

HIST 535/615/635: Sweetness and Stimulants: Commodity History in the Americas
Fall 2014
Robinson B 205 Thursdays 7:20 -10:00 pm

Professor Joan Bristol
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Office hours Tuesdays 3:00-4:30 pm or by appointment

This course examines the role of American commodities such as chocolate, cocaine, cochineal, cotton, emeralds, salt, sugar, and tobacco from the colonial period to the present. The primary focus is on Latin America with discussions of commodities from other parts of the Americas as well. Commodities have linked American regions to each other and to other world regions through mercantilism and other forms of trade, and American commodities have influenced the development of cultural, social, and economic systems all over the world. The desire for commodities has also justified colonialism, created significant trade imbalances, and led to the exploitation of land and labor within and outside of the Americas. We will read monographs by historians, anthropologists, and others and consider the definition of the term commodity and the light that commodities shed on other historical and contemporary issues.

Assignments and Grading:

1. Participation in class discussions: 25% of final grade.
2. Blog entries: 25% of final grade. We have a class blog on Blogger at <http://535gmu2014.blogspot.com/>. You will receive an email inviting you to join the blog. You must have a Google account to join. You will post at least ten times over the course of the semester. The posts should be at least 250 words (approximately 1 double-spaced page). In your posts you may discuss interesting issues raised in the readings, you may ask thoughtful questions, or you may relate the week's readings to other readings that we have done. The posts should deal with the week's assigned reading(s) and with issues relating to this class. If you are not the first poster please respond to or take into account at least one of the posts that were entered before yours (preferably more). All posts should be on the blog by Wednesday at 8 pm. You must have done at least four posts by October 16th. I will then give you a cumulative grade so you know how you are doing.
3. Book Presentation (includes written blog post, written blog comment, oral presentation in class): 25% of final grade. You will each nominate a book for the class to read on December 4th (the last day of class).
 - a) Please choose a book that you think relates to the course as a whole and write a 1,000 word essay explaining why the book relates to the themes that we have discussed in class. Please post your paper on the class blog by November 17th. This will involve some description and summary of the book, but the essay should be geared towards convincing us to read the book. It should mention at least 4 of the books we have read in class.
 - b) You will also write a comment supporting a book nominated by a different student. Your comment should be on the blog by November 18th.

c) You will then present your nominations in class on November 20th. Your presentation should be between 5 and 10 minutes.

4. Final essay: 25% of final grade. This will be a 15-20 page paper responding to the question appended to the end of this syllabus. The sources for the paper will be the books assigned for the class as well as four additional readings of your choosing.

Late policy:

Blog entries must be posted by Wednesday at 8 pm. You are free to post after that but late posts will not be counted towards the ten required posts. If, at the end of the semester, you have not posted 10 entries, you will get a zero for your blog grade.

The book nomination should be on the blog by November 17th. If it is not there and you have not contacted me to arrange an alternate due date you will receive a zero for 1/3 of the assignment. The comment should be on the class blog by November 18th. If it is not and you have not contacted me you will receive a zero for 1/3 of the assignment. You should present your nomination in class on November 20th. If you do not and you have not contacted me you will receive a zero for 1/3 of the assignment.

The final essay must be placed in my mailbox in the Department of History and Art History mailroom, Robinson B 359, by December 12th at noon. If you do not hand it in then you must email me immediately to arrange handing it in. There will be a penalty for late papers.

Class policies:

Do not eat during class. (You may bring something to drink but don't spill it.)

Communicate with me if you are having a problem, if you do not understand something, or if you have a comment. I am available during office hours and by appointment.

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at (703) 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Honor Code:

George Mason has an honor code and you are expected to adhere to it. It is as follows:

"To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work."

(http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#honor_system_and_code)

If I suspect plagiarism or other forms of cheating I will submit my findings to the Honor Committee immediately. **You are responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism and other kinds of cheating. If you do not understand what constitutes plagiarism and cheating ask me for clarification.**

Books:

0. Bruce Robbins "Commodity Histories" in *PMLA*, Vol. 120, No. 2 (Mar., 2005)
1. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*
2. Coe, Sophie and Michael Coe, *True History of Chocolate*
3. Greenfield, *A Perfect Red*
4. Topik, Frank, Marichal eds. *From Silver to Cocaine*
5. Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures*
6. Lane, *Colour of Paradise*
7. Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*
8. Soluri, *Banana Cultures*
9. Soto Laveaga, *Jungle Laboratories*
10. Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things*
11. Anderson, *Mahogany*

Class Schedule with readings:

August 28: Introduction and assign chapters in Appadurai, ed. for next week. We will divide in groups and each group will be responsible for a different set of chapters from next week's book. **Reading for tonight: Bruce Robbins "Commodity Histories" in *PMLA*, Vol. 120, No. 2 (Mar., 2005) available on JSTOR.**

September 2 is the last day to add classes and the last day to drop with no tuition penalty

September 4: Readings: Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value," Kopytoff "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process," and selected chapters in Arjun Appadurai *The Social Life of Things*, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

September 11: Reading: Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (1986)

September 18: Reading: Sophie and Michael Coe, *True History of Chocolate* (1996)

September 25: Reading: Amy Butler Greenfield, *A Perfect Red* (2006)

September 26 is the final day to drop a class

October 2: Reading: Topik, Frank, Marichal eds. *From Silver to Cocaine* (2006). We will divide up the chapters so that each person reads a selection.

October 9: Reading: Soluri, *Banana Cultures* (2006)

October 16: Reading: Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine* (2009)

You must have done at least four blog posts by this date.

October 23: Reading: Soto Laveaga, *Jungle Laboratories* (2009)

October 30: Reading: Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures* (2010)

November 6: Reading: Lane, *Colour of Paradise* (2010)

November 13: Reading: *Mahogany* (2012)

November 20: Book Presentations

November 27: No Class: Thanksgiving break

December 4: Reading: The book we chose on November 20.

Final paper assignment (15-20 pages) DUE DECEMBER 12th:

The history of commodities intersects with other subfields in global history and area studies including the history of food, drugs, material culture, and world systems. Commodity history intersects with other fields including anthropology, sociology, and economics and journalism. I chose to organize this syllabus chronologically according to our texts' publication dates but there are multiple other ways that I could have organized the syllabus for this course – by approach and methodology, audience, commodity, time period, region, etc.

Please explain how you 1) define commodity history and 2) how you would organize a syllabus for a class on the history of commodities. To do this you must explain what the guiding principle is behind your organization and how students would benefit from your organizational principles. Please discard at least four of the readings from the current syllabus and add at least four readings (books or sets of articles) that we did not read this semester (for a total of 13 readings). You may use the book you nominate for our final reading, and if your book is chosen you may still use it. Describe the new readings in depth *without doing a straight summary*. Explain your rationale for these substitutions.

In evaluating these papers I will be most impressed by those papers that make extensive changes to the current syllabus, by reorganizing and adding new readings. Being able to do this means that you paid attention to and understood the issues that we discussed this semester.