HISTORY 243C/343C/434C

People, Plants, and Medicine: Atlantic World Amerindian, African, and European Science

Professor Londa Schiebinger                                  Winter 2024
E-mail: schiebinger@stanford.edu                                Mondays: 1:30-4:20
Office Hours: please email me for an appt.                     Classroom: 200-201

Explores the global circulation of plants, peoples, disease, medicines, technologies, and knowledge. Considers primarily Africans, Amerindians, and Europeans in the eighteenth-century Atlantic World and focuses on their exchanges in the Caribbean, in particular within the French and British empires. We also take examples from other knowledge traditions, where relevant. Readings treat science and medicine in relation to voyaging, the natural history of plants, environmental exchange, racism, and slavery in colonial contexts. Colonial sciences and medicines were important militarily and strategically for positioning emerging nation states in global struggles for land and resources.

Graduate students taking the course as a one-quarter seminar should enroll in 343C. Grad students taking the course as a two-part graduate research seminar should enroll in the 443C-part-I number in Winter and the 443C-part-II number in Spring.

Readings are listed below. Students will be asked in advance to lead our weekly discussions of the readings. The class runs on active discussion!

Paper topics (paragraph plus a beginning bibliography) are due in class Feb 12. Presentations of final papers are on March 11. Final papers are due at 5:00 PM (via email) March 20. No late papers accepted. Undergraduates: 8-10 pages, double spaced, 12-point font, plus notes (notes are not included in the page count); graduates taking 343C: 15-17 pages, 12-point font, plus notes (notes are not included in page count); graduates taking 443C: 25 pages due at end of Spring quarter, 12-point font, plus notes (notes are not included in page count).

All reading materials are linked here or on Canvas. “Critical Reading” and “Paper Preparation” are also on Canvas. A resource for your papers: www.oxfordbibliographies.com. Search “Atlantic World” or other topics.

Grading: Class discussion plus reading presentations: 50%; Paper presentation: 20%; Final paper: 30%. Attendance is required.

Honor Code: All students are responsible for fully understanding and complying with the Honor Code. If you have any questions about plagiarism and the Honor Code, you should speak directly with me and/or visit: https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/policies-guidance/honor-code. University policy on generative AI: Absent a clear statement from a course instructor, use of or consultation with generative AI shall be treated analogously to assistance from another person. In particular, using generative AI tools to substantially complete an assignment or exam (e.g., by entering exam or assignment questions) is not permitted. Students should acknowledge the use of generative AI (other than incidental use) and default to disclosing such assistance when in doubt.
Access and Accommodations: If you have an Academic Accommodation Letter, please share your letter with me at your earliest possible opportunity.

Jan 8 Week 1 Introduction

Guest: Michael Wilcox, the first Native California faculty member at Stanford, is a senior lecturer in the Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity. He will talk about Ohlone history and the natural environment.

The Atlantic World and Colonial Science
The Actors: London Natural History Museum, Slavery and the Natural World: Chapter 2, People and Slavery. Canvas
Using images in historical research
http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/exhibition/1_3.html
Historical Research: http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/
How do we evaluate historical work? Critical Reading
Watch: Botany of Desire https://watchdocumentaries.com/the-botany-of-desire/ (40 minutes)
You may wish to watch: Belle or Amistad, which stream on some services.

Background reading:
London Natural History Museum, Slavery and the Natural World: Chapter 3, Commercial Plants, intro, tobacco, sugar, cacao. Canvas

Jan 22 Week 3 A Few Great Articles on Various Topics. Discuss article content plus historiography, methodology, and primary sources.

You can download a PDF of the chapter.
Jamaica's best kept secret: Blacks owned slaves
Kathleen Gutierrez. (2023). From Objects of Study to Worldmaking Beings: The History of Botany at the Corner of the Plant Turn. History Compass, 21(8), e12782.


Jan 29 Week 4 African Women in a Colonial Context

Guest: Rachel Jean-Baptiste, Michelle Mercer and Bruce Golden Family Professorship in Feminist and Gender Studies, 1:30-2:45


Atlantic World Plant Exchange: European, African, Amerindian


Rhianna Marks, "Interpreters of Nature: Louis Nicolas and his Indigenous Guides." Early American Literature 57, no. 2 (2022): 413-444. (This is about New France, not French-held lands in the Caribbean.)

Feb 5 Week 5 Sexual Violence and the Marketplace of Slavery

Guest: Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, Chancellor's Professor of History; Director, African and African-American History Writer's Workshop, UC Berkeley, via Zoom. 1:30-2:45


Atlantic World Agnotology and Gender
Schiebinger, Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World (Harvard University Press, 2004). E-Book, Green Library
Maria Sibylla Merian, Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium,
Plate 45. Original Dutch available at:
http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/129308#page/15/mode/1up
Listen to song: Weed Woman (in class)

Circulation of Knowledge in the Atlantic World
“Medical News,” Medical and Philosophical Commentaries, by a Society in Edinburgh 2 (1774): 90-92. Canvas

Feb 12 Week 6 Are there Slaves in Paris?
Guest: Miranda Spieler, Associate Professor of History and Politics, The American University of Paris. Via Zoom from Paris. 1:30-2:45. All Spieler readings on Canvas
Spieler, M. Introduction, Conclusion, and chapter two from “Slaves in Paris,” forthcoming from Harvard University Press. Please do not circulate these unpublished chapters.

Interactive Workshop on Oral Presentations
Guest Helen Lie, Program in Writing and Rhetoric and Oral Communication Program, 3:15-3:50. hlie@stanford.edu

Paper Topics plus Bibliography Due. Initial Discussion of Papers:
Sources, Methods, Narrative, Images.

Who Owns Nature?

**Feb 26 Week 8 Medical Experiments with Slaves**
Watch: Alexandra Stern, Reckoning with Eugenics in California, video. The passcode is StanfordEugenics2021!

**March 4 Week 9 Clash of Knowledges and Medical Regimes**
Benjamin Moseley on Obeah (“Obi”), *A Treatise on Sugar with Miscellaneous Medical Observations, 2nd ed.* (London, 1800), 190-205. Canvas
Watch in class Voodoo documentary: CNN & National Geographic

**Begin Paper Presentations** 2 student presentations
March 11 Week 10 Paper Presentations

March 20, Final paper due, 5:00 pm