

History of Culture Contact

Fall 2017

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Office hours: B, I, C Days from 120-315 or By Appointment – Email me!

Meeting Time in A 149

MThF 11a

Course Description

This class is about the history of culture contact, which is a huge topic. We will investigate culture contact in two specific historical contexts. In the first part of the class, we will talk, read, and write about gigantic network of trade in Asia called the **Silk Roads**. This network was strong for a long time, from about 200BC until at least the 1200sAD, with a legacy that extends even farther in time. Over this period, dozens of distinct cultures came into contact, containing various economic, governmental, and social systems. The story of the Silk Roads is a complicated and delightfully diverse one to tell.

During the rest of the class, we will talk about one specific culture and one particular type of contact – **British Imperialism** across the globe. The British began their quest for colonial commodities and profit in the 1620s and sustained it until the mid-1900s, so there is rather a lot to discuss. We will encounter the British in the West Indies, India, China, America, and Africa. We will try to see whether this sort of contact, with one culture exerting tremendous power in order to hold the center, is any different than the one we encountered in the first half of the class.

People in all these stories will be drawn into contact, sometimes against their will, over **commodities and trade goods**, so we will focus our attention on these objects and how they “mediate” culture contact between human groups, that is, how they bring people together and shape the way people relate to one another.

Course Objectives

- To **improve your writing skills**
- To think about the **disruption and collaboration** that happens when different types of folks meet, and how culture contact around global trade goods built the world we live in today over the course of thousands of years.
- To **learn to speak clearly and well in front of a group**
- To learn something about **how history is written** by examining the very stuff of history – historical documents and, to a lesser degree, archaeological evidence.

Grades

Participation/Quizzes	25%
In-Class Writings	15%
Paper 1 – Silk Road	15%
Take Home Essay Test	15%
Paper 2 – Commodity	20%
Presentation	15%

Assignments

Large assignments like the papers and presentations will conform to the expectations laid out in handouts and class instruction, which will be provided closer to the due dates for these assignments.

Required Texts

Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads*

Henry Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives*

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Most readings will be found on Moodle in PDF

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Silk Roads

Using mostly primary sources, we will discuss cultural contact along the silk roads, mostly prior to 1000AD. Contact between diverse cultures, especially between nomads and sedentary farming societies was rife with conflict, but it also produced a number of religious and political collaborations across Asia and Europe, including the spread of Buddhism.

Paper, 3-4 pages: Using mostly primary sources, describe three ways that the network of the Silk Roads changed people religiously, culturally, economically, or politically (choose at least three). Use sources from class, and cite them.

Unit 2: The Empire of the (British) Dandelion: Diseases, Insects, Weeds

The British colonialists struck out into the world looking for, among other things, cash crops that they could sell back to Britain to earn a living. They got more than they bargained for, and so did the people they met when they arrived in new places. In this unit, we will talk about the diseases, animals, and weeds Europeans brought with them to the new world, what happened to colonized people and environments as a result. This is a short unit, but we will return to the theme of the environment in the next one as well.

In class writings and quizzes for this section, but no paper

Unit 3: British Empire: Imperial Commodities and Culture Contact

In this unit, we will focus heavily on commodities and cultural contact through imperial trade. We will pay special attention to the history of coffee and the way it fostered civil society in Britain, as well as the sugar/slave complexes of the West Indies. Then, we will spend some time learning about the tremendous struggle between China and Britain over opium in the nineteenth century, culminating in the Opium Wars. Finally, we will explore rubber production in colonial Africa in the late nineteenth century through a reading of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. All of these stories involve two groups, usually colonized and colonizer, interacting over the production of a single profitable good, and will serve as models for your final paper. We will conclude the class with some thoughts about space alien invasion, as is only proper.

Final Paper and Presentation: Commodities and Social Relations in the Empire. See handout for more details.

Rules and Expectations

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory, as per the Student Handbook. Students appearing at the door more than two minutes after our meeting starts will be marked tardy. Appearing more than fifteen minutes late will earn you an “absent” marking. **Absences and tardies accumulate, and can result in dire consequences. See your handbook for details.**

No Technology

Nothing with a screen shall the instructor find in the hand of a student, except on Library Days. Clicking is too often the enemy of cogitation, and we’ll have none of it.

Bring paper, pens, and printed readings.

Get a big **folder** for readings and handouts. There will be a lot, and they are all important.

Note Taking

Take notes on lectures and anything your instructor writes on the board during discussions. You will use these notes again in your final paper, and in your in-class writings and quizzes, so these notes are incredibly important to you. **Bring your notes to class every day.**

Make-up work and Extensions

You may consider make-up work and paper extensions to be magical and angry unicorns. You will never see one in your ordinary life, and you should be glad. Most graded activities will happen in the first fifteen minutes of class. If you are late to class and miss a quiz, or end up with only 5 minutes to finish an in-class writing that the students who were on time had 20 minutes to complete, there will be no make-up opportunity.

Family and medical emergencies are the only circumstances in which make-up work or late papers will be allowed.

Late papers will lose a full grade per day (24 hours) until they are turned in.

Turning in Assignments

Turn in papers through Turnitin.

Participation

Your grades have a large participation component. Your instructor expects you to come to class -

- 1- Having **done your homework**
- 2- Ready to **discuss** the readings
- 3- Ready to **participate** in class activities
- 4- Ready to actively **take notes** on lectures
- 5- Ready to execute **in-class writings** (bring paper, pens, ALL CLASS NOTES and readings)

Academic Integrity

All of the work you turn in for this course should be your own. Do NOT plagiarize.

Plagiarism defined:

“You plagiarize when, intentionally or not, you use someone else’s words or ideas but fail to credit that person. . . . You plagiarize even when you do credit the source but use its exact words without using quotation marks or block indentation. . . .You [also] plagiarize when you paraphrase a source so closely that anyone putting your work next to it would see that you could not have written what you did without the source at your elbow.”¹

Claiming as your own the work of others, in whole or in part, will result in **referral for disciplinary action**, which can include **dismissal from IMSA**. See the IMSA Student Handbook for specific details and be sure to refer to the Chicago Style Guide for IMSA Students (<http://staff.imsa.edu/socsci/chicagostyle/>).

¹ Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams in their book *The Craft of Research*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003)