondary or primary resources you identify as important to your argument. **Due: May 16**

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### Unit I. Makers Part One: Edison and Invention

#### February 17: Introduction

Discussion:

- Theodore Dreiser interviews Edison for *Success* magazine (1898)

In class: watch “Thomas A. Edison: father of invention.” A&E Biography (1996).

#### February 24: Edison in the Gilded Age

- “Reach” in Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the ‘Gilded Age,’ 1865-1905*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- “The Story of Thomas A. Edison” in F.M. Perry, *Four American inventors: Robert Fulton, Samuel F. B. Morse, Eli Whitney, Thomas A. Edison; a book for young Americans* (1901). <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924003645060#page/n9/mode/2up> OR <https://ia600401.us.archive.org/20/items/cu31924003645060/cu31924003645060.pdf>
- D.W. Meinig, “The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene”

In class: Watch “Mr. Edison at Work in His Chemical Laboratory” (1897); “Inventor Edison Sketched” (1896)

Marie Cieri, Mapping workshop 10:30-12.

#### March 3: Park visit

#### March 10: Inventing the Light Bulb?

- David E. Nye, “How Do Historians Understand Technology,” in *Technology Matters: Questions to Live With*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.
- Ernest Freeberg, “Inventing Electric Light” (Chapter 1) and p.71-75 from “Civic Light” in *The Age of Edison: Electric Light and the Invention of Modern America*. New York: Penguin Press, 2013.
- Edison, “Experimental Notes;” Upton, “Letters Home;” and three figures of light bulb designs, *Thomas Edison and Modern America*, 91-105

In class: Watch “Palace of Electricity” (1900); “Pan American Exposition by Night” (1901); “Electrocuting an Elephant” (1903)

#### March 17: Contexts and Legacies of Invention

- Freeberg, “Inventive Nation” (Chapter 6) in *The Age of Edison*
- W. Bernard Carlson, “Innovation and the Modern Corporation: From Heroic Invention to Industrial Science,” in *Science in the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Krige and Dominique Pestre (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997), pp. 203–226
- Edison Companies, <http://edison.rutgers.edu/list.htm#Battery>

- GE “Innovation Timeline”  
<http://www.ge.com/about-us/history/1878-1904>  
<http://www.ge.com/about-us/history/1905-1912>  
<http://www.ge.com/about-us/history/thomas-edison>  
<http://www.ge.com/about-us/history/research-heritage>

DUE: Assignment #1

## **Unit II. Makers Part Two: Industrial Workers**

### **March 24: SPRING BREAK**

### **March 31: A Changing World of Work**

- Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the ‘Gilded Age,’ 1865-1905*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, “Work” plus pages 185-87, 197-205 from “A State of War.”
- Rose Currarino, “Meat vs. Rice”: The Ideal of Manly Labor and Anti-Chinese Hysteria in Nineteenth-century America *Men and Masculinities* April 2007 9: 476-490.
  - “The Purposes and Program of the Knights of Labor,” 1878.
  - “Thomas O’Donnell on the Decline of the Factory Artisan,” 1883.
- “Jennie Cunningham Croly Relates the Story of a Working Girl,” 1883.

In Class: Watch “Blacksmithing;” (1893) “Black Diamond Express, no. 1” (1896); “Fifth Avenue, New York “ (1897); “Chinese Laundry Scene” (1894);

### **April 7: Labor Im/migration**

- Jacobson, “Labor Markets: The World’s people as American Workers” in *Barbarian Virtues*
- Joe William Trotter, Jr. “The Great Migration” *Magazine of History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (Oct., 2002), pp. 31-33.
- Sui Sin Far, “In The Land Of The Free” from *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912)
- Yeziarska, “How I found America” from *Hungry Hearts* (1920) at <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/yeziarska/hearts/hearts.html#X>
- Jacob Lawrence Migration Series (1941) at [http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration\\_series/flash/journey.html](http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration_series/flash/journey.html)

In class: Watch *Hungry Hearts* film (1922); “Children who labor”(1912)

### **April 14: Health and Industrial Work**

- Claudia Clark, *Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910-1935*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997, Chapters 1, 3, 5.

- Photographs of Edison employees at <http://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery.htm?id=B83F63FA-155D-451F-67B740E2F71C8601>

Due: Assignment #2

### **Unit III. Markets: Consuming Goods and Experiences**

#### **April 21: From customers to consumers**

- Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989, chapters 2 and 4.
- Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, short selection on the department store (1900)
- Thorstein Veblen on “conspicuous consumption” (1899): <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1902veblen00.asp>

In class: watch “The Kleptomaniac” (1905); “The Unsullied Shield” (1912)

#### **April 28: The meanings and uses of leisure**

- John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*
- Nan Enstad, “Dressed for adventure: Working women and silent movie serials in the 1910s” *Feminist Studies* 21, no. 1 (Spring 95 1995): 67.

In class: Watch “Coney Island at Night” (1905); “What Happened to Mary” (1912)

#### **May 5: Consumers of the World**

- Robert W. Rydell “The Louisiana Purchase Exposition, Saint Louis, 1904: ‘The coronation of civilization’” from *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Jacobson, “Export Markets: The World’s People as Consumers” in *Barbarian Virtues*.
- Albert Beveridge, “The March of the Flag” (1898) <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/empire/text5/beveridge.pdf>

In Class: Watch “Imperial Japanese Dance” (1894); “Princess Ali Egyptian Dance” (1895); selection of films at <http://www.loc.gov/collection/spanish-american-war-in-motion-pictures/articles-and-essays/#remember-the-maine-the-beginnings-of-war>

#### **May 12: Bodily responses**

- Tera Hunter, “Dancing and Carousing the Night Away” in *To ‘Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

- Carolyn Thomas de la Peña, "Designing the Electric Body: Sexuality, Masculinity and the Electric Belt in America, 1880-1920." *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 275-289.

In class: Watch "What happened in the tunnel" (1903); "Black eyes" (1915)

**May 16: Assignment #3 Due**

**May 19: Final Critique**