This theme seminar, for MA and Ph.D. students from any regional field, uses the burgeoning field of commodity history to explore the history of global connections and capitalism. Over the past two decades, the study of goods, informed by new anthropological, constructionist, and transnational perspectives, has become an entry point for understanding material culture, consumption, food, labor, environments, empire, and historical inequalities and globalization. Commodity studies cut across cultural-anthropological and social and political-economy methods in history, and links local actors into changing global structures of power. Material goods and their modern commodification are regarded, for better or worse, as the connecting tissues of peoples, nature, life-styles, and global regimes. The field also responds to public desires to grasp the interconnectedness of global life. What remains to be seen, however, is whether this broad fascination with the making and pathways of singular goods is ongoing, or whether it is a transitory political or intellectual phase between the post-1989 “cultural turn” and the apparent return of systemic studies of global “capitalism” after 2008.

This seminar requires 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 and global goods. Each week engages an exemplary commodity history to unpack its premises or implications. Interdisciplinary interests are greatly welcome.

As a largely reading and discussion seminar, there are only 3 brief (6-9 page) writing assignments. The first, due Week 6, is a collective exercise about the approaches in commodity history. For the second, students will write an analytical book review on either one of the “Recommended” readings or a weekly text further along in the course, due, Week 11, and will present it to the group. Third, students will write a modest paper, due Week 15, about either commodities studies in a particular region of the world (Atlantic, Africa, Pacific world …), about a particular kind of good, or particular perspective on commodities (environmental, geographic, cultural, Marxist…), also presented in the last week of the seminar.

The professor’s office hours (TTH, 10:15-11:30am, SBS N319) are best supplemented by graduate appointment by e-mail (above).

The following seminar books--most worth acquiring--are available at SBU Bookstore (and far cheaper online). We’ll also share a few critical “e-handouts” during the first weeks of the seminar. An additional Commodity Studies Readings List will help guide students in their papers and in further work in the field.
Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin, 1985)


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


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


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


So, saddle on up for some groovy commodities!
PRELIMINARY SEMINAR SCHEDULE

I: NEW COMMODITY PERSPECTIVES

WEEK 1: THURSDAY, Jan. 28  INTRODUCTIONS/OVERVIEW

WEEK 2:  Feb. 4  COMMODITY PERSPECTIVES
  READINGS: Conceptual essays (Marx, Appadurai--Kopytof, Mintz, Robbins, Bair, OAH 2014 Roundtable…)

Recommended: A. Appadurai, Social Life of Things; M. Douglas, Isherwood, World of Goods; H. Molotch, Where Stuff Comes From; J. Bair, Frontiers of Commodity Chain Research; B. Fine, World of Consumption; J. Brewer, Trentmann, Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives; Topik, Marichal & Frank, From Silver to Coke; A. Bauer, Goods, Power, History

II: EARLY MODERN GOODS

WEEK 3:  Feb. 11  CAPITALISM and POWER
  READING: Sid 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:  Feb. 18  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

WEEK 5:  Feb. 25  ATLANTIC CROSSINGS
  Recom: J. Goodman, Tobacco in History: Cultures of Dependence (or W. Schivelbusch, Tastes of Paradise)

COLLECTIVE WRITING EXERCISE BEGINS

WEEK 6: March 3  SUBALTERN GOODS, ATLANTIC GOODS  (ALT Date: Tues 3/1?)
  READING: Judith Carney, Black Rice: African Origins of Rice Cultivation in Americas
  Recom: A. Warman, Corn & Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance

WRITING EXERCISE DUE
PTIII: MODERN GOODS, MODERN GLOBE

WEEK 7: March 10  ENERGY GOODS & OTHER WORLDS
READING: Greg Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*
Recom: T. Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*

WEEK 8: March 17  SPRING BREAK (catch up)

WEEK 9: March 24  MONOCULTURES & MASS CONSUMPTION
READING: John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption & Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States*
Recom: J. Anderson, *Mahogany: The Cost of Luxury in Early America*

WEEK 10: March 31  SOURCES of U.S. CAPITALISM
READING: Bart Elmore, *Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism*
Recom: W. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*

WEEK 11: April 7 GOODS of NATIONAL IDENTITY
READING: María Gaytan, *Tequila!: Distilling the Spirit of Mexico*
Recom: M. Schrad, *Vodka Politics: Alcohol, Autocracy & the Secret History of the Russian State*

PAPER II DUE

WEEK 12: April 14 DIASPORIC GOODS
READING: S.A. Stein, *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce*
Recom: T. Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, & Consumption in Zimbabwe*

WEEK 13: April 21  EMPIRES of INDUSTRY
READING: S. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism*
Recom: J. Tully, *The Devil’s Milk: A Social History of Rubber*
WEEK 14: April 28  ILLICIT GOODS  
Recom: P. Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America*  
(or D. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*)

WEEK 15: May 5  FOOD COMMODITIES  
READING: Aaron Bobrow-Strain, *White Bread: Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf*  
Recom: S. Striffler, *Chicken: Dangerous Transformation of America’s Favorite Food*

PAPER III DUE

*Brooklyn Commodities Festival?*
1. Disability Support Services:

If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, 128 ECC Building (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to http://www.ehs.sunysb.edu/ and search Fire Safety and Evacuation and Disabilities. more info at: http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/syllabus

2. Statement on Academic Integrity

From: http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic_integrity/syllstate.html

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. Any suspected instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at www.stonybrook.edu/academicintegrity.

3. Responsibility to report behavior that interrupts the learning process:

I.e., the instructor’s ability to perform his/her duties, or compromises the safety of other students. The University at Stony Brook expects students to maintain standards of personal integrity that are in harmony with the educational goals of the institution; to observe national, state, and local laws and University regulations; and to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty is required to report disruptive behavior that interrupts faculty’s ability to teach, the safety of the learning environment, and/or students’ ability to learn to Judicial Affairs