

Empires and World Inequality

(SOCI 364, CRN: 24908)

Spring 2023

T: 7:00–9:00 pm

King Building 325

Professor: Mauricio Betancourt

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Office: King 305-A

Student hours: T: 11:00 am-12:30 & by appointment

I. Description and goals

In this course you will learn why some countries are deemed as “developed,” “advanced,” “industrialized,” or “affluent,” while others are labeled as “underdeveloped,” “backward,” “agrarian,” or “poor,” as well as how of this state of affairs came about. We will examine key theories that examine why some countries are rich and others are not, as well as several historical and current case studies of how raw materials were commodified and traded from the Global South into the Global North. We will study the ecological degradation and human exploitation common to these episodes, as well as possible paths to transcend the asymmetric cross-national power relations characterizing the modern world.

This class grants Cultural Diversity because of its focus on cultures outside the United States. This course is also Writing Advanced (“W-Adv”) given it explicitly and actively addresses the writing process through peer-reviewed and Instructor revision and feedback.

II. Assessment

Assignment / Requirement	Due date and time	Points worth
1. Attendance	Each class (Weeks 1-14)	10
2. Exposition in Class	Anytime during the term (Week 5-14)	15
3. Reading journal, <i>part 1</i>	March 3 by 6:59 pm (Week 5)	15
4. Essay Draft, <i>part I</i>	March 17 by 6:59 pm (Week 7)	15
5. Essay Draft, <i>part 2</i>	April 7 by 6:59 pm (Week 11)	15
6. Reading journal, <i>part 2</i>	May 5 by 6:59 pm (Week 14)	15
7. Final Essay	May 14 by 11:00 am (Week 16)	15
Total:		100

1. Attendance and absences. There will be 13 sessions this semester. You are allowed to miss **one** class throughout the semester without penalty, regardless of the cause. Attending each class is worth 0.84% of your final grade. If you miss more than one class, you cannot make up for those points except if it is due to unforeseen extenuating circumstances (*e.g.* medical, legal, a family emergency, athletic, etc.). If you are allowed to make up for your absence, you must turn in a 300-word statement on a topic pertaining to the

class you missed. You should contact the Instructor so you are informed about the specifics of these statements.

2. Exposition. Either by yourself or in groups of two or three, you will be in charge of leading one discussion in class, starting on Week 5 onwards. You must select a raw material whose history of commodification we will examine to determine the week when you will lead the discussion. You must read the required texts for that class (see below), *but also go beyond them* through the analysis of other materials. The format of your presentation is quite flexible (you are welcome to briefly lecture, prepare specific or open-ended discussion questions, carry out activities in class, show videos or presentations, etc.) but you must make sure that, together, we have a collective, fruitful, and enduring learning experience. This exposition is worth 15% of your final grade.

3. Reading journals. The aim of the reading journals is that you can record your engagement with the course materials (**readings/videos**) in depth on a continuous basis. This will allow you to review the most important concepts and ideas in the materials, to reflect on them, and to develop an enduring record of the evolution of your thoughts related to the course. The journal will be turned in three times during the term.

Journal entries must be *typed* and uploaded to Blackboard as *.doc or .pdf* files in the appropriate column of the Assignments section in the date and time they are due. Entries should be written in a word processor using a *12-font size, 1-inch margins*, and must be *1.5- or double-spaced*. Entries should be *dated*, and should include reflections on *all readings and videos* related to *each week's* material. Students should average *at least two pages* of journal entries *per week*. The format of the journal entries is quite flexible, but they should unambiguously indicate a *deep engagement* with the course materials. Entries might include extracts from the **texts and videos** and *reflections* on them; reflections on class discussions; interrelations with current or past relevant events or lived experiences; notes for students' essays; and so on. Journals are a tool for developing a deep, long-lasting understanding of the ideas treated in class.

The grading of the journals will be based on both the quantity and quality of reflections, with an emphasis on: (1) serious engagement with the materials; (2) imagination and creativity; (3) effort; (4) and the capacity to interrelate the materials to the student's experience and current events. ***Journals that either just copy quotes verbatim from the texts, do not refer to the films, and/or only repeat what the instructor mentions in class or in the notes he uploads, will get poor grades.***

4. Essays drafts and final essay. Writing is an iterative and ever-improvable endeavor. The aim of these essays is twofold: that you work on your advanced writing process through peer-reviewed and Instructor feedback, and that you engage profoundly with one or more topics of the class *through the development of a sound argument*. The first draft (Week 7) will be reviewed by the Instructor, and the second draft (Week 11) by both the Instructor and the class. Students must incorporate all the useful feedback for the final version of the essay. Essays must be *typed* and uploaded to Blackboard as *.doc or .pdf* files in the appropriate column of the Assignments section in the date and time they are due. Essays should be *10-12 pages long, double-spaced*, and written in a word processor using a *12-font size and 1-inch margins*. You should choose an essay topic from a list of prompts that will be provided by the instructor through Blackboard in due course.

The grading of the essays will be based on: the (1) the incorporation of the relevant peer and Instructor feedback; the (2) correct understanding of class materials; (3) the development of a coherent argument (with a thesis, a body, and a conclusion); and (4) the use of imagination and creativity. Any citation style can be used as long as it is consistent throughout the whole work. Reliable outside sources are welcome.

5. Late Submission Policies. No late submissions are allowed in this class except if unforeseen extenuating circumstances (*e.g. medical, legal, family, athletic, etc.*) arise. If you need an extension due to any of the foregoing circumstances, *it is your responsibility to contact the Instructor in advance* to ask for an extension. For any late submission case, there will be a 10% daily deduction in your grade.

Grading Equivalents:

Grade	Points	Notations	Grade	Points	Notations
A+	97.5– 100	(outstanding)	C+	77.5 – 79.9	(satisfactory)
A	93 – 97.4	(excellent)	C	73 – 77.4	(below satisfactory)
A-	90 – 92.9	(very good)	C-	70 – 72.9	(below satisfactory)
B+	87.5 – 89.9	(above good)	D+	67.5 – 69.9	(inferior)
B	83 – 87.4	(good)	D	63 – 67.4	(inferior)
B-	80 – 82.9	(approaching good)	D-	60 – 62.9	(inferior)
			F	59.9 or less	(unsatisfactory)

III. Required Readings.

All required articles, book chapters, and videos listed below will be provided online on Blackboard or through syllabus links.

IV. Course Schedule (subject to changes if necessary)

Date	Topic	Reading to Complete Before Class
Week 1: T 1/31	Introduction: Imperialism and Dependency Theory	<p>[1] Syllabus</p> <p>[2] Betancourt, Mauricio. 2022. “Ecological Imperialism: A Holistic Analysis of the Guano Trade in Nineteenth-Century Peru” (Introduction, pp. 18-31).</p> <p>[3] Galeano, Eduardo. 1970. <i>The Open Veins of Latin America (OVLA)</i>, Introduction (pp. 1-8).</p> <p>[4] Rodney, Walter. 1972. <i>How Europe Underdeveloped Africa</i> (pp. 1-30).</p>
Week 2: T 2/7	Unequal Exchange and Development	<p>[1] Emmanuel, Arghiri. 1972. <i>Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade</i> (pp. 46-52; 60-64; 145-51; 160-64; 172-74; 262-70).</p> <p>[2] Amin, Samir. 1977. <i>Imperialism and unequal development</i>, “The End of a Debate” (pp. 181-238).</p>
Week 3: T 2/14	World-Systems Theory and the Scramble for Africa	<p>[1] Wallerstein, Immanuel. 2004. <i>World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction</i> (Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2, and Glossary) (pp. ix-41, 91-100).</p> <p>[2] Pakenham, Thomas. 1992. <i>The Scramble for Africa</i>. Introduction and Prologue.</p>
Week 4: T 2/21	Ecological Imperialism	<p>[1] Foster, John Bellamy, and Brett Clark. 2004. “Ecological Imperialism: The Curse of Capitalism.” In <i>The Socialist Register</i>, edited by L. Pantich and C. Leys (pp. 230-246).</p> <p>[2] Foster, John Bellamy, and Hannah Holleman. 2014. “The Theory of Unequal Ecological Exchange: A Marx-Odum Dialectic.” <i>The Journal of Peasant Studies</i>, 41(2):199–233.</p>

Week 5: T 2/28	Gold & Silver	<i>OVLA</i> , “Lust for Gold, Lust for Silver” (pp. 11-58).
Week 6: T 3/7	Sugar	Mintz, Sidney W. 1986. <i>Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History</i> . “Production” and “Power” (pp. 19-73, 151-186).
Week 7: T 3/14	Cotton	Beckert, Sven. 2015. <i>Empire of Cotton: A Global History</i> . Introduction and Chapters 1 and 4 (pp. ix-28, 83-97).
Week 8: M 3/20 – F 3/24	SPRING BREAK	NO CLASSES
Week 9: T 3/28	Coffee	[1] Sedgewick, Augustine. 2021. <i>Coffeeland</i> . Prologue, Chapter 1, and Chapter 16 (pp. 1-20; 181-197). [2] Steven Topik and Mario Samper, “The Latin American Coffee Commodity Chain: Brazil and Costa Rica,” in Topik, <i>et al.</i> , 2006. <i>From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000</i> (pp. 119-146).
Week 10: T 4/4	Guano	Betancourt, Mauricio. 2022. “ <i>Ecological Imperialism: A Holistic Analysis of the Guano Trade in Nineteenth-Century Peru</i> ” Chapters 1, 5, and 6 (pp. 35-76, 181-269).
Week 11: T 4/11	Bananas	[1] <i>OVLA</i> , pp. 105-120, 173-204. [2] Podcast (listen before class) “There Will Be Bananas,” Through Line (Jan. 9, 2020), https://www.npr.org/2020/01/07/794302086/there-will-be-bananas (NPR, 56 minutes).
Week 12: T 4/18	Coal & Oil	[1] Malm, Andreas. 2016. <i>Fossil Capital</i> . Chapters 1 and 13. [2] York, Richard. 2017. “Why Petroleum Did Not Save the Whales.” <i>Socius</i> 3:1–13.
Week 13: T 4/25	Water	[1] Roberts, Adrienne. 2008. “Privatizing Social Reproduction: The Primitive Accumulation of Water in an Era of Neoliberalism.” <i>Antipode</i> 40(4):535–60. [2] Barlow, Maude. 2013. <i>Blue future: protecting water for people and the planet forever</i> . Chapter 1. [3] Oscar Oliveira, “Even the Rain,” Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life, “Water is Not for Sale,” and Legislative Assembly of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, “Rights of Nature,” 603-611, 650-652.
Week 14: T 5/2	Lithium & Conclusion	Jerez, Bárbara, Ingrid Garcés, and Robinson Torres. 2021. “Lithium Extractivism and Water Injustices in the Salar de Atacama, Chile: The Colonial Shadow of Green Electromobility.” <i>Political Geography</i> 87:102382.

Content Warning. Some sources might contain subjects that aggravate past or present trauma. Please care for yourself as necessary. It is impossible to forecast all content that might be difficult for students to encounter. Use your best judgement, and contact me as needed.

V. Honor Code/Academic Honesty

Students are expected to follow the Oberlin College Honor Code (<https://www.oberlin.edu/dean-of-students/student-conduct/academic-integrity>). Academic misconduct, plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating are not acceptable in this class. If a student is uncertain about what constitutes academic misconduct, it is her/his obligation to ask for clarification. Students will not receive credit for any assignment violating these expectations. In addition, remember that you must write and sign on each assignment the following official honor code pledge: “I have adhered to the honor code on this assignment.”

VI. Accessibility

Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Office for Disability and Access (<https://www.oberlin.edu/accessibility-services>). If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: (1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Resources office in the Center for Student Success to determine the accommodations you need; and (2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs. I am committed to working with you, so do not hesitate to come talk with me.

VII. Classroom Behavior and Expectations

The COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, and we should be prudent about it. I recommend and encourage the use of masks in class, especially during the first weeks. In addition, if you have even mild symptoms that could be due to COVID, please do not come to class. See COVID updates at: <https://www.oberlin.edu/obiesafe>.

All students will be treated with respect in this course. This course is supposed to spark lively discussions on a diverse set of viewpoints and social and environmental conditions. Everyone in the course is expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class, including in our email and Blackboard interaction. If a hurtful or inappropriate comment is made, the Instructor will handle it according to relevant course and College policy. In addition, students are expected to be on time for class. Students are expected to come to class prepared (*i.e.* having read the assignment(s) and ready to engage in class discussion). Eating will not be allowed to eat in class (drinking plain water is acceptable). Students will not be allowed to look at their cell phones while in class, unless if due to a personal emergency or requested by the Instructor for class purposes. The Instructor strongly encourages the use of pen and paper, as opposed to electronic devices, to take notes while in class, although the use of electronic devices for this purpose is not forbidden.