

Stony Brook University
SBS N320 (LACS Seminar Room)
Thursdays, 2-5 pm
Spring 2016

Prof. Paul Gootenberg
SBS N319; Office hrs T,Th 10-11:30
Grads: Best by Appointment
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HISTORY 554: THEME SEMINAR

Commodity Histories and Global Capitalism

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)

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)

Gregory T. Cushman, Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History (Cambridge University Press, 2013)

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

Bartow J. Elmore, Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism (Norton, 2015)

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

Sara Abrevaya Stein, Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce (Yale University Press, 2008)

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

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

Aaron Bobrow-Strain, White Bread: A Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf (Beacon Press, 2012)

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 Cocaine; 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

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

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 17th 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 (ALT Date: Tues, April 26th?)
READING: P. Gootenberg, Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug
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?

ADDITIONAL CLASS STATEMENTS (2016)

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