LTEN 149: Empire of Taste
Prof. Nicolazzo / TuTh 3:30-4:50

From our morning coffee or tea to our chocolate desserts, the food we consume every day is imported from all over the world, and bears centuries of global history.

This course examines the cultural meaning of food—from its production to its consumption—in the context of the early history of the British Empire. We’ll learn about some of the most important economic forces of this period, tracing the roots of modern finance back to the 17th-century spice trade, contemporary concerns about sustainable food production back to the human and ecological devastation of early colonial agriculture, and the phenomenon of consumer boycotts to their early history in abolitionist campaigns against sugar. At the same time, we’ll consider how literary texts engage with the aesthetic properties of taste: how did writers develop new aesthetic strategies to describe physical experiences—from the taste of a fresh pineapple to the high of opium—that circulated globally in unprecedented ways? How did the Chinese import of tea become so central to the idea of Englishness? How can the history of food shed light on the histories of race and gender? How might we read the textual records of food for traces of the lives and experiences of people who grew and made the food, people who were displaced by colonial agriculture, or people who fought back against the violence at the root of this global food system?

Fulfills the A requirement of the Literatures in English major.