

Coffee History Perks Up Lesson Plans

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newwave@tulane.edu

As part of an ongoing initiative to help elementary and secondary school teachers expand their lesson plans, the Stone Center for Latin American Studies at Tulane recently co-sponsored a workshop for area teachers about a major sector of the economy in Latin America: coffee.



Learning about the coffee trade and incorporating that information into lesson plans was the focus of a workshop for area elementary and secondary school teachers, cosponsored by the Stone Center for Latin American Studies.

The session kicked off with a presentation by Mark Pendergrast, author of *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How it Transformed Our World*.

The workshop, "Coffee, Culture and Community Development," was held on Thursday (March 17) at the Roosevelt Hotel in conjunction with the centennial meeting of the National Coffee Association in New Orleans. The [Stone Center](#) organized the session along with Vanderbilt University's Center for Latin American Studies and its Institute for Coffee Studies.

“Coffee is the fourth most valuable traded agricultural commodity in the world. It provides a living for millions of people around the world,” said Pendergrast.

He gave a comprehensive account of the history of coffee, its impact on foreign policy and its implications for the tropical countries that produce it in Latin America and Africa.

Pendergrast also emphasized the oppression that was present in the coffee industry at its inception and that still exists today. He said the early days of the coffee trade would not have been possible without slave labor.

“Coffee is an incredibly labor-intensive crop ? it was grown by slave labor first in the East Indies,” said Pendergrast.

Injustice still exists in the form of unfair wages for those who cultivate coffee beans in developing countries, the author said. The disparities that exist between the consuming countries in Europe and North America, and the producing countries in Latin America and Africa, were particularly troublesome for Pendergrast.

“We no longer have slavery but there is an inequity built into the coffee system, into our whole economic system,” he said.

Among the other speakers at the workshop, Elizabeth Van Sant, a coffee roaster and Latin American studies educator, worked with teachers on preparing hands-on activities for lessons on Latin America and geography.

Michael Celone is a sophomore student at Tulane majoring in public health.