

**INTS 215:**  
**Latin America and Global Commodities**

**Summer Session II, 2020**  
**Trinity College**  
**Prof. Sergio Pinto-Handler**  
**Tuesday/Thursday, 10-12 (online)**  
**Office Hours: Monday 8-9 AM and Tuesday, 8-9 AM, and by appointment**

**Course Description**

This course examines the role of global commodities — specifically sugar, precious metals, coffee, petroleum and lumber — in Latin America’s past and present. We will explore how the production of these commodities has impacted Latin America’s natural environment, structured the region’s relationship to the world, and created exploitative yet dynamic societies of slaves, peasants and working classes. We will examine how the worldwide spread of Latin American commodities has transformed global consumer demands, altering the way that people consume these commodities and changing the social and cultural meaning that they attach to doing so. Drawing on the interdisciplinary field of commodity studies, students will use methods from across the social sciences and the humanities to understand Latin America’s key role in the process of globalization.

This course has three parts to it. First, we will establish a theoretical and historical foundation for the study of commodities in Latin America. We will ask what a commodity is, then ask why and how studying commodities can help us see a great deal about humanity and the world. We will then examine Latin America’s long and important role as a commodity-exporting region, while paying particular attention to the social, political and ecological consequences of commodity production in the region from the colonial era to the present. In the second part of our course we will split into groups and each will focus on one of the specific commodities we study. During week 3 we will read about each commodity’s history within Latin America, and in week 4 we will explore how each specific commodity has impacted the world beyond Latin America. The final part of our course will move beyond our five commodities to look at a broader set of commodities in contemporary Latin America, with a specific focus on questions of state power and ecological degradation.

We will meet twice a week. There will be a Zoom lecture at 10 AM each Tuesday and a review session at 10 AM each Thursday. Attendance is required. So long as all students agree, all sessions will be recorded and made available on Moodle.

Each week’s readings are split up into a set of reading modules. For example, our week on Latin American history is split into four clusters of readings. For each week, the reading modules are listed as corresponding to either our Tuesday or Thursday class.

## Course Assignments

- **Short Essay: 15% of final grade**

This 3 to 5-page essay will examine interdisciplinary approaches to the study of commodities and will be due on July 18. The prompt is on Moodle.

- **Quiz: 10% of final grade**

This short quiz (15 questions) covers Latin American history and must be completed on Moodle by the beginning of week July 29. A study guide is on Moodle and we will review for the quiz during week 3.

- **Final Assignment, Research Paper: 35% of final grade**

Your final assignment for this class is a research project which includes both a paper and a digital assignment.

For the paper, your task is to select one of the commodities we focus on in class and **complete one of the following two assignments:**

- 1) Explain the nature of production of this commodity in contemporary Latin America. Please focus on a specific case study (e.g. the Brazilian lumber industry) and explain the productive, environmental, social and political dynamics driving the creation of this commodity. Then, follow the commodity chain out of Latin America and explain some different forms of this commodity's consumption in a few sites around the globe. How are various forms of consumption differentiated by class, race and gender? How have some consumers sought to undo their alienation from the production of the commodities they consume? How (if at all) have these efforts altered the nature of production of this commodity on the ground in Latin America?
- 2) Explain the historical process through which the production of specific goods became industrialized in Latin America. Please focus on a specific commodity (e.g. sugar) and explain how the production of this commodity became more efficient, rapid and profitable. What were the technological innovations that spurred this process? How did changes in the form of production spur specific social and political transformations that altered the lives of the people who worked to produce these commodities? What were the ecological consequences of this process? How (if at all) did the industrialization of this commodity production alter Latin America's economic relationships and power (im)balances with the rest of the world?

This paper will be written in stages and the grades for each draft of the assignment are listed below alongside the schedule for completion.

- **Final Assignment, Digital Project: 10% of final grade**  
 As a capstone to the course, you will work with your classmates who selected the same commodity to create a digital resource explaining either the nature of a specific commodity's production in contemporary Latin America or the history of that commodity in the region. This is an assignment with a good deal of leeway – you can write a Wikipedia article, create a digital explanation of the production process, or build a digital exhibit of different cultural products about a specific commodity (e.g. coffee advertisements, confectionery recipes, etc). We will begin discussing this project in our first review session on July 9 and the final project must be uploaded to Moodle by **August 14**.
- **In-Class Participation: 10% of final grade**  
 You are asked to participate in our online class sessions, particularly the discussion-based classes on Thursdays. A discussion/review guide for each week will be posted on Moodle each Sunday, and this should help encourage participation.
- **Discussion Post Participation: 10% of final grade**  
 Post a one paragraph response to the readings for each reading module. The aim is to demonstrate a clear and thoughtful engagement with the course material. These responses are due on Moodle at the end of each week, to be posted by Saturday at 11:59 PM.
- **Research Workshop Participation: 10% of final grade**  
 The group studying each commodity has a dedicated discussion board on Moodle. Please use this forum to ask questions of your peers, share ideas and provide feedback on each other's work. I will post an in-progress version of your grade on this activity at the end of week three, so that you can see where you stand.

### Outline for Completion of Research Project

- **Proposal 1:** Complete the research worksheet that is on Moodle by **July 12**. Here you will explain which commodity you want to study, why you want to study that commodity, and which countries or regions within Latin America you are most interested in. **Not graded.**
- **Proposal 2:** This 2-page essay will be an opportunity to explain which of the two options you would like to take, to identify which case studies you would like to use and to explain why they are important. This essay will also be a place for you to explain the sources you will use for this assignment. This assignment is due July 24. **5% of final grade.**
- **Paper Draft:** A 5 to 7-page draft of your research paper is due August 3. **10% of final grade.**
- **Final Paper:** This 7 to 10-page essay is due August 14. **20% of final grade.**

## Course Schedule

### Part I: Commodities in Theory and in Latin American History

#### Week 1: Intro to Commodities

For Tuesday July 7:

##### Module 1: Commodities and Cultural Meaning in Anthropology

- Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985), Introduction and Chapter 1.
- Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (1986).

For Thursday, July 9:

##### Module 2: Commodities and Power in History

- Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal and Zephyr Frank, "Commodity Chains in Theory and in Latin American History," in *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy*, eds. Topik, et al (2006).
- Marcy Norton, "Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics" *American Historical Review* (2006).

##### Module 3: Commodities and Globalization

- Gary Gereffi, Korzeniewicz and Korzeniewicz, "Introduction: Global Commodity Chains," in *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism* eds. Gereffi, Korzeniewicz (1994).
- Frederick Cooper, "Space, Time, and History: The Conceptual Limits of Globalization," in *Empirical Futures: Anthropologists and Historians Engage the Work of Sidney Mintz*, eds. Palmié, Khan, et al (2009).

#### Week 2: Commodities in Latin American History

For Tuesday, July 14:

##### Module 1: Commodities and the Colonial System, 1500-1800

- Barbara Stein and Stanley Stein, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective* (1970), Chapter 1.
- Peter Bakewell, *Miners of the Red Mountain: Indian Labor in Potosí: 1545-1650* (2010), Chapters 1 and 2.
- Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (1997), Chapter 10.

Module 2: Latin American Commodities and the Global Industrial Revolution, 1800-1929

- Steven Topik, “Coffee,” in *The Second Conquest of Latin America: Coffee, Henequen and Oil During the Export Boom, 1850-1930* (1998), eds. Topik et al.
- John Soluri, “People, Plants and Pathogens: The Eco-social Dynamics of Export Banana Production in Honduras, 1875–1950” *Hispanic American Historical Review* (2000).

For Thursday, July 16:

Module 3: Commodities, Politics and Agrarian Transformation in 20th Century Latin America: The Case Study of Mexico

- Jonathan C. Brown, “Acting for Themselves: “Workers and the Mexican Oil Nationalization,” in *Workers Control in Latin America, 1930-1979* (2000), ed. Jonathan Brown.
- Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America’s Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (2010), Introduction, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.
- David Sonnenfeld, "Mexico's 'Green Revolution,' 1940-1980: Towards an Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* (1992).

Module 4: Neoliberalism and the Commodity Cycle

- Anjali Browning, “Corn, Tomatoes, and a Dead Dog: Mexican Agricultural Responses after NAFTA and Rural Responses to Declining Maize Production in Oaxaca, Mexico,” *Estudios Mexicanos* (2013).
- Watch for in-class discussion on commodities in Latin American history: Fitzcarraldo (1982), link is on Moodle. Enjoy!!!

**Part II: In-Depth Commodity Study**

**Week 3: Commodities in Latin American History**

1. Precious Metals: Mining and Society
  - Kathleen Higgins, ‘Licentious Liberty’ in a Brazilian Gold Mining Region: Slavery, Gender and Social Control in Eighteenth Century Sabará, Minas Gerais (1999).
2. Lumber: Work and Consumption
  - Jennifer Anderson, *Mahogany: The Costs of Luxury in Early America* (2012).
3. Coffee: Capitalism and Modernity
  - Stanley Stein, *Vassouras: A Brazilian Coffee County, 1850-1900* (1956).
  - Erica Beckman, *Capital Fictions: The Literature of Latin America’s Export Age* (2012), Intro, Chapters 1,2 and 5.
4. Sugar: Work and Society
  - Sidney Mintz, *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History* (1960).

5. Petroleum: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Politics and Society
  - Myrna Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (2006).

#### **Week 4: Latin American Commodities in Global Perspective**

1. Coffee: Histories, Cultures and Consumers
  - Julia Landweber, "This Marvelous Bean: Adopting Coffee into Old Regime French Culture and Diet," *French Historical Studies* (2015).
  - Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the U.S.*, (2009), Chapter 1.
  - Craig Thompson and Zeynep Ansel, "The Starbucks Brandscape and Consumers' (Anticorporate) Experiences of Glocalization" *Journal of Consumer Research* (2004).
2. Precious Metals
  - Todd Gordon and Jeffery Weber, "Imperialism and Resistance: Canadian Mining Companies in Latin America" *Third World Quarterly* (2008)
  - Wim Hoogbergen and Dirk Kruijt, "Gold, Garimpeiros and Maroons: Brazilian Migrants and Ethnic Relationships in Postwar Suriname." *Caribbean Studies* (2004)
  - Leire Urkidi and Mariana Walter, "Dimensions of Environmental Justice in Anti-Gold Mining Movements" *Geoforum* (2011).
3. Lumber: Ecology and Power
  - Seth Garfield, *In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States and the Nature of a Region* (2013).
4. Sugar: Environment and Technology
  - Thomas Rogers, *The Deepest Wounds: A Labor and Environmental History of Sugar in Northeastern Brazil* (2010).
  - Leida Fernández Prieto, "Islands of Knowledge: Science and Agriculture in the History of Latin America and the Caribbean," *ISIS* (2013).
  - John Wilkinson, "The Emerging Global Biofuels Market" *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* (2009)
5. Petroleum: Resource Extraction and Modernity
  - Miguel Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture and Society in Venezuela* (2009).

### Part III: Commodities in Contemporary Latin America

#### Week 5: Commodities and the State in Latin America

For Tuesday, August 4:

##### Module 1: Bonanzas, State Power and the Logic of Capitalism

- Gustavo Adler and Sebastián Sosa, “Commodity Price Cycles: The Perils of Mismanaging the Boom,” in *Latin America: New Challenges to Growth and Stability* (IMF, 2014).
- Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (1997), Chapter 1.

##### Module 2: Commodification and Conservation

- Glenn Shephard, “Trouble in Paradise: Indigenous Populations, Anthropological Policies, and Biodiversity Conservation in Manu National Park, Peru,” *Journal of Sustainable Forestry* (2010).
- B. Zimmerman, Perez, Malcom and Turner, “Conservation and Development Alliances with the Kayapó of South Eastern Amazonia, a Tropical Forest Indigenous People,” *Environmental Conservation* (2001).

For Thursday, August 6:

##### Module 3: The State and Illicit Commodities in Latin America: The Global Cocaine Industry

- Paul Gootenberg, “Cocaine in Chains: The Rise and Demise of a Global Commodity, 1860-1950,” in *From Silver to Cocaine*.
- Ivelaw Griffith, “The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean: Problems without Passports,” in *The Political Economy of the Drug Industry* (2004), ed. Menno Vellinga.
- Bruce Michael Bagely, “Globalization and Transnational Organized Crime: The Russian Mafia in Latin America and the Caribbean,” *The Political Economy of the Drug Industry*.

#### Week 6: Commodities and Globalization in Latin America

For Tuesday, August 11:

##### Module 1) Commodities and Economic Development

- Raúl Prebisch, *The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems* (1950).

For Thursday, August 13:

Module 2) The Dynamics of Dependency: Venezuela and Brazil

- Fernando Henrique Cardoso, "Dependent Capitalist Development in Latin America," *New Left Review* (1972).
- Óscar García Agustín, "Venezuela and China: Independency and Dependency in the Context of Interdependent Hegemony," *Journal of China and International Relations* (2016).

Module 3) Conclusion: Dependency and Inequality in Latin America

- André Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment," *Monthly Review* (1966).
- Rodrigo Arocena and Peter Senker, "Technology, Inequality, and Underdevelopment: The Case of Latin America," *Science, Technology and Human Values* (2003).
- Kim Voss, "Enduring Legacy? Charles Tilly and *Durable Inequality*," *American Sociologist* (2010).

**Final Essay and Digital Project due August 14 at 11:59 PM.**



## **Course Policies**

### **Grading Scale**

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- o A: 94% and above
- o A-: 90% - 93%
- o B+: 87%-89%
- o B: 84% - 86%
- o B-: 80%-83%
- o C+: 77%-79%
- o C: 74%-76%
- o C-: 70%-73%

### **Late Assignments**

All assignments completed within one week after the due date has passed will have one-third of a letter grade deducted (e.g. an A becomes an A-). Any assignment handed in more than a week late will be deducted an entire letter grade (e.g. an A becomes a B). I will not accept late assignments more than two weeks after the deadline.

### **Laptops and Electronic Devices**

Laptops and tablets are permitted in class but only for academic purposes. If you are using these devices for anything else, I will ask you to turn them off. Phones are prohibited.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory. I will take attendance during class and more than 3 unexcused absences will result in an entire letter grade deduction.

### **Academic Integrity**

In accordance with the Trinity College Student Integrity Contract (p. 10), students are expected to abide by the highest standards of intellectual honesty in all academic exercises. Intellectual honesty assumes that students do their own work and that they credit properly those upon whose work and thought they draw. It is the responsibility of each student to make sure that he or she is fully aware of what constitutes intellectually honest work in every examination, quiz, paper, laboratory report, homework assignment, or other academic exercise submitted for evaluation in a course at Trinity College. Please refer to the Trinity College Student Handbook for examples of intellectual dishonesty.

## **Students with Academic Accommodations**

Trinity College complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you have a documented disability and require academic accommodations, please share your accommodations letter with me during the first two weeks of the semester or a minimum of 10 days prior to needing your accommodations. If you do not have a letter but have a disability requiring academic accommodations, or if you have questions about applying for academic accommodations, please contact Lori Clapis, Coordinator of Accommodation Resources, at 860-297-4025 or at [Lori.Clapis@trincoll.edu](mailto:Lori.Clapis@trincoll.edu). My office is located in McCook hall. At the present time, getting to my office requires climbing several stairs. If an alternative meeting location for meeting during my office hours is needed, please notify me in advance.

