

HISTORY WORKSHOP

The Department of History

Tuesdays ~ 12:30-1:30 pm ~ ZOOM

The Vinelords: Wine and Capitalism in Colonial Algeria

Dr. Owen White

University of Delaware

September 8, 2020

12:30-1:30 pm

[Zoom ID: 946 2190 5729](#)

P/W: UDHistory



In the late nineteenth century, wine production took off in French-ruled Algeria – so much so that for most of the following century this Muslim-majority territory was the fourth biggest wine producer in the world. From a colonial perspective, there seemed few drawbacks to the expansion of viticulture. Grapevines grew well on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, viticulture tended to root settlers in the countryside better than other forms of cultivation, and the revenue from wine helped place the colony on a sounder financial footing. In especially productive areas, such as the plains south of the city of Algiers, once-poor colonists used the wealth from their vineyards to extend their personal networks and their influence in colonial society. As capitalist viticulture in Algeria developed and strove for greater efficiency, however, its risks to the French project of colonization became increasingly clear, for the economic rationality represented by large vineyards and new machines was not designed to maximize European settlement in the countryside or the amount of work available to the Algerian majority. This paper will use the example of prominent colonial producers like the Pelegri and Germain families in the period 1880 to 1930 to show how wine was central to but awkwardly embedded in the economic life of Algeria and the broader French Empire.

Owen White is Professor of History at the University of Delaware, where he has taught since 2000. He is the author of *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1895-1960* and co-editor of *In God's Empire: French Missionaries and the Modern World* (both Oxford University Press). His new book, *The Blood of the Colony: Wine and the Rise and Fall of French Algeria*, will be published by Harvard University Press in January 2021.