

History 480: Famines and the Making of the Modern World

Instructor

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Place and Time:

345 Education Building
Tu & Th 4:00–5:15
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Library webpage

<http://libguides.bgsu.edu/content.php?pid=30098>

1. Class Overview

This research seminar is set up to think about famines in the modern world and how they transform our understanding of history. Two examples help to start thinking on the issues involved in the topic:

India, late nineteenth century. Railroads, cotton plantations and wheat farming have transformed the Indian economy. From being a major global manufacturing center, India has become a major raw material exporter to Britain, its imperial master. Land ownership and land use have been redefined, traditional access to communal lands, grazing areas, and common woods are all gone. Inequality has grown to unknown levels. Two El Niño events, in 1876-7 and 1899-1900, produce immense droughts in some areas, while other regions keep exporting grain as usual. Ten million people die without significant intervention of colonial authorities devoted to the principles of free market economics. India's population suffered from famines through 1947, when newly independent Indian state prioritized storing and distributing food surpluses.

China, 1959-60. Mao Zedong set China into a major program of economic transformation called the Great Leap Forward. Modeled after Stalin's five-year plans, policies and commandments were set up to shift resources from the countryside to the urban, industrial centers. These policies coincided with (or provoked?) major food shortages in rural areas that caused the largest recorded famine in human history. The ultimate result of the Great Leap Forward was not industrialization, but increasing control by Mao Zedong and the Party all over China. Survivors from famine-stricken districts are living testaments to famine as they struggle with their political, economic and social consequences even in the present day.

Many questions arise from those examples (and the many other famine occurrences in world history) that will be discussed in this course. The questions can be arranged in three sets. First, we can ask if famines were instrumental in the making of the modern world. As societies have become more intensely devoted to manufacturing and services, there is an increasing need to supply the non-rural sectors of the population with food. Famines have occurred in contexts in which parts of the population are relatively well supplied while others starve. Has industrialization in some regions of the world triggered food shortages in other parts of the world? Has colonialism, totalitarianism and even economic dependency exposed more people to the risk of famine? And conversely, is the present-day highly unequal world the result (at least to

some extent) of previous massive famines that condemned tens of millions of people to limited opportunities, disease and poverty? Why have states and global organizations been so limited in their ability to stop famines in the twentieth century?

As we look closer at how the famines unfolded, a second set of questions regarding human agency acquires more relevance. Are famines the result of intentional policies on part of colonial or central authorities? More generally, to what degree are humans responsible for famines? Some scholars strongly believe this is the case and propose that famines are comparable to holocausts—a purposeful human slaughter meant to eliminate groups of people that do not conform to the ideals of the ruling class. Others, however, keep a more cautious stance emphasizing extraordinary climatic events as responsible for harvest losses and ultimately the tragic loss of human life.

The tragic legacy of the famine experience is the third set of questions that we will explore. How did survivors cope with the famine experience? Famine is a trauma that leaves traces from memory and representations to impaired body functions. How did (and does) the legacy of famine pass from generation to generation? How did (and does) memory of famine shape political action? How have famine prevention programs (or lack thereof) helped legitimize (or not) colonial and postcolonial regimes.

The course's ultimate goal is to conduct advanced research and write a polished paper on an issue related to famines in the modern world. Researching and writing is a tedious and complex process that requires acquiring certain abilities and skills. The structure of the seminar is intended to facilitate this learning process. Its starting point is a provocative book by historian Mike Davis: *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Construction of the Third World*. Davis sets out to prove that colonial powers had a strong responsibility in the tragic famines that took the lives of tens of million of people in the colonial and dependent world in the late nineteenth century. The close reading of Mike Davis' monograph provides a model to address the three sets of questions, which you can critically apply as you write the paper. Other readings will broaden the scope to incorporate other famines and approaches that do not necessarily fit in Davis' interpretation.

The intense reading load of the first weeks will provide you with a wide range of cases to provide examples of scholarship and cases you can use in conducting your research and writing your paper. At the sixth week you will present a literary review of the readings, a paper proposal, and a preliminary bibliography and document collections you intend to use. The rest of the term will be mostly dedicated to doing the research and writing the paper. You will turn in two draft versions of your paper; by addressing the suggestions, comments and criticism of your peers and instructor your paper will improve throughout the term. Similarly you will read and comment your classmates' papers. The last two weeks of classes are reserved for student presentations. The final assignment of the paper is the final version of your paper, due in the exam week.

The specific topic and thesis of your paper is for you to decide. That requires exploring interpretations in the historiography, asking questions that interest you and looking for primary and secondary sources to build your thesis on. You can pick any famine event (or a series of them) that you perceive as the most attractive and feasible to do, in any time period after 1750 to the present day. The following are a few examples of topics that can give you some orientation of the type of papers that are expected in the class: "Winners and losers of the Great Irish Famine of 1845-9;" "American and British views on famine in late Victorian India;" "Missionaries and famine relief efforts in China;" "Colonial and postcolonial discourses on famine in Africa;"

"Famine relief initiatives of international charity organizations in late twentieth-century Africa." The library holds collections with primary sources relevant for your research — government reports, diplomatic correspondence, major US and British newspapers in microfilm, literary works, not to mention electronic resources such as JSTOR. Your possibilities multiply if you use BGSU's library partners through the Ohiolink or Interlibrary Loan programs. Because the retrieval of these materials takes time to process, plan your activities with anticipation.

Finally, History 480 is a *seminar*—a setting in which all the members participate in an equal standing and collectively contribute to the understanding of the subject. Participants criticize others' work (be it by professional historians or the class participants) and pose new questions that further the collective knowledge of the history of famines. The key to a good seminar is active participation—that is, your constant questioning, commenting, and reflection on the readings and topics at hand.

2. Learning Outcomes

By the end of the class, students will be able to:

- a. Understand the major historical interpretations of the origins of famines and their influence in the making of today's world system.
- b. Formulate a relevant historical question on the topic of "famines in modern world history" and design an original thesis to address the question.
- c. Conduct independent research using both primary and secondary sources accessible in a variety of online and offline repositories.
- d. Write a polished, history paper based on original research that follows formal academic conventions (citations, writing style).
- e. Orally present the conclusions, methodology, and relevance of their research to an audience only vaguely familiarized with the specific topic of study.

3. Description of Assignments

3.1. Paper

The different stages of the paper writing add up to 70% of the grade in this class. Students are to be evaluated on the originality of the thesis, its relevance and historiographic importance, evaluation of evidence, depth of research, quality of expression, and progress through the revisions. In order to merit a passing grade, the paper:

- a. Begins with an effective introduction that states a clear thesis
- b. Uses Chicago citation style (rather than MLA)
- c. Builds and defends an argument (rather than simply narrating a story)
- d. Supports the argument with primary sources (rather than simply using primary sources as illustrative material)
- e. Contextualizes the research with relevant secondary sources
- f. Discusses the interpretations found in secondary sources
- g. Reaches thoughtful conclusions that explain the historical significance and contemporary relevance of the research

- h. Provides an annotated bibliography
- i. Has been revised at least once (but preferably several times) in consultation with the instructor and peer evaluators
- j. Uses library research (rather than just assigned course materials or web sources)
- k. Is expressed in academic style, with no contractions (*it's*), informal language (*that was a heck of a famine*), or colloquialisms (*as you can see*)
- l. Has at least fifteen pages in Times 12pt, double-spaced and one-inch margins
- m. Uses at least ten secondary sources (including scholarly books and academic journal articles); an equivalent use of varied primary sources (newspaper articles, government and non-government reports, etc) is also expected

The History Department has a review process to make sure that the final paper meets these minimum expectations. Failure to do so will automatically imply a failing grade.

3.2. Drafts

- a. One of the assessment criteria is that the paper improves by incorporating the peers' and instructor's suggestions on the drafts.
- b. The first draft should be at least five pages long and contain the following sections: an **introduction** that presents the topic and spells out the research question/s and their relevance; the **historiography** on the subject (including one or two paragraphs on Davis are mandatory, and references to other readings in the syllabus); the **historical context** (e.g. what was going on in Ukraine in the 1930s and how that affects your interpretations); a section based on the **analysis of a primary source**.
- c. The second draft should be at least ten pages long (longer draft is better), and should address the following: modifications of previous sections based on the **instructor's feedback**; sections containing **substantial analysis of primary and secondary sources**; a preliminary **annotated bibliography** of some of the items used in the paper.

3.3. Paper proposal

- a. The proposal (also known as “prospectus”) signals the intention to conduct a research on a selected topic using sources that have been located and are available to consult in the timeframe of the project.
- b. The proposal is about three to five pages long, contains a **bibliography** (although at this point it is understandable that you have not read most of the items) and a list of **primary sources**. The proposal is not just a statement of a topic and sources. It presents the research question, and their relevance to the understanding of the role of famines in shaping the modern world is essential to the proposal. Excerpts and examples of primary sources are part of a successful proposal as they attest to the availability of the material and that you can build the skills to analyze it. The bibliography should include not only books or articles on your specific topic, but more general readings on famine, and the country and period of your choice. (For example: if you are writing on famine in Ethiopia in the 1960s, you will need, for instance, an authoritative history of the country, or at least of the continent that deals extensively with the conditions in the cold war era and the overthrow of the Ethiopian emperor.)

3.4. Presentation

- a. Students will give a presentation before the class and instructor.
- b. The presentation will have a duration of 15 minutes, and cannot be read.
- c. The student will distribute an abstract of the paper beforehand.
- d. Use of powerpoint is mandatory. Handouts are optional. Please coordinate with the instructor beforehand.

3.5. Participation

- a. Being a seminar, the expectation is that students attend and actively engage in an intellectual discussion of the topics of the day
- b. In each class with assigned readings, we will discuss (for each piece): the author’s questions and thesis, the materials ("sources") they use, their major concepts and approach, the structure of the piece, the relevance of their conclusions to the understanding of famine, and to your research interests. You will also select one excerpt that we may discuss in class. There are also discussion questions to focus on that the professor will circulate beforehand. Students may be called on individually during class to answer a question or contribute with their opinion.

3.6. Reading journal

Every class, or by the end of the week at the latest, students will submit a brief journal of their readings that analyzes in detail one or more excerpts. The student will also discuss how the reading has shaped his/her research questions and approach. There is no required length, some days you may turn in a longer journal (say two pages), some days you may turn in a brief paragraph. It is mandatory to provide correct citation of the material used in the journal.

4. Assessment

Weights		Scale	
Paper Writing		A	90-99
- Proposal	10%	B	80-89
- First Draft	10%	C	70-79
- Second Draft	20%	D	60-69
- Final Version	30%	F	≤59
Peer review	5%		
Participation and reading reports	15%		
Presentation	10%		

All submitted assignments should comply with the academic honesty policy. Infractions will be reported to the Dean.

5. Weekly Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Check the website for updates. The first item in the Course Information area contains the most updated schedule. By week six your suggested readings will be incorporated in the syllabus.

All references are given in Chicago Footnotes style. With the exception of Davis, you can find the readings by: a) looking in e-reserve or blackboard (Course Documents), b) if it's not there, then it's available online through JSTOR or other online resource hosted in the Jerome library. Look for the journal or book title in the catalog, then choose the online resource that contains the year of the publication.

	Day	Topic and reading	Assignments
	1: Tue 1/13	Introduction	
	Thu 1/15	Approaches to study famine in history David Arnold, <i>Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change</i> (Blackwell Publishers, 1988), 29-46. Alex de Waal, <i>Famine that Kills. Darfur, Sudan</i> , revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9-32.	Reading journal
	2: Tue 1/20	Colonialism and famines Mike Davis, <i>Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World</i> (London: Verso, 2001), 1-210	Reading journal
	Thu 1/22	Colonialism and famines Davis, 1-210 Working with sources (history writing workshop): Fragments from Mary Lynn Rampolla, <i>A Pocket Guide to Writing in History</i> , 5th ed. (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006).	Reading journal
	3: Tue 1/27	Colonialism and famines Davis, 1-210	Reading journal
	Thu 1/29	Victims of famine: Megan Vaughan, "Famine Analysis and Family Relations: 1949 in Nyasaland," <i>Past and Present</i> 108 (Aug. 1985): 177-205.	Reading journal
	4: Tue 2/3	Famine and the international community Edward Kissi, "The Politics of Famine in U.S. Relations With Ethiopia, 1950-1970," <i>International Journal of African Historical Studies</i> 33, no. 1 (2000): 113-131. Alex De Waal, <i>Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa</i> (Indiana University Press, 1998): 159-178.	Reading journal

	Day	Topic and reading	Assignments
	Thu 2/5	Workshop on use of primary and secondary sources with Carol Singer, at Pallister Conference Room (BGSU Jerome Library)	Collect your thoughts about topics and research questions
	5: Tue 2/10	Collectivization and famines Mark Tauger, "The 1932 Harvest and the Famine of 1933," <i>Slavic Review</i> 50, no. 1 (1991): 70-89; and follow-up discussion with Conquest. Workshop: Research ideas.	1) Reading journal 2) Preliminary topic and research questions
	Thu 2/12	Workshop on use of primary and secondary sources with Carol Singer, at the Electronics Reading Room (BGSU library)	
	6: Tue 2/17	The role of climate: Davis, 211-276. Workshop: Research ideas.	Reading journal
	Thu 2/19	Workshop: The challenge of a long research paper, a panel with former History 480 students (to be confirmed)	Paper proposal with a bibliography and list of primary sources
	7: Tue 2/24	Colonialism, natural disasters, and the origins of the third world: Davis, 277-398	Reading journal
	Thu 2/26	Davis, 277-398	Reading journal
	8: Tue 3/3	No class. Professor is available in his office for consultation.	
	Thu 3/5	Workshop: The writing process	1) First draft 2) Provide one primary source and one secondary source that you want to discuss in class. Include: paper or electronic copy, an abstract, and the discussion prompt.
Spring break			
	9: Tue 3/17	Internal colonialism Thomas P. Bernstein, "Stalinism, Famine, and Chinese Peasants: Grain Procurements During the Great Leap Forward," <i>Theory and Society</i> 13, no. 3 (May 1984): 339-77.	Reading journal

	Day	Topic and reading	Assignments
	Thu 3/19	Student-selected readings and sources	Reading journal
	10:Tu e 3/24	Student-selected readings and sources	Reading journal
	Thu 3/26	Student-selected readings and sources	Reading journal
	11:Tu e 3/31	Student-selected readings and sources	Reading journal
	Thu 4/2	No class. (Latin American Studies conference.)	Progress report
	12:Tu e 4/7	Student-selected readings and sources	Reading journal
	Thu 4/9	Workshop: How to prepare effective presentations	Second draft, including a preliminary annotated bibliography
	13:Tu e 4/14	Workshop: discuss papers in pairs	Peer review
	Thu 4/16	Workshop: The annotated bibliography	
	14:Tu e 4/21		Presentations
	Thu 4/23		Presentations
	15:Tu e 4/28		Presentations
	Thu 4/30		Presentations
	Tue, 5/5	Final paper due. In my office by 3pm, or electronically by 5pm (expect confirmation)	