**HIST 5365, Topics**

**Spring, 2018**

Histories of Commodities

**PROFESSOR**: C. MORRIS

**OFFICE**: UH 346

**EMAIL**: morris@uta.edu

**FACULTY PROFILE:** <https://www.uta.edu/mentis/public/#profile/profile/view/id/1212/category/3>

**OFFICE HOURS**: Tue 2:30-3:30, 5:00-6:00, Thu 2:30-3:30,

**SECTION INFORMATION**: HIST 5365, SECTION 001

**TIME AND PLACE**: Tue. 7-10, UH 009

**CONTENT AND GOALS:**

How have the things people have exchanged shaped human history?

This class will examine the new and exciting history of commodities, in particular, within a transatlantic and transnational perspective. We will begin with some readings on what commodities are and how they have been conceptualized by economists at least since Smith, Ricardo, and Marx. We will also look at some approaches taken by anthropologists and sociologists, including Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and the debate over how inanimate objects such as commodities can be active agents in human history. With these preliminaries out of the way, we will then consider some recent histories of commodities with an eye to answering our guiding question. Readings address this central question from varying perspectives: by focusing on specific things (for example, cotton, rubber, labor); by examining how people in the past have thought about commodities (as inherently valuable, as fungible, as necessary or as superfluous); by developing ways for historians to think about commodities and history (as past objects of human attention, invention, and connection, but also as agents of history).

**REQUIREMENTS**:

Active participation in class discussions is absolutely essential. We will not be looking for correct answers in this class, or to solve issues once and for all, but for students to puzzle through ideas, concepts, and approaches to historical research, to ask questions of readings and of classmates, and to think out loud. I expect to hear all your voices (preferably not all at once).

Students will write five book reviews of about 800 words each, based on assigned texts. Each review should have four parts: 1)state the author’s main point, argument, or thesis; 2)describe the author’s sources, methods, theories/approaches, or in the case of a review essay, the sort of literature being reviewed; 3)explain the author’s finding and conclusions; 4)offer your assessment of the work—did the author do what he/she set out to do? Did the author make a valuable contribution to an ongoing debate or field of research? How does the work relate to other readings, especially those assigned the same week as your essay is due? Finally, where does the author’s contribution leave us?

In addition, students will write one critical review essay of 8-10 pages on a minimum of three book on a theme, issue, or commodity of their choice. **This essay is due in class May 1st.**

**GRADING**:

Book reviews: 50 points (5 X 10)  
Essay: 30 points  
Participation: 20 points

TOTAL: 100 points

**TEXTS:**

Pollan, *Botany of Desire*

Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*

Latour, *Reassembling the Social*

Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*

Anderson, *Mahogany*

Other readings will be available as PDF files that you may download, and if you so desire, print.

**UNIVERSITY POLICIES:**

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance**. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://wweb.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

**Disability Accommodations:** UTArlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including *The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA),* and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.* All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of **a letter certified** by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD).Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting: **The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD)** [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or calling 817-272-3364. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability).

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) [www.uta.edu/caps/](http://www.uta.edu/caps/) or calling 817-272-3671 is also available to all students to help increase their understanding of personal issues, address mental and behavioral health problems and make positive changes in their lives.

**Non-Discrimination Policy:** *The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit*[*uta.edu/eos*](http://www.uta.edu/hr/eos/index.php)*.*

**Title IX Policy:** The University of Texas at Arlington (“University”) is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment that is free from discrimination based on sex in accordance with Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits sex discrimination in employment; and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act). Sexual misconduct is a form of sex discrimination and will not be tolerated.*For information regarding Title IX, visit* [www.uta.edu/titleIX](http://www.uta.edu/titleIX) or contact Ms. Jean Hood, Vice President and Title IX Coordinator at (817) 272-7091 or [jmhood@uta.edu](file:///C:\Users\hannabas\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\697W32M3\jmhood@uta.edu).

**Academic Integrity:** Students enrolled all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington’s tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

*I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code in their courses by having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents’ Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university’s standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student’s suspension or expulsion from the University. Additional information is available at <https://www.uta.edu/conduct/>.

**Electronic Communication:** UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Campus Carry:** Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. Under the new law, openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/news/info/campus-carry/>

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in face-to-face and online classes categorized as “lecture,” “seminar,” or “laboratory” are directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student’s feedback via the SFS database is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. Students’ anonymity will be protected to the extent that the law allows. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law and aggregate results are posted online. Data from SFS is also used for faculty and program evaluations. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

**Final Review Week:** for semester-long courses**,** a period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

**Emergency Exit Procedures:** Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

**Student Support Services**:UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include [tutoring](http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/current/academic-support/learning-center/tutoring/index.php), [major-based learning centers](http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/college-based-clinics-labs.php), developmental education, [advising and mentoring](http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/advising.php), personal counseling, and [federally funded programs](http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/current/academic-support/mcnair/index.php). For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at <http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/index.php>.

**SCHEDULE**

Jan. 16 Introduction

Jan. 23 Commodities in Economic and Cultural History

READINGS: Lipartito, “Reassembling the Economic: New Departures in Historical Materialism,” *American Historical Review* 121 (Feb. 2016): 101-139. Bruce Robbins, “Commodity Histories,” *PMLA* 120 (Mar. 2005): 454-463.

Jan. 30 What Is a Commodity? A Brief History of a Concept

READINGS: Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), chapters 4-9, on money, labor, markets, and commodities; Marx, *Capital* (1867), vol. 1, part 1, chapter 1, “The Commodity.” Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, (1944), chapter 6, “The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities: Labor, Land, and Money.”

Feb. 6 The Social and Cultural Life of Things

READINGS: Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” and Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization As Process,” in Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986).

Feb. 13 Do (Living) Objects Shape Human History?

READINGS: Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire* (2001).

Feb. 20 No class. Students are encouraged to attend the lecture by Michael Pollan, Texas Hall, 7:30.

Feb. 27 Do (Non-Living) Objects Shape Human History?

READINGS: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (2005).

Mar. 6 Latour, continued

Mar. 13 Spring Break

Mar. 20 The Commodification of Nature

READINGS: Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (1985), chapters 1 and 2. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998), Introduction and Chapter 1. Scott Prudham, “Commodification,” pp. 123-142, in N. Castree, D. Demeritt, D. Liverman, and Bruce Rhoadson, eds., *A Companion to Environmental Geography* (2009).

Mar. 27 Commodities and the Intersections of Human and Natural Worlds

READING: Jennifer L. Anderson, *Mahogany: The Costs of Luxury in Early America* (2012), Chapters 1-4.

Apr. 3 Commodities and Intersections, continued

READING: Anderson, *Mahogany*, chapters 5-9.

Apr. 10 Commodities: Biographies and Metonymies

READING: Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*

Apr. 17 Commodification of Human Bodies

READINGS: Walter Johnson, “The Chattel Principle,” from *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (1999). Amy Dru Stanley, “Wages, Sin, and Slavery: Some Thoughts on Free Will and Commodity Relations,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 (Summer 2004): 279-288. Michael Ralph, “Commodity,” *Social Text* 27 (Fall 2009): 78-84.

Apr. 24 Commodities between Nations

READINGS: Rosenblatt, “Orientalism in American Popular Culture,” *Penn History Review* 16 (Spring 2009): 51-63. Suzanna Reiss, “Resources for Freedom: American Drug Commodities in the Postwar World,” pp. 53-96, in Reiss, *We Sell Drugs: The Alchemy of U.S. Empire* (2014).

May 1 Commodities that Made Empires, continued

READING: Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2014), chapters 8-14.