

Global Studies: Plants and Empire

fall 2024

This program reimagines the historical study of plants and empire through the interdisciplinary lenses of economic botany, political economy and feminist theory. Using case studies of global commodities such as sugar, rice and cotton, the program explores a historical view of how various peoples' use of plants are shaped by economic, cultural, legal, and political conditions as well as environmental realities. Using commodities histories, we will trace the movements of plants and people and the emergence of a globalized system of production, consumption, trade, and finance, that become the constitutive features of the capitalist economic system. We will begin our explorations in the 13th century, examining important events in European history that contributed to a shift from feudalism to market-based economies. We will read about the lives of people who lived and worked on plantations during the 17th and 18th centuries, cultivating agricultural commodities that become integral to the rise of world markets. From the early colonial era we move chronologically forward to the rise of the British Empire and the industrial era of monopoly capitalism. We will pay special attention to Kew Garden as a 19th century botanical research hub that supported the establishment and maintenance of plantations in British colonies. And then we shift to the 20th century and the expansion of globalization and the rise of neoliberalism.

Taught by a social scientist and a botanist, this program introduces students to key questions about how the social constructions of gender, race, and class shape our relations with the natural world. Coursework in economic botany grounded in political economy and political ecology will give students the skills to think critically about how human use of the environment intersects with the power dynamics of the global economy. This will allow them to examine how various systems of knowing about nature and its use can support or challenge systems of oppression. And they will develop an understanding of how current political controversies are shaped by the legacy of oppression, struggle, and social change associated with capitalism. In this hybrid program, students can expect a blend of about 32 hours/week of asynchronous (self-paced) and 8 hours/week of synchronous (scheduled) work. For example, there will be written assignments and discussions using Canvas, videos that students watch on their own time, as well as in-person lectures and discussions. To successfully participate in this program, students will need a quiet place to read and write, as well as access to a computer with a reliable internet connection and word processing software. This program is open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

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Weekly Schedule:

Tuesday in-person	Thursday in-person	Asynchronous (self-paced)
12 noon-1 pm Optional Social Time atrium outside SEM 2 E1105	12 noon-1 pm Optional Social Time atrium outside SEM 2 E1105	32 hours/week
1-2:30 pm Lecture (FB) SEM 2 E1105	1-2:30 pm Lecture (SC) SEM 2 E1105	of reading, video watching, podcasts, quizzes, worksheets, and assignments.
3 – 5 pm Discussion SEM 2 E2107, SEM 2 E2109	3 – 5 pm Discussion SEM 2 E2107, SEM 2 E2109	(required log of hours)

Fall Credit Equivalencies:

- 4* - Cultural History of Plants
- 4* - Global Studies: Colonial Botany
- 4 - Political Economy of Imperialism
- 4 - Feminist Political Economy

TENTATIVE Discussion Texts (many of these will be available as free eBooks)

- Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, [A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet](#) (2018, Verso, \$18 paperback)
- Londa Schiebinger, [Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World](#) (2007, Harvard University Press, \$53 paperback)
- Stefanie Gänger, [A Singular Remedy: Cinchona across the Atlantic World, 1751–1820](#). (2020, Cambridge University Press, \$32 paperback)
- Corey Ross, [Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World](#) (2017, Oxford University Press, \$36 paperback) -skip pages 136-273
- Sathnam Sanghera, [Empireworld: How British Imperialism Shaped the Globe](#) (2024, PublicAffairs, \$35 hardback)
- Andrew Zimmerman, [Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South](#) (2012, Princeton University Press, \$34 paperback)
- Aaron Eddens, [Seeding Empire: American Philanthrocapital and the Roots of the Green Revolution in Africa](#) (2024, UC Press, \$29.95 paperback)
- Nancy Fraser, [Cannibal Capitalism](#), (2023, Verso, \$19 paperback)

Various articles and excerpts from book posted on Canvas including:

- Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*
- Manjapra, "Plantation Dispossession: The Global Travel of Agricultural Racial Capitalism"
- Jeremy Bellamy Foster, *The Robbery Nature*
- Christine Bauhardt and Wendy Harcourt (ed.), *Feminist Political Ecology and the Economics of Care: In Search of Economic Alternatives*