HI525: Development in Historical Perspective

Course Description

For at least a century, the category of “development” has represented an important, contested set of practices and beliefs about how certain countries and communities might improve their conditions, or have their conditions improved. The project of development worldwide has had successes and failures, and has engendered a tremendous amount of controversy, even as its processes and assumptions have helped structure relationships between the West and the Global South. Decades ago, development was seen as an unquestionable good, but by the 1980s, scholars and practitioners were advancing serious critiques of its goals and assumptions. More recently, a new wave of practitioners has tried to reaffirm importance of development, taking into account the most trenchant critiques of the category.

This course considers the category of “development” in historical context, and considers cases from around the world. We will first consider some theories for why certain countries enjoyed more favorable outcomes than others, and explore certain nineteenth- and early twentieth-century antecedents for the project of development, primarily but not exclusively located in the imperial world. We will examine practices of development in the decolonizing countries of Asia and Africa, and new international ideas and institutions that influenced the course of development in the wake of empire. After thinking through questions of “modernization” and the Cold War, we turn our attention to some important arguments and movements of the last two decades that have questioned, and then reaffirmed, the enterprise of development as a whole.

Our goal in this course will not be to cast a verdict on the project of development as a whole, but to understand how development emerged as an important category of relationships and practices, and to make sense of the ways in which scholars and
practitioners have affirmed, challenged, and rethought this category. In a final paper, you will be asked to select a development project and analyze it historically, drawing upon some of the perspectives encountered in our shared readings.

**Course Materials**

The following books are on reserve in the library; you will likely find it useful to have your own copies of the books read in class. (These books may be acquired online or at a local bookstore, but have not been pre-ordered.) The remainder of the articles and other selections read in the class will be placed on Blackboard Learn. Each week’s readings are to be read in their entirety before coming to class.


**Assignments and Evaluation**

As a research seminar, the weekly readings for this course will often be challenging: the volume to be read is significant and the perspectives are sometimes complex. The material will be drawn primarily from history, but we will draw in important readings from political science, economics, and anthropology. The readings each week have been selected so that they are in conversation with one another; I will mention a suggested order of reading or focus the week prior to each assignment. Completing all the reading before class will be important for the sake of our shared conversations and debates and is an essential requisite of the course and your grade in it.

One student will be responsible for leading discussion each week; we will put together a schedule of class discussions on the first day of the semester. Students are encouraged,
though not required, to consult with the instructor prior to the class to discuss major points of the reading and strategies for discussion leading. I will take a back seat during our in-class discussions; it is therefore imperative that discussion leaders come prepared to lead approximately two hours of directed conversation.

Our readings will help us prepare for a final research paper on a “development project,” broadly defined, anywhere in the world from the eighteenth century onwards. This paper will be fifteen to twenty pages for undergraduate seminar participants and thirty-five to forty for graduate students; graduate students will be encouraged to submit final papers to peer-reviewed journals for publication. At the beginning of our fifth session together (February 23, 2016), you will turn in a one-page proposal for your final paper, as well as a one-page analysis of a primary source that you will use for the same. At the beginning of our seventh session together (March 15, 2016), you will submit a prospectus and provisional bibliography for this paper. You will identify the key primary sources available on campus or via electronic resources that will inform your project, as well as some of the important existing literature on the subject. In our final class session, you will be expected to deliver a fifteen-minute presentation on the paper and your findings. The final paper is due by 5:00 PM on April 20, 2016, and will assessed a full letter grade penalty for each day it is late.

Class attendance is mandatory; you are expected to arrive on time and remain for the entire class period. There will be no unexcused absences permitted, and if you are unable to attend a class session owing to illness or emergency, you must contact the instructor in advance. Unexcused absences will result in a third of a grade deduction each; missing more than three class meetings for any reason will result in forfeiting credit for the course. Computers and cell phones are not permitted in the classroom, unless the former are required for documented accessibility needs. Plagiarism is a serious offense and, if suspected, will be referred to the Dean’s Office; a copy of Boston University’s code of conduct is online at www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code.

I encourage you to show up to office hours to discuss reading, your paper, or anything else. I will respond to all e-mails within twenty-four hours but not necessarily on the same day that you write; I expect you to be accessible in a similar manner via your BU e-mail address. Substantive materials are to be discussed in office hours, not via e-mail.

Final grades will be based on the following rubric:

- Participation and class session leadership: 25%
- Proposal and primary source analysis: 10%
- Prospectus / provisional bibliography: 15%
- End-of-semester presentation: 10%
- Final paper: 40%
Weekly Reading Schedule

Week I: Defining “Development” (January 19, 2016)

- In-class assignment of class discussion leaders

Week II: Debating the Origins of Inequality (January 26, 2016)


Week III: Empire, Climate, Population (February 2, 2016)


Week IV: Colonial Logics and Postcolonial Consequence (February 9, 2016)


No Class February 16, 2016 (Monday Class Schedule for Presidents’ Day Classes)

Week V: New Nations, New Economies, New Subjects (February 23, 2016)

- One-page proposal and one-page primary source analysis due
Week VI: High Modernism and Planning in the Twentieth Century (March 1, 2016)


March 5, 2016 to March 13, 2016: Spring Break

Week VII: Modernization and the Cold War: Thinking Big: (March 15, 2016)

- **Prospectus and provisional bibliography due**

Week VIII: Modernization and the Cold War: Thinking Small (March 22, 2016)


Week IX: Development Fantasies and the Anti-Politics Machine (March 29, 2016)


Week X: The New Optimists (April 5, 2016)

Week XI: Individual Meetings on Student Papers (April 12, 2016)

Week XII: Writing New Histories of Development (April 19, 2016)


Week XIII: Student Presentations (April 26, 2016)

**Final papers due 5:00 PM, April 20, 2016**