

HIST 535/615.001: Sweetness and Stimulants: Commodity History in the Americas
Fall 2012

Professor Joan Bristol

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Office hours Mondays 10:30 am – 11:30 am and Tuesdays 4:30 pm – 6 pm

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. Although the focus will be on Latin America we will look at 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: 1/3 of final grade.
2. Final essay: 1/3 of final grade. This will be a 15-page paper responding to a question.
The sources for the paper will be the books assigned for the class.
3. Blog entries: 1/3 of final grade.

We have a class blog on Blogger. The blog is called History 535 Fall 2012. You will receive an email inviting you to join the blog and 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 Monday 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.

Late policy:

Blog entries must be posted by Monday 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 0 for your blog grade. 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](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.**

Class Schedule with readings:

August 28: Introduction

September 4: Readings: Introduction to Topik, Frank, Marichal eds. *From Silver to Cocaine* (2006); Bruce Robbins "Commodity Histories" in PMLA, Vol. 120, No. 2 (Mar., 2005) available on JSTOR; Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value" and Kopytoff "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process," in Arjun Appadurai *The Social Life of Things*, Cambridge University Press, 1986. THE APPADURAI BOOK IS ON RESERVE IN THE LIBRARY.

September 4 is the last day to add classes and the last day to drop with no tuition penalty

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

September 18: Reading: Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise* (1993)

September 25: Reading: Sophie and Michael Coe, *True History of Chocolate* (1996)

September 28 is the final day to drop a class

October 2: Reading: Judith Carney, *Black Rice* (2002)

October 9: *No class (Columbus Day)*

October 16: Reading: Amy Greenfield, *A Perfect Red* (2006)
You must have done at least four blog posts by this date.

October 23: Reading: Topik, Frank, Marichal eds. *From Silver to Cocaine* (2006). We will divide up the chapters so that each person reads X number.

October 30: Reading: Soluri, *Banana Cultures* (2006)

November 6: Reading: Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine* (2009)

November 13: Reading: Soto Laveaga, *Jungle Laboratories* (2009)

November 20: Reading: Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures* (2010)

November 27: Reading: Lane, *Colour of Paradise* (2011)

December 4: Reading: Rosenthal, *Salt and the Colombian State* (2012)

Final paper assignment (10-20 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). 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.