Course description:
This course examines the role of Latin American commodities in constructing the modern world system, beginning in the sixteenth century. While these commodities are not all indigenous to Latin America they have all played a significant role in the region’s economy and culture. We will examine how these commodities were exported and imported, how they affected populations, and how ideas about these goods and their meanings developed through time and over space. Commodity flows are integral to world politics, economics, and historical events. The desire for commodities justified colonialism, created significant trade imbalances, and led to the exploitation of land and labor in many parts of the world.

Books (available in the bookstore):
Soluri, Banana Cultures

In addition to these books, there are readings available online. See the schedule below for information.

Assignments and grading:
1) Research assignment (20%).
   a. Choose one commodity that has had a significant impact on world history and create a map of its route. Map due May 2 by 5 pm via email.
   
   Pick two of the following:
   b. Create an annotated bibliography of 5 books about this commodity (in addition to any we have read in class). The annotated bibliography should use Robbins’ framework to discuss the books about the commodity. We read Robbins in week 1 and we will discuss his framework. Each annotation should be at least 250 words. You will meet in the library for research help on February 14. Annotated bibliography due May 9 by 5 pm via email.
   
   c. Discuss (in 750-1,000 words) whether this commodity has been fetishized or not (using and citing Marx’s ideas about commodity fetishism as well as two books about the commodity. (The books should not be those we have read for class.) We read Marx in Week 2. Essay due May 9 by 5 pm via email.
   
   d. Five-minute presentation in class of the map with the commodity route. The presentations will take place the last few weeks of the semester.
2) Two papers, 1,000-1,500 words (20% each). The due dates are noted on the syllabus (February 21 and April 12). You will receive prompts for the papers. Please email the papers to me in MS Word.

3) Quizzes (20% total). You will take 5 quizzes and I will count the highest 4. These will be simple quizzes (True/False) based on the class readings. The quizzes do not require any study beyond reading the assignments and paying attention in class.

4) Class participation (20%). Participation will be measured by involvement in class discussions, both group discussions and larger class discussions. You must attend class regularly in order to participate. Please complete the readings by Monday of each week and arrive in class ready to discuss them. I will send you an email by the end of February letting you know your participation grade thus far.

Class policies:
1) You may bring a drink to class. Do not eat food during class.
2) If you use a laptop please sit in the back row so that you do not distract other students.
3) If you hand in a late paper you must make arrangements with me to hand it in and we will discuss penalties then.
4) You are responsible for keeping track of assignments and the class schedule. I suggest that you exchange email addresses with another student so that you can catch up on any notes or assignments that you might miss.
5) If you have a disability and need academic accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at (703) 993-2474. Accommodations are arranged through that office.

Honor Code:
This class operates under GMU’s Honor Code, which states, “Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.” Plagiarism means presenting another person’s words, ideas, or arguments as your own without giving that person credit. I am obligated to report all violations of the Honor Code to the Honor Committee. See https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/.

Course schedule:
Week 1 (January 22 and 24): Defining the topic.
Readings (for Wednesday):
2. Bruce Robbins, “Commodity Histories,” PMLA, Vol. 120, No. 2 (2005) You can find this online by going through the E-Journals tab on the library website.

Week 2 (January 29 and January 31): What is a commodity?
Readings:
1. Marx, Capital, Chapter One: Commodities,” from the Marxists Internet Archive: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4

Monday January 29 is the last day to add classes.

Week 3 (February 5 and February 7): The circulation and value of objects
Readings:
Paper assignment # 1 is posted on Blackboard on Wednesday.
Quiz #1 on Wednesday.

Week 4 (February 12 and 14): Sugar and Slavery
Wednesday February 14 we will meet in Fenwick 1014B.
Readings:

Monday February 12 is the last day to drop classes with a 33% tuition penalty.

Week 5 (February 19 and 21): Sugar and Slavery
Readings:
Mintz, “Consumption,” Chapter 3 of Sweetness and Power (Penguin, 1985). This is on Blackboard.
Paper assignment #1 is due on Wednesday. Please email it to me in MS Word before class begins.
Quiz #2 on Wednesday.

Friday February 23 is the last day to drop classes with a 67% tuition penalty.
Monday February 26 – Friday, March 30 is the selective withdrawal period.

Week 6 (February 26 and February 28): Chocolate, Tobacco, and Cultural Transmission
Reading: Norton, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4.

Week 7 (March 5 and March 7): Chocolate, Tobacco, and Cultural Transmission
Reading: Norton, Chapters 5, 6, 7.
March 12 and March 14: Spring break, no class. Enjoy!

Week 9: (March 19 and 21): Chocolate, Tobacco, and Cultural Transmission
**Reading:** Norton, Chapters 8, 9, 10.
**Quiz #3 on Wednesday.**

Week 10 (March 26 and 28): Cotton, Labor, and Capitalism
**Readings:**
**Paper assignment #2 is posted on Blackboard Wednesday.**

Selective withdrawal period ends Friday March 30.

Week 11 (April 2 and April 4): Bananas, Imperialism, and the Environment
**Reading:** Soluri, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4.

Week 12 (April 9 and 11): Bananas, Imperialism, and the Environment
**Reading:** Soluri, Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8.
**Quiz #4 on Wednesday.**
**Paper assignment #2 is due on Friday by 5 pm in MS Word via email.**

Week 13: (April 16 and 18): Cocaine, Medicine, and Criminalization
**Readings:**

Week 14 (April 23 and 25): Marijuana, Stereotyping, and Criminalization
**Reading:**
Campos, Isaac, “Degeneration and the Origins of Mexico’s War on Drugs,” *Mexican Studies = Estudios Mexicanos* 26.2 (2010), 379-408. You can find this online by going through the E-Journals tab on the library website.
**Quiz #5 on Wednesday.**

Week 15: (April 30 and May 2): Final project presentations.
Email me your commodity maps by Wednesday at 5 pm.