FALL 2003

AGRARIAN SOCIETIES
CULTURE, POWER, HISTORY, AND DEVELOPMENT

This seminar presents a multidisciplinary perspective on the modern transformation of the countryside of the world. The rise of a capitalist mode of production as the engine of a world economy, the emergence of a contentious international polity of nation-states, and the propagation of rationalizing religions and standardizing education are three distinct yet intersecting processes in the modern transformation of the world since the 1500s. These processes have not been inevitable, nor irreversible, nor complete. However, they have been compelling, in so far as they have come to frame both our acceptance of and resistance to the modern order in which we find ourselves.

"Peasant studies" is a rubric for the loosely bounded, interdisciplinary exploration of the initial modernization of the European countryside and the subsequent engagement and ongoing incorporation of the countryside of Asia, Africa, and the Americas into this modern order. At its most precocious, it tries to comprehend the intrusive thrusts of nation-state formation, capitalist production, and the rationalization of belief into the most distant agrarian regions of the world. At its most instructive, it insists that people everywhere have confronted those forces with their particular histories and distinctive, local configurations of environment, society, and culture. Everywhere, the encounters of old and new ways of viewing the world and organizing activities have been fitful and frightful, always metamorphic, but never uniform. Animating peasant studies has been the concern to demonstrate the varied ways in which peasants have shared in the making of the modern world that has in turn transformed their lives.

We intend this to be an introductory seminar. That is, we assume you may be ignorant of much of the basic literature. We also assume that you work hard and learn fast. Although the varying backgrounds of students and faculty require us to be somewhat eclectic, we hope that the seminar will prove foundational in an interdisciplinary sense for subsequent work on agrarian issues in any discipline. We encourage you, in your writing and discussion, to make vigorous efforts to be understood across disciplinary boundaries.

Seminar meetings combine lectures and discussions. We expect regular attendance; please notify us in advance if you are unable to come to a session. We regard participation in discussions to be a gauge of students' completion and comprehension of the assigned readings. We will evaluate your performance in the seminar on the basis of this participation and on the quality and timeliness of the writing assignments.

Beginning in the third week, designated students will be asked to take formal responsibility for organizing the discussion of the readings. Such responsibility will be shared as equitably as possible. As
far as writing assignments are concerned, there are two. First, students are required to submit short (three-page) essays on **THREE** weekly themes/readings of their choice. They may want to link these essays to themes for which they have some responsibility in organizing the discussion. A second paper is due at the end of the course. This may be either a research paper on a topic related to the course concerns or a theoretical discussion or synthesis of some of the analytical readings we have covered. In either case, it should be negotiated with one of the instructors.

All assigned readings for the seminar are on reserve at the Social Science or Cross Campus Libraries. Copies of all assigned books are available for purchase at Book Haven. In addition, we have placed a collection of all assigned articles on file at the office of the Program on Agrarian Studies Office (room 201 at 89 Trumbull Street). Students may choose to have a copy of this file made for their purchase and use.
September 8  Week 1  James Scott
No Reading

September 15  Week 2  Michael Dove

**Reading Agrarian Ethnography**

*The Politics of Describing the Disreputable*

Readings:

**Slavery, Serfdom, Bondage, and their Rebellions**

September 22  Week 3  Paul Freedman

**European Peasants and Elites in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period: Slaves, Serfs, and Free(d)men**

Readings:

September 29  Week 4  Paul Freedman, Robert Harms, James Scott

**Rebellion, Resistance, Revolution**

Readings:
October 6  Week 5  Paul Freedman, Robert Harms

**Agrarian Change and the Longue Durée**


AND


October 13  Week 6  Michael Dove, Robert Harms, James Scott

**Colonialism, Labor, Cash-Cropping, and Resistance**


**Ecology Resources, Climate, and Landscape**

October 20  Week 7  Robert Harms, James Scott

**Resources, Community, and Migration**


October 27  Week 8  Robert Harms, Michael Dove

**Climate and Landscape: Punctuated Longue Durée**

**Readings:** Mike Davis. 2001. *Late Victorian Holocaupts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*. Verso Press. Selected chapters to be announced. (Book Haven)
November 3  Week 9  James Scott

**Plants, Food, Taste, Diet, Health**


November 10  Week 10  Michael Dove

**Depicting the Rural Poor in the American South**


November 17  Week 11  James Scott

**Industrial Agriculture and Local Knowledge**


Development Discourse