

From Coffee to Cocaine: Commodities, Society, and Environment in Modern South America

Upper Undergraduate Seminar.

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Course Description

Originating from commodity-exporting colonies, most of the post-independence South American countries in the 1800s did not break entirely with the economic model of their colonial past. Commodities like coffee, rubber, petroleum, guano, timber, salmon, and cocaine have continued to connect the new South American nations to a world economy centered in Europe and the United States throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The political economy of commodity export has had a profound effect on the South American environment. Changes in the landscape occurred at an unprecedented pace as agricultural and mining frontiers expanded concurrently with the territorial consolidation of the new nation-states. The commodity-driven settlement of a vast and sparsely populated territory with a commodity-based economic model is a window to the ways in which South Americans both changed and were changed by the environment. The purpose of this course is to use key commodities and natural resources as a lens to understand the relationship between South American societies and their natural environments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Objectives

This course will approach its subject with an array of methods used in historical scholarship. Each week will offer different case studies centered on commodities and natural resources, crucial features of South American societies since the colonial era. Here, the protagonists are both “natural” elements like plants, animals, blights, and landscapes, as well as social groups that were the generators, victims, and witnesses of these processes, including settlers, farmers, travelers, peasants, rebels, politicians, businesspersons, the military, scientists, activists, and indigenous peoples. The analysis of different types of historical sources to illuminate the themes of each week will be an important part of the course. We will examine travelers’ accounts, scientific reports, photo magazines, news stories, literary and political essays, maps, and qualitative and quantitative spatial data. Throughout the course, we will be guided by the following questions: What is the role of ideas about *frontier*, *nature*, and *nation* in the relationship between South Americans and their environment? How is the environment acknowledged (or not) by the historical witnesses of these processes? What kind of constraints does the environment present to human activities? How are such constraints negotiated by these societies? Why have certain political, cultural, and societal arrangements resulted in socio-environmental catastrophes and economic failures, while others appear more resilient? What are the long-term social and environmental consequences of the short economic cycles of boom and bust and the long-term processes of commodities production? Is human-caused environmental change permanent?

Participation

In-class participation is crucial in a seminar course like this. You will be expected to engage in class discussions and should complete all readings, except of course the *handouts*, prior to the class meetings. Please, bring texts to class. In order to improve your analytical skills in reading primary and secondary sources, you will be required to elaborate questions on the readings and a list of key terms (more below).

Discussion guides - Choose one week

Each of you will sign up for one of the following weeks—2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8. In the chosen week, for each day of class, you will turn in “discussion guides” based on the day’s readings. For the discussion guide you will elaborate 3 questions and a list of 4 to 6 key terms that you think are relevant for understanding the texts. As we have two meetings per week, you will produce two discussion guides for your assigned week — one for each day of class. For the secondary sources you must focus on the author’s arguments, historiographical claims, methods, and on his or her use of sources. The questions and key terms must engage closely with the readings — avoid generalizations that are too vague. For the primary sources, you must pay attention to what the source can offer in terms of understanding events and phenomena of the past. But you should also focus on the author’s argument (when there is one). The questions are not meant to clarify doubts about the understanding or the context of the readings. You can and should bring these to class, but they are not a part of the discussion guides, which should be based on your own understanding (even partial) of the readings. The discussion guides are due midnight on the day before each class by email (f_freitas@ncsu.edu), and you will also be required to share them for discussion in class. In the first week of class, I will provide examples of questions and key terms based on the readings of day 1.2.

Written Assignment 1 - Due in week 6

You will write an analytical 3-page paper combining the analysis of visual and textual sources. You will choose one of the textual primary sources of week 1, 2, or 4. Then, you will compare it to the correspondent pictorial primary sources briefly analyzed in class. Choose one of the three books: Martius’s *Flora Brasiliensis* Vol 1, Part 1 (week 1); Carril’s *Mauricio Rugendas* (week 2); or Barros’s *Canudos: Imagens da Guerra* (week 5). Von Martius’s is available online (<http://florabrasiliensis.cria.org.br>). The three books will also be on reserve at Green. You will choose a group of images (minimum of 3) from your book of choice to analyze. You should try to address the differences of visual and textual sources. What does each type of source reveal about the historical phenomenon in question. How is nature represented in the textual and the visual source? What do they reveal about everyday experience in past settings? What was left outside the frame?

Written Assignment 2 - Due in week 11

You will write a brief research paper, 8 to 10 pages long, or 2500 to 2800 words. The paper should use a limited number of primary sources and present an argument or interpretation on the basis of evidence gleaned from the source(s). You should also make use of a limited number of secondary sources (monographs, journal articles, etc.) for historical contextualization and historiographical debate. You can choose a topic already discussed in the course, expanding it by adding other sources and deepening the analysis, or you can choose different periods and geographical areas within the boundaries of modern South America (nineteenth and twentieth centuries). While reading your sources and writing your paper, you should have in mind the questions that are recurrent throughout the course. Some of these questions are: What is the relation between *frontiers* and *commodities*? How is nature transformed into commodity? How are the environment and the boom-and-bust cycles of commodity production in South America related? What is the relationship between human society and the environment? What is the role of the state in such stories? In what way do commodity stories transcend national frontiers and the nation-state? Prior to **week 4** you will meet me to discuss your topic and tentative primary and secondary sources. The goal of this meeting is to help you assessing the feasibility of your topic and to compile a possible list of sources. So, the earlier in the quarter we meet the better for you. In week 7 you will submit a one-page paper proposal (plus a list of primary and secondary sources). In the proposal, you must briefly describe the subject of the paper and tentative sources.

All assignments are due electronically, upload them on your Drop Box at Coursework.

Due dates:

- Meeting instructor - between **April 2** and **April 23**.
- Assignment 1 - **May 8**, Wed, 11:59 pm
- Assignment 2 Proposal - **May 15**, Wed, 11:59 pm
- Assignment 2 - **June 11**, Tue, 11:59 pm

Digital/Spatial History Mini-Project

Week 9 and 10 will be dedicated to an in-class, hands-on exercise in Digital and Spatial History. You will be introduced to the digital methodologies of Spatial History and GIS (Geographic Information System). In week 9, you will do a introductory GIS workshop at the Library. We will not have regular classes in that week.

Grading

Attendance and in-class Participation – **20%**

Discussion guides (two in the chosen week) – **15%**

Written Assignment 1 (3 pages) – **15%**

Written Assignment 2 proposal (1 office-hours meeting and 1 page proposal) – **5%**

Written Assignment 2 (8-12 pages) – **35%**

Digital/Spatial History Mini-Project – **10%**

Format

All the written assignments should use a serif font (I suggest Cambria or Georgia), size 12, double-space, with the default margins preset in most word processors (1 inch each side for letter-size pages). You can use any system of formatting citations you like. If you do not know what system you should use, I suggest Chicago (see more below).

Books

Required

Euclides da Cunha and Elizabeth Lowe. *Backlands: The Canudos Campaign*. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.

Alfred W. Crosby. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Mike Davis. *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino famines and the making of the third world*. London; New York: Verso, 2002.

Other books you might want to buy

Warren Dean. *With Broadax and Firebrand: The destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press, 1997.

The required books will be available for purchase at the bookstore and on reserve at Green Library. All other text can be found in the Course Reader, online through the Library website or Google Books, or posted on the materials folder on Coursework.

WEEK 1 — INTRODUCTION: Environmental History, Commodities, and Frontiers

Monday, April 1 — Introduction to History of Commodities, Society, and Environment

Wednesday, April 3 — Expanding Frontiers at the Dawn of Colonial Brazil

Karl Friedrich Philipp von Martius and Johann Baptist von Spix. "Journey from Villa Rica to the Coroado Indians on the Rio Xipoto." In *Travels in Brazil, in the years 1817-1820, Undertaken by Command of His Majesty the King of Bavaria*, Vol II. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824. 207-247. *Online at Google Books and on reserve.*

Hal Langfur. "Moved by Terror: Frontier Violence as Cultural Exchange in Late-Colonial Brazil." *Ethnohistory* 52, no. 2 (2005): 255-289. *Online.*

Karl Friedrich Philipp von Martius. *Flora Brasiliensis*. Vol. I. Part 1. Selected Plates. Available online at <http://florabrasiliensis.cria.org.br> *Handout.*

WEEK 2 — HIDES AND WOOL: Neo-Europes

Argentina, 1840s-1860s

Monday, April 8 — Neo-Europes: Environmental determinism?

Alfred W. Crosby. "Chapter 7: Weeds," and "Chapter 8: Animals," In *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 145-195. *On reserve.*

Wednesday, April 10 — Cows and Sheep in Argentina

William MacCann. *Two Thousand Miles Ride through the Argentine Provinces*. Vol 1. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1853. 1-38; 272-295. *Online at Google Books and the Library website and on reserve.*

Thomas J. Hutchinson. *Buenos Ayres and Argentine Gleanings, with extracts from a diary of Salado Exploration in 1862 and 1863*. London: Edward Stanford, 1865. 27-33. *Online at Google Books and on reserve.*

Bonifacio del Carril. *Mauricio Rugendas*. Buenos Aires, 1966. *Handout.*

WEEK 3 — COFFEE: The Commodity Boom

Southeast Brazil, 1830s-1900s

Monday, April 15 — What environment? Visions of a "virgin" forest

George Gardner. "Journey to and Residence in the Organs Mountains." In *Travels In the Interior of Brazil: Principally Through the Northern Provinces, and the Gold and Diamond Districts, During the Years 1836-1841*. London: Reeve Brothers, 1846. 37-54. *Online at Google Books and on reserve*

Warren Dean. "Humans Invade: the First Wave." In *With Broadax and Firebrand: The destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press, 1997. 20-40. *Online at the Library website and on reserve.*

Wednesday, April 17 — The boom: coffee replaces the forest

C. C. Andrews. "Visit to a Coffee Plantation." In *Brazil: Its Conditions and Prospects*. 2d ed. New York: D. Appleton, 1889. 137-171. *Online at Google Books and on reserve.*

Herbert H. Smith. "Coffee Culture in Brazil." In *Scribner's Monthly: An Illustrated Magazine for the People*. Vol 19, 1880. New York: Scribner & Co. 225-238. *Online at Google Books and The Library website.*

Thomas Ewbank. "Chapter XXVII." In *Life In Brazil; or, a Journal of a Visit to the Land of the Cocoa and the Palm*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856. p. 305-311. *Online at Google Books and on reserve.*

Warren Dean. "Coffee Dispossesses the Forest." In *With Broadax and Firebrand: The destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press, 1997. 168-190. *Online at the Library website and on reserve.*

WEEK 4 — WATER: Environmental crises

Northeast Brazil, 1890s

Monday, April 22 — Drought as a man-made crisis

Mike Davis. *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino famines and the making of the third world*. London; New York: Verso, 2002. 1-16; 81-90; 188-195; 239-245; 256-259; 377-393. *On reserve.*

Wednesday, April 24 — Environmental crises and human rebellions

Euclides da Cunha and Elizabeth Lowe. *Backlands: The Canudos Campaign*. New York: Penguin Books, 2010 (originally published in 1902). 103-116; 150-177; 182-204. *On reserve.*

Flávio de Barros, Cícero Antonio F. Almeida, and Maria Isabel Ribeiro Lenzi. *Canudos: Imagens da Guerra: Os últimos Dias da Guerra de Canudos*. Rio de Janeiro: Museu da República, 1997. *Handout.*

WEEK 5 — RUBBER: The Commodity Bust

Brazilian and Peruvian Amazon, 1880s-1910s

Monday, April 29 — Rubber production and environmental factors

Warren Dean. *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber: A Study In Environmental History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 1-6, 53-107, 163-171 (including tables). *Course reader.*

Wednesday, May 1 — Rubber production and its social costs

Roger Casement and Angus Mitchell. "Blue Book – Document 9 - Consul General Casement to Sir Edward Grey." In *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*. Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2003. 143-192. *Course reader.*

"Rubber Atrocities Spare no Victims: Bluebook Issued in London Confirm the Worst Charges Against Peruvians." *The New York Times*, July 14, 1912. <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F10914FC395813738DDDAD0994DF405B828DF1D3>. *Online.*

WEEK 6 — GUANO: Science and environmental management

Coastal Peru, 1850s-1950s

Monday, May 6 — Boom, bust, and environmental depletion

Robert Cushman Murphy. *Bird Islands of Peru: The Record of a Sojourn on the West Coast*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1925. 26-93. *Coursework*

Robert E. Coker. "Regarding the Future of the Guano Industry and the Guano-Producing Birds of Peru," *Science* (10 July 1908). 58-64. *Online*

Wednesday, May 8 — The scientific rebuilding of the guano industry

>>>Turn in Written Assignment 1

Robert Cushman Murphy. "Peru's profits from Sea Fowl." *National Geographic Magazine* (March 1959): 401-409. *Coursework*.

Gregory Cushman. "The Most Valuable Birds in the World: 'International Conservation Science and the Revival of Peru's Guano Industry, 1909-1965.'" *Environmental History*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Jul., 2005). 477-509. *Online*.

WEEK 7 — OIL: National Territory, Development, and Perennial Frontiers

Brazilian and Ecuadorian Amazon, 1950s-2000s

Monday, May 13 — Developing the Jungle

Paul E. Little. *Amazonia: Territorial Struggles on Perennial Frontiers*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. 1-12; 74-130. *Course Reader*.

Charles H. Wood, and Marianne Schmink. "The Military and the Environment in the Brazilian Amazon." *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 21, no. 1 (1993): 81-105. *Online*.

Wednesday, May 15 — Oil, Forest, and Indigenous Peoples

>>>Turn in Written Assignment 2 Proposal

Patrick Radden Keefe. "Reversal of Fortune." *The New Yorker*. January 9, 2012. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/01/09/120109fa_fact_keefe?currentPage=all
Coursework and Online

Joe Kane. "With Spears From All Sides." *The New Yorker*. September 27, 1993 (54-78). *Coursework*

WEEK 8 — COCAINE: Transnational commodity chains

Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia 1860s-2000s

Monday, May 20 — The creation of a commodity chain

Paul Eliot Gootenberg. "Cocaine in Chains: The rise and demise." In Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr L. Frank. *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000*. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2006. 321-350. *Course Reader*.

Mary Roldán. "Cocaine and the 'miracle' of modernity in Medellín." In Paul Eliot Gootenberg. *Cocaine: Global Histories*. Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 1999. 165-182. *Online at the Library website and on reserve*.

Wednesday, May 22 — Coca versus Cocaine

“The Cocaine Economy” In Orin Starn, Carlos Iván Degregori, and Robin Kirk. *The Peru Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. 2nd Ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. 385-417. *Course Reader*.

United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime. “The Coca-Leaf Problem in Colombia.” *Bulletin on Narcotics* 4, no. 2 (1952): 19-22. *Online*.

http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1952-01-01_2_page007.html

Raúl Pérez Alcalá.. “The Coca Question in Bolivia” *Bulletin on Narcotics* 4, no. 2 (1952): 10-15. *Online*. http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1952-01-01_2_page005.html

Vicente Zapata Ortiz. “The Problem of the Chewing of the Coca Leaf in Peru.” *Bulletin on Narcotics* 4, no. 2 (1952): 26-33. *Online*.

http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1952-01-01_2_page009.html

WEEKS 9 and 10 - SALMON: Digital and spatial history

Chile 1970s-2010s

WEEK 9

Monday, May 27 — Memorial Day, no classes

Wednesday, May 29 — no classes

GIS Workshop *This week you will attend the GIS workshop at Library. If you cannot make it, you will have to do three GIS tutorials in your free time during this week (each takes about one hour) and send me the end results. I will provide all the materials.*

WEEK 10

Monday, June 3 — GIS work

Suggested Reading: John Soluri. “Something Fishy: Chile’s Blue Revolution, Commodity Diseases, and the Problem of Sustainability,” *Latin American Research Review* 46, (special issue, 2011): 55-75. (21 pages) *Online*.

Database: Andrew Gerhart, and RIMISP. *Salmon Workers Household Survey*, 2009.

Wednesday, June 5 — GIS work and presentation

Time to wrap up your mini-projects. The last 30 min. will be reserved to informal presentations of what the students have accomplished.

WEEK 11

Monday, June 10 — Turn in Written Assignment 2.