

HI3T6-30 Narcos: A Global History of the Drug Trade

26/27

Department

History

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Benjamin Smith

Credit value

30

Module duration

22 weeks

Assessment

Multiple

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Narcotics have made the modern world. They have offered insight, relieved pain and ruined lives. Their sheer monetary worth have driven booms, shaped economies, expanded empires, and kept nations on their feet. At the same time, anti-drugs policies have molded modern politics, boosting the expansion of repressive state apparatuses from police forces and border patrols to asylums and prisons.

Drugs, of course, are as old as humanity itself. So is smuggling. As one writer wryly commented, "in the biblical account of our origins, our plight began with the illegal traffic of apples". This course focuses on the emergence of the trade in the four most important modern drugs - opium and their derivatives, cocaine, marijuana and amphetamines. The course starts with the role of opium in the creation of the British Empire before moving through the creation of nineteenth century miracle drugs, the onset of prohibition, and the emergence of modern drug cartels.

Module aims

1. To introduce students to the centrality of narcotics to the creation of modern medicine, economies, and politics.

2. To introduce students to the multiple ways in which narcotics can be studied.
3. To offer students an insight into the ebbs and flows of transnational capitalism over the past two centuries.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1) Introduction: What are drugs? What do they do? What role have they played in human development? Why have states sought so strongly to regulate to drug prohibition?

PART I: Opium and Empire

Week 2) The British Cartel: Opium and the creation of the British Empire

Week 3) The First Drug Wars: The Chinese-British Opium Wars

Week 4) Chinese Drug Culture

PART II: From Habit to Addiction

Week 5) Miracle Medicines

Week 6) Theories of Addiction

Week 7) Theories of Addiction at the Margins

PART III: The Beginnings of the International Prohibition Regime

Week 8) Global Drug Prohibition

Week 9) U.S. and European drug controls

Week 10) Killer Highs: Drugs and World War II

Week 11) Japan, meth and the world's first mass incarceration

PART IV: The Modern Drug Trade

Week 12) The Counterculture and Deviant Capitalism

Week 13) Drugs, Guerrillas and the Cold War

Week 14) Cartels and the Killing Fields of Colombia

Week 15) Cartels and the Killing Fields of Mexico

Week 16) U.S. Mass Incarceration

Week 17) Death Penalty Prohibition in Modern Asia

Week 18) The Dilemmas of Legalization

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Subject knowledge: Students should come away with a clear knowledge of the role of narcotics in the creation of the modern world.
- Subject knowledge: Students should get a broader understanding of the kind of interdisciplinary history which interacts with history of medicine, international relations, criminology and economics.
- Key Skills: Students should come away with better written and oral communication skills.
- Cognitive Skills: Students should improve their critical analysis, and their ability to parse complex contemporary issues.
- Subject knowledge: Students should gain a greater understanding of the relationship between international norms and national cultures.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

Interdisciplinary

Students will be asked to combine readings of history with those of political science, anthropology, international relations and criminology.

International

The course is global in nature and touches on historiographies of Asia, North and South America and Europe. At a later date, I also hope to introduce a week on Africa.

Subject specific skills

Knowledge of the history and historiography of the narcotics trade. Understanding of the historical context of certain contentious contemporary issues including narcotics, mass incarceration, drug legalization, addiction and harm reduction.

Transferable skills

Critical analytical skills Essay writing Interpersonal and communication skills

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	20 sessions of 2 hours (13%)
Private study	260 hours (87%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

History modules require students to undertake extensive independent research and reading to prepare for seminars and assessments. As a rough guide, students will be expected to read and prepare to comment on three substantial texts (articles or book chapters) for each seminar taking approximately 3 hours. Each assessment requires independent research, reading around 6-10 texts and writing and presenting the outcomes of this preparation in an essay, review, presentation or other related task.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A1

Assessment component	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
1500 word essay	10%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
3000 word essay	40%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Legalization and Harm Reduction Policy Brief	30%		Yes (extension)
Policy brief on regional or national experiment with legalization or harm reduction policies.			

Reassessment component is the same

Assessment component

Museum Exhibition Presentation and short museum guide	20%		Yes (extension)
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Reassessment component is the same

Assessment group S

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
1500 word essay	10%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
3000 word essay	40%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
Legalization and Harm Reduction Policy Brief	30%		Yes (extension)

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
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Reassessment component is the same

Assessment component

Seminar Contribution	20%	No
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Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History
- UENA-VQ33 Undergraduate English and History (with Intercalated year)
 - Year 4 of VQ33 English and History (with Intercalated year)
 - Year 4 of VQ33 English and History (with Intercalated year)
- Year 4 of UFRA-R1VA Undergraduate French and History
- Year 4 of UGEA-R2V1 Undergraduate German and History
- ULNA-R4V1 Undergraduate Hispanic Studies and History
 - Year 4 of R4V1 Hispanic Studies and History
 - Year 4 of R4V1 Hispanic Studies and History
- UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
 - Year 3 of V100 History
 - Year 3 of V100 History
- UPDA-Y306 Undergraduate History (Part-Time)
 - Year 3 of Y306 History (Part Time)
 - Year 3 of Y306 History (Part Time)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V102 Undergraduate History (Renaissance and Modern History Stream)
- Year 4 of UHIA-V103 Undergraduate History (Renaissance and Modern History Stream) (with Year Abroad)
- Year 4 of UHIA-V101 Undergraduate History (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UIPA-V1L8 Undergraduate History and Global Sustainable Development
- Year 4 of UITA-R3V2 Undergraduate History and Italian

- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V8 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
- UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
 - Year 3 of VM11 History and Politics
 - Year 3 of VM11 History and Politics
 - Year 3 of VM11 History and Politics
- Year 4 of UHIA-VM14 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 4 of UHIA-VM12 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VM13 Undergraduate History and Politics (with a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL16 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL14 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)
- UVCA-LA99 Undergraduate Liberal Arts
 - Year 3 of LA99 Liberal Arts
 - Year 3 of LA92 Liberal Arts with Classics
 - Year 3 of LA73 Liberal Arts with Design Studies
 - Year 3 of LA83 Liberal Arts with Economics
 - Year 3 of LA82 Liberal Arts with Education
 - Year 3 of LA95 Liberal Arts with English
 - Year 3 of LA81 Liberal Arts with Film and Television Studies
 - Year 3 of LA80 Liberal Arts with Global Sustainable Development
 - Year 3 of LA93 Liberal Arts with Global Sustainable Development
 - Year 3 of LA97 Liberal Arts with History
 - Year 3 of LA71 Liberal Arts with Law
 - Year 3 of LA91 Liberal Arts with Life Sciences
 - Year 3 of LA75 Liberal Arts with Modern Languages and Cultures
 - Year 3 of LA96 Liberal Arts with Philosophy
 - Year 3 of LA94 Liberal Arts with Theatre and Performance Studies