

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA – GREENSBORO

FALL 2011, HIS 508

## **“Indians” and the Nation in Latin America**

Prof. Peter B. Villella

**Meeting times:** Tuesdays 3:30-6:20pm, in MHRA 2207

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Global systems today are dominated by nation-states: political entities representing (with more or less legitimacy) the people residing within strictly defined geographical areas. However, whether by active exclusion or failed attempts at inclusion, nation-states rarely integrate all within their borders as full “citizens” and participants. Those whom we call “indigenous peoples” exist today in every region of the globe, and their relations with the nation-states in which they find themselves vary greatly according to local historical, economic, and demographic factors.

The relations between the nations of Latin America and their diverse indigenous peoples – called “Indians” by Europeans after 1492 – are unique in that the lines between the “colonizers” and “colonized” are especially blurry and complex, the legacy of a colonial era that saw widespread interethnic mixing and cultural borrowing. In the famous phrase of Octavio Paz, the people of today’s Mexico (and, to greater and lesser degrees, the rest of Latin America) are the “sons of La Malinche”: the native woman who aided the Spaniards in their conquest of Aztec Mexico: in other words, the descendants of *both* European conquerors *and* their native victims.

As a result, vigorous (and occasionally violent) “culture wars” over the “true” heritage of Latin America – is it essentially European or essentially indigenous? – have shaped and enlivened the region’s art, culture, and politics for centuries. While “indigenists” point to native traditions as the heart and soul of Latin American identity, others insist that such sentiments obstruct necessary modernization. Should schoolchildren in Peru, for example, study the Romans or the Incas as their “national” ancestors? Are native practices of land-use more legitimate than the supposedly objective laws of property rights? The results of these debates are complex and ambivalent: for example, cultural and political elites often celebrate native peoples in the abstract as national icons even as they exclude native contemporaries from full participation in society.

Students in this seminar will investigate the influence of indigenous history, culture, and memory on the construction (and deconstruction) of nationhood and national identity throughout Latin America. How did European colonizers view and approach the native peoples of America, and what strategies did native peoples devise in response to European colonization? How did native peoples transition from “subjects” of the Spanish king to “citizens” of the newly independent republics of the nineteenth century? And finally, where do native peoples – and indigeneity – fit into national politics and culture today?

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT**

The course is organized into a seminar format, consisting of weekly discussions and periodic written work. There will be some, but very little, lecturing; students themselves are responsible for providing the vast majority of classroom content and discussion. This means **heavy reading**, on average one advanced academic book every two weeks. Students who are not prepared to perform such work should drop the course.

Our primary approach will be historiographical – that is, we will study what historians and other thinkers have written about the course material. To these ends, the course is divided into two thematic sections: “colonial” (4 weeks) and “modern” (6 weeks). Each student will choose and read 5 books (2 from colonial, 3 from modern) over the course of the semester. Every two weeks, the student will turn in a short book review (2-3 pages) and briefly present the book to the class. Finally, the student will integrate all five reviews into a coherent historiographical essay, due at the end of the semester, and provide original insights and interpretations.

Course grading is as follows:

<i>Weekly attendance and participation</i>	10%
<i>Book reviews and class presentations (5 each)</i>	60%
<i>Historiographical essay</i>	30%

## **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**

As this is a small seminar meeting only once a week, full attendance and participation is essential to its success. If regular attendance is not possible, please consider another course. Understanding that illnesses and life events are unavoidable, I will allow students one “free” absence, but I will subtract 20 points (from 100 total) for each subsequent absence beyond that. I reserve the right to drop students who miss more than three meetings, as well as any who miss two in a row. Missing any class does not free students from their written and oral responsibilities. In addition, since it is disrupting, I will subtract 5 points for excessive or habitual lateness.

## **BOOK REVIEWS AND CLASS PRESENTATIONS**

In consultation with me, by the second week of class students will prepare a list of five readings pertaining to their graduate research or personal interests. Students may select works not on the official course reading list, but only with explicit instructor approval. Two works should address the colonial era, and three should deal with Latin America after 1800.

Beginning in week 3, each student will present his or her findings to the class every other week (there will be two groups). These oral presentations introduce an historical work by identifying its objectives, intellectual influences, sources, methodologies, conclusions, and other important considerations in understanding the nature of the work. Each presentation will be guided by a short book review (2-3 pages), which students will turn in at the end of each class.

Each presentation and book review is worth 20 points, and will be graded according to the following rubric: “check++” (rare, 20pts); “check+” (excellent, 19pts); “check” (good, 17pts); “check-“ (poor, 15pts); or “incomplete” (10pts). I will not accept late papers; they will receive zero points. We will discuss the specific criteria for a good book review in the first weeks of class.

## HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

The final essay, about 10-15 pages in length, is due on or before Thurs, Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>, at 3:30pm. It will organize and integrate all five book reviews into a coherent and unified narrative. I am flexible about how students approach the essay, but they should make sure to address how the books they read bear on the primary course theme: the relationships of Latin America's native peoples to the various governments they have been subjected to over the past 500 years.

## COURSE POLICIES

*Writing standards:* As historians, your ability to write in clear and articulate prose is very important. In every written assignment I expect you to meet basic university writing standards, especially regarding spelling and grammar. Proofread and spell-check everything, as clarity and quality will affect your grade. All written coursework is to be typed in Microsoft Word (or its equivalent), in 12-pt New Times Roman font, with all the standard 1-inch margins.

*Plagiarism:* **Take special care not to plagiarize.** Plagiarism – that is, when you quote or paraphrase somebody else's words or ideas without crediting him or her – is the academic equivalent of lying, cheating, or stealing. **Every word you write in this class must be your own, not copied from any other source, whether in print or online,** unless clearly indicated. If in doubt, ask! See the UNCG Academic Integrity Policy at <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu>. I reserve the right to fail any student who has plagiarized on an assignment.

## CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

In this course we will often discuss sensitive and emotionally charged topics, such as race, class, gender, and imperialism. We will also see and read about archaic and (frankly) offensive perspectives. As they are part of our history (whether we like it or not), we will not censor or ignore them, and students should be prepared to address them directly and in a mature, academic fashion.

In discussions, we will not always agree with one another, yet we welcome diverse interpretations, as a discussion where everyone agrees is a pep rally rather than a classroom, unlikely to be enlightening. We aim, therefore, to foster an atmosphere in which all feel free to express their ideas, and in which we can disagree and challenge one another openly without feeling threatened or disrespected. Thus, **personal attacks and offensive language will not be tolerated**, since they obstruct honest debate.

A good rule to keep in mind: **when challenging another's arguments, try to do so in a way that assumes good faith on his or her part.** Address the strongest aspects of his or her ideas, not a cartoonish, simplistic, and easily dismissed version of them. This rule has the added benefit of requiring each of us to consider our own assumptions more deeply.

Finally, **TURN OFF ALL CELL PHONES.** No texting. Students who disrupt class or who are otherwise not contributing positively may be asked to leave, counting as an absence. You may have drinks – but not food – in class.

*Have a great semester!*