

Graduate Liberal Studies, Wesleyan University

## **SOCS 638: Luxury Commodities and the Emergence of the Modern World**

**Spring 2024**

[information subject to change]

**Day/Time:** Mondays 6:30–9:00 pm

**Modality:** ONLINE via Zoom

**Instructor:** Prof. E. Grimmer-Solem

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### **Course description:**

This course explores the role of luxury consumption in the development of the market economy into a capitalist system with a global division of labor by 1800. It will study how Europeans were exposed to such luxury commodities as spices, sugar, cotton, porcelain, tea, and coffee and the role this played in sparking a revolution in consumer tastes and preferences. It will analyze the development of long-haul oceanic trade to meet growing consumer demand for these goods and the role played by monopoly companies and plantation systems in that process. It will explore the broader financial and “industrious revolution” that unfolded in its wake, changing the pace of work and household structure. The course will conclude by considering how these processes contributed to the Industrial Revolution, free trade, changes in diet and household structure, and many other features of modernity. The course aims to be accessible, broad, and comparative, drawing insights from many fields to consider the environmental, geographical, cultural, social, and political factors shaping the economic changes that have created modernity.

### **Course requirements:**

1. Attendance and participation, including weekly submitted questions (20%)
2. Midterm essay (10-12 pp total, 40%)
3. Final research paper (10-12 pp 40%)

Due to the compressed nature of this course and the importance of the material that will be introduced and discussed in class, regular attendance is crucial. I expect informed participation in all class sessions, which means that you must have completed the readings assigned for a given session of class before the beginning of class. To help you prepare for that, I expect you to

submit three questions or comments prompted by the reading to the course Moodle before the start of class. If you miss class or attend unprepared, you will risk gradually forfeiting 20% of your grade. The midterm paper will be comprised of an essay assignment allowing you to choose from several questions treating different aspects of the material covered in the first half of the semester. For the final exam you will write a 10-12 page research paper on a topic of your choice, but the topic must be approved by me in advance. Your writing must demonstrate a critical mastery of the assigned readings and a good command of the key points made from the additional material that I will introduce in class. This material will be made available to you for review as Powerpoint slides well in advance of the exams.

Weekly questions/comments: Identify the most interesting or important theme or problem you encountered in the readings and the most significant analytical questions they raise. Analytical questions are ones that ask “how” or “why”. Such questions can be phrased in different ways but what they all have in common is that they allow you to begin to analyze and interpret the thought, values, intentions or purposes of the agents or the lines of causation of the events or problems encountered in readings. Analytical questions also often require you to extend specific ideas or arguments in readings to other settings or to infer conclusions. Many times such questions raise additional points with new sets of questions that you may or may not want to elaborate. The length of each of your questions (and their subquestions, if any) is at your discretion but should reflect deeper thinking about the persons, ideas, problems, and events encountered in the readings. The three questions/comments are due in Moodle before class and must be submitted as a PDF file. Give the file a name that identifies you (e.g., Smith\_week\_1). Late submissions are not accepted.

In making references in your midterm and final paper, please use footnotes following the Chicago notes/bibliography style outlined in the *Chicago Manual of Style* (14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> edition). This citation convention is usefully summarized in Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, chs. 15-16, as well as in the Chicago-Style Citation Quick Reference Guide [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html). The bibliography will not count toward the page limit (10-12 pages). Papers must be double spaced. Please use a font no smaller than 12 points and provide generous right and left margins (1 ¼ inches minimum) and at least 1 inch top and bottom margins on your papers.

For your convenience, papers should be submitted to the course Moodle on or before the day and time outlined on the syllabus. Papers received late will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for each day late (i.e., from A to A-, then A- to B+, etc.).

### **Required readings:**

1. Bernstein, William J. *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0802144164

2. Mintz, Sidney W. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986. ISBN: 978-0140092332
3. De Vries, Jan. *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy 1650 to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0521719254
4. A selection of readings accessible via the course Moodle.

**Class schedule:**

M, Jan 29: The Caravan Spice Trade, the Black Death, and their Consequences

- Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange*, 55–151.
- Belich, *The World the Plague Made*, 106–39. (Moodle)

M, Feb 5: The Maritime Spice Trade and the Silver Revolution

- Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange*, 152–213.
- Irigoien, “The New World and the Global Silver Economy, 1500-1800,” in *Global Economic History*, ed. Roy and Riello, 271–286. (Moodle)
- Wadsworth, *Global Piracy*, 83–91. (Moodle)

M, Feb 12: No class.

M, Feb 19: Sugar, Corporations, and Plantations

- Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange*, 214–240.
- Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 19–73
- Burnard, “Plantations and the Great Divergence,” in *Global Economic History*, ed. Roy and Riello, 102–117. (Moodle)

M, Feb 26: A World Dressed in Cotton

- Parthasarathi, “Cotton Textiles in The Indian Subcontinent, 1200–1800,” in *The Spinning World*, ed. Riello and Parthasarathi, 17–41. (Moodle)
- Kriger, “‘Guinea Cloth’: Production and Consumption of Cotton Textiles in West Africa before and during the Atlantic Slave Trade,” in *The Spinning World*, ed. Riello and Parthasarathi, 105–126. (Moodle)
- Lemire, “Revising the Historical Narrative: India, Europe, and the Cotton Trade, c. 1300–1800,” in *The Spinning World*, ed. Riello and Parthasarathi, 205–226. (Moodle)

M, Mar 4: Coffee, Tea, and Sugar

- Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange*, 241–279.
- Nierstrasz, “The Popularization of Tea: East India Companies, Private Traders, Smugglers and the Consumption of Tea in Western Europe, 1700–1760,” in *Goods from the East*, ed. Berg, 263–276. (Moodle)
- Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 74–150.

M, Mar 11: No class. Spring break.

M, Mar 18: No class. Spring break.

M, Apr 1: White Gold—Porcelain and other Goods from the East

- Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 21–84. (Moodle)
- Marchand, *Porcelain*, 8–59. (Moodle)

M, Apr 8: The “Industrious Revolution” and the Middling Classes

- De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 40–72.
- Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 199–246. (Moodle)

M, Apr 15: Longer Working Hours and Changing Consumer Demand

- De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 73–185.

M, Apr 22: No class. Passover.

M, Apr 29: From Imports to Industry

- Parthasarathi. *Why Europe Grew Rich*, 89–114. (Moodle)
- Allen, *The Industrial British Industrial Revolution*, 182-216. (Moodle)
- Koehn, “Josiah Wedgwood,” in *Creating Modern Capitalism*, ed. McCraw, 19-50. (Moodle)

M, May 6: Toward Modernity

- Bernstein, 280–315.
- De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 186–237
- Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 151–186.