

# Environment and Global Capitalism in Latin America

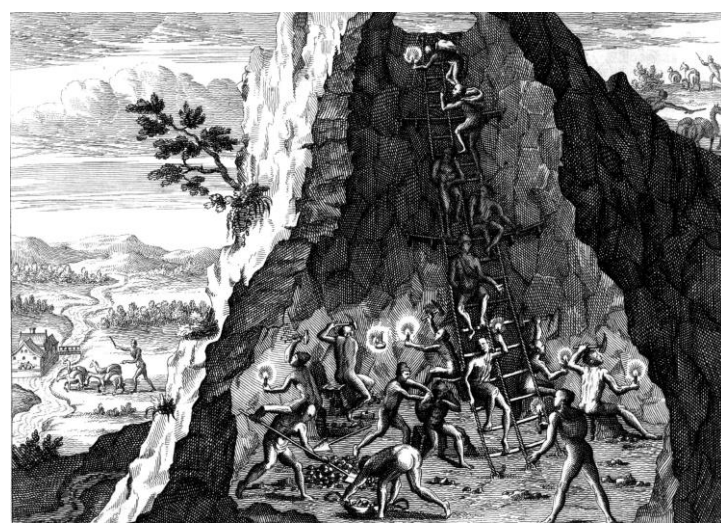
HIST 222 / LAT AM 222 / ENVIRON 223

Duke University, Spring 2021

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Silver Mine in Potosí, engraving by Theodore de Bry, 1590



Serra Pelada Gold Mine in Brazil, photograph by Sebastião Salgado, 1986

## Class meetings

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:00PM - 1:15PM

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## Course description

This course's main objective is to understand the intricate links between the earliest processes of globalization, colonization and capitalism from the viewpoint of humans, animals and territories. Today, the global economy extracts 92 billion tons of natural resources every year, according to the International Resource Panel. The use of natural resources has more than tripled since 1970. This global extractive economy has deep and unsustainable environmental consequences and is unequally distributed around the world: the places from which resources are being tapped are not necessarily the same where they are being consumed. This course combines a global and environmental history perspective in order to shed light on the birth of a global extractive economy since the early-modern times. It focuses primarily on the ways in which the discovery and

subsequent colonization of the Americas by European powers meant the massive circulation of organisms (from germs to human beings) and resources (organic and mineral) from one continent to the others. In tracing these circulations, the course aims to understand what happens when massive amounts of natural resources are relocated from one place to another. What are the environmental and social consequences of these displacements both in the site of extraction and in the various locations to which the resources make their way? How are Latin America's history, landscapes and peoples shaped by the relation between environment and global capitalism since the early-modern times?

This course is divided in two sections. The first part will be devoted to the circulation of organisms and matter across the world as new territories were colonized and commercial networks extended in the early-modern times. We will start with the smallest organisms – microbes – and their role in the earliest contacts between Eurasia and the American continent. We will then examine what happens when new animals are introduced into the American continent. We will then proceed to study the massive forced deportation of African people to the Americas as slaves. Subsequently, we will follow two global commodities (sugar and silver) from their production or extraction to their consumption or trade. We will turn to the historical, philosophical, and economical debates of the eighteenth century surrounding these topics. The Atlantic revolutions, with an emphasis on Caribbean and Latin American revolutions, will be reappraised from the point of view of the extraction and commerce of global commodities. The second part of this course will explore state formation in Latin America during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from a viewpoint of territorialization and integration into the world circuits of commodities and the new international order. Finally, we will end the semester, with case studies around environmental justice and globalization in Latin America. Throughout the semester, we will read the work of preeminent historians, but also geographers, anthropologists and political scientists. Class conversations will focus not only on how each reading contributes to our understanding, but also on how to evaluate an author's argument. We will also use primary sources – letters, archival documents, engravings, photographs – to help us understand how to write an environmental history of Latin America in a global context.

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## Objectives

The principal objective for this course is to develop an ability to analyze, explain, and historically contextualize primary sources, as well as to learn to engage critically with diverging historiographical perspectives. Students will acquire or consolidate skills in pursuing independent research by writing an essay of significant length subject to peer-review and feedback from the instructor throughout the process of research and writing. These skills include shaping a meaningful and realistic research project by identifying an environmental problem in a specific place; building, expanding, and refining a bibliography that permits to address such problem in a historical way; finding pertinent primary sources and analyzing them; convincingly presenting a solid argument; and using cartographical language to synthesize the argument.

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## Requirements

### Attendance

Classes will meet via Zoom unless otherwise noted. Students need to register for the Zoom meeting. Details can be found on the Sakai site.

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. Zoom room will be open 10 minutes before each class, students can come in and chat with each other if they wish. We will begin our classes on time. Please do not come late as it disrupts the class.

Absences from class and missed work are accommodated (excused) in five circumstances: 1) significant illness, 2) personal instances of distress or emergency, 3) religious observance, and 4) varsity athletic participation and 5) required court or legal appearances. Detailed information about these policies and notification procedures can be found here: <https://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/class-attendance-and-missed-work>

### Class organization

There will be two kinds of sessions: discussion of the readings and sources and workshop for the research and writing projects.

**Discussions sessions** will be held via Zoom. For the discussion sessions, students will read in advance the texts and take notes on them. Students should prepare at least one question based on the readings before class.

All the texts are available in Sakai Ressources folders. Students should understand who is the author and when was the text written and identify the question of the text, the documentation it relies on, and the way the author uses the documentation. This will be the basis for class discussion. Class participation entails having a copy of the readings at hand, preparing them attentively, and contributing frequently, informedly, and respectfully to in-class discussion. Students can also send comments via email or through the comments section on the Wordpress if they don't have time to talk during class or if they feel more comfortable doing so.

**Workshop sessions** will happen either in full class or in groups. Details will be given for each session.

### Assignments

#### Article-length text

The principal assignment for this class will be to produce collectively a WordPress site that offers in-depth analyses of particular places in Latin America that serve as current local observatories of how the human and geographical environment have been historically shaped by wider global dynamics. The projects will examine a place in Latin America in which one can see these dynamics at play, such as mining, intensive agricultural production, modifications of ecosystems, etc. Each project will draw on both specific materials pertaining to the project, and on the materials covered in class. Students will form teams around broader topics and will work together and individually on a semester-long research and writing assignment. Throughout the semester, students will have assignments that break down the project into successive stages and revisions and collective feedback into the research and writing processes.

### **The calendar is as follows:**

- Thursday, February 4: Choose a potential research project and upload to Sakai, a description of the place and environmental problem you plan on studying (one or two paragraphs long) and a research question
- Thursday, February 18: Commented research bibliography
- Thursday, February 25: Articulate and narrow down a research question
- Thursday, March 25: **Full-text due**
- Thursday, April 1: Synthetic map and illustrations
- Thursday, April 8: **Co-authored introduction due**
- Thursday, April 15: Final draft to be posted to the Wordpress site

Note: each student will have a single Box document with every stage of the writing project dated. We will give feedback on the same document.

### **Blog posts**

In addition to the article-length assignment, students will be in charge once during the semester to write a critical summary of the readings of 500-1500 words. They will post this on the Wordpress site in the “Readings” section. The comments section will be open and students should at least once during the semester comment on somebody’s else post.

Students can sign up here for the sessions.

### **Duke Reader Project**

This class participates in the [Duke Reader Project](#) that pairs students in participating courses with a Duke alumnus/alumna or employee who has professional expertise and interest in their writing project. Duke students have the opportunity to receive feedback on a class writing project from someone outside the classroom setting who has professional experience relevant to their project. This feedback helps students learn to anticipate the needs and expectations of readers, and to revise their writing to make it more effective for the intended audience.

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## **Grades**

### **Grade components**

#### **Class participation: 30%**

- General attendance and engagement in the course throughout the semester
- Class presentations of the writing project
- Good team work
- Reading blog post

#### **Writing project: 70%**

- Research bibliography
- Engagement with the readings
- Individual text
- Map
- Final co-authored piece