

Stony Brook University
SBS N303
WEDS: 2:40-5:35pm
Spring 2022

Prof. Paul Gootenberg
SBS N309; Of. hrs., M, 12-2 pm
Grads: best by appointment
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HISTORY 553: THEME SEMINAR

Commodity Histories and Globalization, 1400-2000

This Theme Seminar (open to MA and Ph.D. students) uses the “new commodity history” as a means of exploring themes in the history of globalization, as well as the histories of capitalism, power, labor, consumption cultures, and natural and built environments. Commodity studies stands at the intersection of material culture, economic & social history, and cultural studies. The seminar will introduce the interdisciplinary trends (mainly from social anthropology and economic sociology) that converge in making this new commodity history. We then delve into 10 or so major monographs and synthetic studies that demonstrate the latest trends in the field. The topics include such historical products as sugar, rice, silver, chocolate, tobacco, teas, rubber, mahogany, cotton, guano, bananas, tequila, Coca Cola, and cocaine.

Over the past two decades, the study of goods, informed by new anthropological, constructionist, and transnational perspectives, has become a crucial entry point not for only understanding globalization and its history, but for study of material culture, consumption, foodways, labor, environments, nations, empires, and historical inequalities. Commodity studies cut across cultural-anthropological and political-economy historical methods, and commodities link grounded local social actors to changing more abstracted global structures of power. Material goods and historical commodification processes and flows are regarded, for better or worse, as the connective tissues of peoples, nature, lifestyles, class, and global regimes. The field also draws on the high public curiosity about the connections of global life and politics. What remains to be seen, however, is whether this broad fascination with the pathways of singular goods is ongoing, or whether it is a transitory intellectual phase between the post-1989 “cultural turn” and the recent return of systemic studies of global capitalism.

This seminar revolves around intensive reading and group discussion. It is divided into 3 sections, focused on a sample of introductory methods, studies of early modern Atlantic goods, and studies of key modern global goods. Each week engages an exemplary commodity history to unpack its premises, methods, or implications. Interdisciplinary interests are welcome.

As primarily an intensive reading and discussion seminar, there are only two modest writing assignments. The first, due around Week 6, is an 8-page collective exercise about fundamental approaches in commodity history. For the second, students will write a concise 10-page paper, due Week 15, about either commodities in a particular world region of interest (Atlantic, Africa, Pacific world ...); about a particular kind of good; or particular perspective on commodities (environmental, geographic, cultural, Marxist...). Papers are presented the final week of the seminar. The “Recommended” readings noted in the syllabus simply suggest further exploration possibilities, but may be useful in selecting paper topics.

The professor's office hours (M, 12-2; SBS N309, or Zoom) are best supplemented by graduate appointment by e-mail (paul.gootenberg@stonybrook.edu). Midway in the seminar (Week 7) we can schedule a week of individual student conferences.

The following dozen seminar books--mostly worth acquiring--are best available online and /or used. We'll also share a few critical "e-handouts" during the first weeks of the seminar, as well as additional Commodity Studies reading list to help guide students in methods, papers, and further work in the field.

SEMINAR BOOK LIST

Sidney Mintz, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History (Penguin, 1985)

Timothy Brook, Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World (Bloomsbury, 2008)

Marcy Norton, Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World (Cornell University Press, 2010)

Judith Carney, Black Rice: African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas (Harvard University Press, 2001)

Sven Beckert, Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism (Knopf, 2014)

John Soluri, Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States (University of Texas Press, 2005)

Jonathan E. Robins, Oil Palm: A Global History (UNC Press, 2021)

Marie Sarita Gaytán Tequila!: Distilling the Spirit of Mexico (Stanford University Press, 2014)

Sarah Milov, The Cigarette: A Political History (Harvard University Press, 2019)

Paul Gootenberg, Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug (UNC Press, 2008)

Sara Ives, Steeped in Heritage: The Racial Politics of South African Rooibos Tea (Duke U-Press, 2008)

PRELIMINARY SEMINAR SCHEDULE

PTI: COMMODITY PERSPECTIVES

WEEK 1: Weds, Jan. 26 INTRODUCTIONS/OVERVIEW

WEEK 2: Weds., Feb. 2 COMMODITY PERSPECTIVES

READINGS: Conceptual essays (Marx, Appadurai--Kopytof, Mintz, Robbins, Bair ...)

Recommended: A. Appadurai, Social Life of Things; M. Douglas, Isherwood, World of Goods; H. Molotch, Where Stuff Comes From; K. Polanyi, Great Transformation; J. Brewer, Trentmann, Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives; Topik, Marichal & Frank, From Silver to Cocaine; A. Bauer, Goods, Power, History; Osterhammel & Petersson, Globalization: A Short History; S. Conrad, What is Global History?

PTII: EARLY MODERN GOODS

WEEK 3: Weds., Feb. 9 CAPITALISM & POWER

READING: Sidney Mintz, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History

Recom: F. Ortiz, Cuban Counterpoint: Sugar and Tobacco (or A. Merleaux, Sugar & Civilization)

WEEK 4: Weds., Feb. 16 GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

READING: Tim Brook, Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World

Recom: F. Braudel, Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800;
E. Wolf, Europe and the People without History

WEEK 5: Weds., Feb. 23 ATLANTIC CROSSINGS

READING: Marcy Norton, Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World

Recom: W. Schivelbusch, Tastes of Paradise; B. Breen, The Age of Intoxication

COLLECTIVE WRITING EXERCISE

WEEK 6: Weds. March 2 SUBALTERN COLONIAL GOODS

READING: Judith Carney, Black Rice: African Origins of Rice Cultivation in Americas

Recom: A. Warman, Corn & Capitalism: How Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance

PTIII: MODERNIZING GOODS, MODERN GLOBE

WEEK 7: Weds., March 9 GLOBAL INDUSTRIALIZING GOODS

READING: Sven Beckert, Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism

Recom: W. Cronin, Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West;

G. Cushman, Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT MEETINGS (to be scheduled)

WEEK 8: March 14-20th **Spring Break**

WEEK 9: Weds, March 23th MONOCULTURES OF MASS CONSUMPTION

READING: John Soluri, Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption & Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States

Recom: E. Rappaport, A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World

WEEK 10: Weds, March 30 INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPES of the GLOBAL SOUTH

READING: Jonathan E. Robins, Oil Palm: A Global History

Recom: T. Mitchell, Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil

J. Tully, Devils Milk: A Social History of Rubber

WEEK 11: Weds, April 6 GOODS of POLITICAL CAPITALISM

READING: Sarah Milov, The Cigarette: A Political History

Recom: J. Goodman, Tobacco in History: Cultures of Dependence

B. Elmore, Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism

WEEK 12: Weds, April 13 NATIONAL IDENTITY GOODS

READING: María Gaytan, Tequila!: Distilling the Spirit of Mexico

Recom: M. Schrad, Vodka Politics: Alcohol, Autocracy & the Secret History of the Russian State; A. Bobrow-Strain, White Bread: Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf

WEEK 13: Weds., April 20 GLOBALIZED ILLICIT GOODS

READING: P. Gootenberg, Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug

Recom: D. Courtwright, Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World.

P. Andreas, Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America;

WEEK 14: Weds, April 27 POST-MODERN "HERITAGE" GOODS

READING: Sara Ives, Steeped in Heritage: Racial Politics of South African Rooibos Tea

Recom: T. Burke, Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, & Consumption

Required Syllabus Statements

The University Senate Undergraduate and Graduate Councils authorize that the following statements appear in all syllabi on the Stony Brook Campus.

Student Accessibility Support Center Statement

If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the Student Accessibility Support Center, 128 ECC Building, (631) 632-6748, or at sasc@stonybrook.edu. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Stony Brook students have a variety of backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles. SASC encourages all learners to seek multiple or differentiated pathways to success.

Academic Integrity Statement

Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic_integrity/index.html

Critical Incident Management

Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of University Community Standards any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. Further information about most academic matters can be found in the Undergraduate Bulletin, the Undergraduate Class Schedule, and the Faculty-Employee Handbook.

