

Humanities Seminars Program

Imagining Latin America: Myths and Realities in Modern Latin America

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Wednesdays 9:00 a.m. – noon
September 28 – December 14, 2016
Dorothy Rubel Room, UA Poetry Center

Stereotypes of dictators, populists, machismo, endemic drug violence and a staunchly Catholic population often describe Latin American realities. Countries as diverse as Argentina, Mexico and Brazil are lumped together despite diverse ethnic and economic realities. How can we tell the difference between the myths and the realities? How can a little island like Cuba so enrage the United States? This ten-week course presents a topical approach to these questions. Along with selected readings, the lectures explore topics such as the decline of the dominant Catholic religion, democracy in Latin America, the role of Jews and Muslim immigrants in shaping this region, U.S. Latin American relations, charismatic leaders, the history of drug production, and the role of women in the future of Latin America. Military regimes as well as guerrilla movements will also be covered. The aim of this course is to inform, share opinions, entertain and enable people to understand news and politics from an informed perspective. *The readings are not designed to cover all topics discussed, but rather to focus on something that emphasizes myths and realities.*

Class Schedule:

Sept. 28: Confronting our Stereotypes, both Geographic and Cultural

This session will examine issues about Latin America that are rarely discussed: How large or small are these countries in comparison to the US, Europe and other parts of the world. How have political cartoons impacted our understanding of the region.

Suggested reading: “The Birth of the American Empire as Seen through Political Cartoons (1896-1905)” Luis Martínez-Fernández Source: OAH Magazine of History, Vol. 12, No. 3, The War of 1898 (Spring, 1998), pp. 48-54.

Oct. 5: Religion in Latin America Then and Now:

While the Spanish and the Portuguese brought the Catholic Religion to Latin America as part of the Conquest, the impact of slavery, Dutch control of Brazil between 1580 and 1640, and the migration of hidden Jews, often called Conversos, added new European religions during the colonial period, just as Indigenous beliefs shaped Catholicism. In the 19th and 20th centuries, European immigration, and the arrival of Hindu, Middle Eastern and Japanese workers further changed religious practices along with Protestantism and Evangelical religions.

Suggested readings: “Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region,” 1914 Pew Foundation Study

See fascinating differences between Catholics and Protestant views on morality in Latin America: <http://www.pewforum.org/interactives/latin-america-morality-by-religion/>

Oct. 19: Race in Latin America

Unlike in the United States, the color of one’s skin did not necessarily define race, and racial identities could be changed. This will be examined from the colonial period through Casta paintings to the present and Brazilian concepts of race.

Suggested reading: “Blonde Bombshell: Xuxa and Notions of Whiteness in Brazil,” by Stephanie Dennison

Oct. 26: Migration and Immigration, 19th and 20th Centuries.

While we tend to think of immigration to Latin America in terms of Spanish and Portuguese settlers and slaves, there is an entire history of politically and religiously infused immigration plans to and from Latin America. Topics we will discuss include the diaspora of the Ottoman Empire, the migration of Americans to Mexico during our Civil War, plans to create a Zionist home in Argentina and/or Brazil, White Slavery to and from Latin America, and the migration of music across the Americas.

Suggested reading: “Small Numbers, Great Impact: Mexico and Its Immigrants, 1821–1973” by JÜRGEN BUCHENAU.

Nov. 2. Women in Latin America Part I.

The origins of machismo: the impact of slavery, independence and “Republican Motherhood,” education and the rise of feminism

Suggested reading: Nadia Youssef, “Cultural Ideals, Feminine Behavior and Family Control.”

Nov. 9 Women in Latin America Part II: Reproductive history; women in revolutionary and conservative movements; women presidents of Latin America.

Suggested Readings: Mala Htun and Jennifer Piscopo, “Women in Politics and Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

Nov. 16 Democracy and The Rise of the Modern State

Why does Latin American democracy seem so different from that of the US? Explanations range from the cultural, the economic, and the social. After an overview of the 19th and early 20th centuries, we will examine specific case studies that indicate that the evolution of the military as well as the impact of American Imperialism, has affected many countries, but so have boom and bust economies, international politics, and changing gender, social and economic prospects.

Suggested Reading: Paolo G. Carozza, From Conquest to Constitutions: Retrieving a Latin American Tradition of the Idea of Human Rights.

Nov. 30 Dictators and Populists: Those who spurred revolutions Fulgencio Batista (Cuba); Those who tried to create revolutions: Che Guevara (Cuba), Juan Perón (Argentina), Hugo Chavez (Venezuela); Those who stopped them: General Augusto Pinochet, Military Juntas

Suggested Reading: Paul Sigmund, “The Chilean Military: Legalism Undermined, Manipulated, and Restored.”

Dec. 7 Charismatic leaders and events: Eva Peron (Argentina), Carlos Menem (Arg.) Fidel Castro, Football in the Americas.

Suggested Reading: Louis Pérez Jr., “Fear and Loathing of Fidel Castro: Sources of US Policy toward Cuba.”

Dec. 14 Drug traffic in the Americas. Early history of marijuana and cocaine. US efforts to thwart Latin American drug traffic. Legalization in the Americas.

Suggested Reading: Bruce Bagley, “Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Latin American and the Caribbean in the Twenty-First Century: Challenges to Democracy.”