

Commodities and Disease in Global History  
History 705/Hist Sci 919/Med Hist 919  
Tuesday, 1:00-3:30 pm  
Fall 2017  
Humanities 5255

**Instructor:**

Gregg Mitman  
Phone: 262-9140  
Email: gmitman@med.wisc.edu  
Office: 1415 MSC  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12 – 1 pm, and by appt.

**Course Description:**

This seminar seeks to put historical scholarship on the global flows of capital, commodities, and disease in conversation with one another. Our temporal reach is expansive, from the shifting patterns of yellow fever accompanying the Atlantic slave trade to the global threat of avian influenza arising from factory farms and changing diets worldwide. We will consider a range of commodities—from cotton and silver to latex and blood—to name just a few, to ask what commodities, and associated diseases that accompanied them, can reveal about changing economic, material, political, and social relationships on the global stage. At the same time, we will interrogate the ways that changing ecological regimes of capital have altered and redistributed life—both human and non-human—and created new disease pathways. We will also attend to the different questions, methods, and forms of evidence that economic, environmental, and medical history bring to a consideration of such questions.

**Expectations:**

This course is based on a seminar-discussion format. Each one in class needs to assume the responsibility of an active participant and learner. Success in the class depends largely upon the time, energy, and commitment you invest. You will be required to arrive at class having read the material assigned for the day and prepared to engage in a thoughtful and constructive conversation that is respectful of others in the classroom and takes seriously the issues and themes presented in the readings.

If any problem arises, either academic or personal, that might jeopardize your performance in the course, please contact me as soon as possible by either phone, email, or in person.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, I urge any student in this course with a disability to inform me as soon as possible, so that I may make any necessary accommodations to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities. All such requests are confidential.

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the UW policies on plagiarism and to assume responsibility for honesty in all course work.

**Course Requirements:**

1) Take turns leading discussion of assigned readings (the number will depend on the number of seminar participants). A typed summary/critique/reaction (1 page in length) should accompany your discussion.

2) Write a 750 to 1,000-word book review for one of the books discussed, which should be an outgrowth of the seminar you helped to lead.

2) Complete a minimum of 20 pages of prose writing in connection with this course – ideally a research paper which relates to the themes of this course, makes use of primary documents, and incorporates conceptual and/or methodological insights gained from the seminar readings. Other possibilities include a research prospectus for a master’s thesis, a historiographic essay in preparation for a prelim field, or a draft dissertation proposal. Please meet with me as early as you can in the semester to discuss how you propose to fulfill the writing requirement. A preliminary proposal and bibliography outlining your research/writing plans is due by Tuesday, October 24.

Grading will be based on class participation (25%), book review (~25%; due two weeks after your seminar discussion), and your written work (~50%). Your written work is due on Monday, Dec. 18.

### **Topics and Schedule of Readings:**

All readings, **except** those marked with an asterisk (\*), can be accessed electronically at <https://uwmad.courses.wisconsin.edu/d2l/home/3782419>. Readings marked by an asterisk are books to be purchase or borrowed from the library.

### **September 12: Charting our Course, Some Helpful Guides**

William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 2d ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), pp. 54-93, 208-241.

Mark Harrison, “A Global Perspective: Reframing the History of Health, Medicine, and Disease,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 89 (2015): 639-689.

Jason Moore, “The Capitalocene, Part I: on the nature and origins of our ecological crisis,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 44 (2017): 594-630.

Marco Armiero and Massimo De Angelis, “Anthropocene: Victims, Narrators, and Revolutionaries,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (April 2017): 345-362.

Timothy Mitchell, “Can the Mosquito Speak?” in *Rules of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 19-53.

Optional: Paul Kramer, “Embedding Capital: Political-Economic History, the United States, and the World,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15 (2016): 331-362,

## **VEGETABLE**

### **September 19: Sugar**

\*Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

John R. McNeill, “Atlantic Empires and Caribbean Ecology,” in *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15-62.

Bartow J. Elmore, *Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2015), pp. 262-296.

### **September 26: Cotton**

\*Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 1-45, 151-279.

Conevery Bolton Valencius, "Racial Anxieties," in *The Health of the Country* (New York Basic Books, 2002), pp. 229-258.

Jennifer Derr, "Labor-time: Ecological bodies and agricultural labor in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, forthcoming, pp. 1-36.

### **October 3: Rubber**

Stephen Harp, "Race, Migration, and Labor," in *A World History of Rubber: Empire, Industry, and the Everyday* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), pp. 10-39.

Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (New York: Mariner Books, 1999), pp. 1-5, 150-184.

Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 1-60.

Michitake Aso, *Rubber and the Making of Vietnam: An Ecological History, 1897-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2018), Introduction and Chapter 3.

Gregg Mitman, "Parasite," typescript.

### **October 10: Fruits**

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

Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 127-169.

## **ANIMAL**

### **October 17: Furs**

\*Elizabeth Fenn, *Encounters at the Heart of the World: A History of the Mandan People* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2015).

### **October 24: Guano**

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

### **October 31: Meat**

David Quammen, "The Chimp and the River," in *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012), pp. 385-489.

Tamara Giles-Vernick and Stephanie Rupp, "People, Great Apes, Disease, and Global Health in the Northern Forests of Equatorial Africa," in *Global Health in Africa: Historical Perspectives on Disease Control*, edited by Tamara Giles-Vernick and James L. A. Webb, Jr. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013), 117-137.

\*Mike Davis, *The Monster at our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

### **November 7: Blood**

\*Joanna Radin, *Life on Ice: A History of New Uses for Cold Blood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

P. Wenzel Geissler, Ann Kelly, Babatunde Imoukhuede, and Robert Pool, "'He is no like a brother, I can even give him some blood' – Relational ethics and material exchanges in a malaria vaccine `trial community' in The Gambia," *Social Science & Medicine* 67 (2008): 696-707.

## **MINERAL**

### **November 14: Silver**

\*Nicholas A. Robins, *Mercury, Mining, and Empire: The Human and Ecological Cost of Colonial Silver Mining in the Andes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

### **November 21: Lead**

\*Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 1-138.

Brett Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), pp. 108-136.

Daniel Renfrew, "'We are Not Marginals': The Cultural Politics of Lead Poisoning in Montevideo, Uruguay," *Latin American Perspectives* 40 (2013): 202-217.

## **SYNTHETICS**

### **November 28: Hormones**

\*Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

Michelle Murphy, *The Economization of Life* (Durham: Duke University Press), pp. 59-112.

Gabriela Soto Laveaga, "Uncommon Trajectories: Steroid Hormones, Mexican Peasants, and the Search for a Wild Yam," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 36 (2005): 743-760

### **December 5: Plutonium**

\*Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

**December 12: Plastics**

Rebecca Altmann, "American Petro-topia," *Aeon* (11 March 2015):

<https://aeon.co/essays/plastics-run-in-my-family-but-their-inheritance-is-in-us-all?src=longreads>

\*Susan Frienkel, *Plastic: A Toxic Love Story* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011).

Thom Van Dooren, "Fledgling Albatrosses: Flight Ways and Wasted Generations," in *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 21-44.