

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA – GREENSBORO
LATIN AMERICA AND THE UNITED STATES

HIS 321 | Prof. Peter B. Vilella

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the tumultuous diplomatic, economic, and cultural interactions between the so-called “Anglo” and “Hispanic” civilizations of the Western hemisphere since roughly 1800. The entire New World shares a common modern history, yet hemispheric relations have been heavily defined by an imbalance between the large and powerful United States and the smaller nations of Latin America. Thus, our primary focus will be on the expressions of US hegemony at the national level, such as military interventions, cultural dominance, and economic dependency, as well as the inevitable “blowback” that follows. However, we will also address other important aspects of hemispheric relations beneath and beyond the nation-state, such as cultural and intellectual exchanges between individuals and private associations.

Knowledge of the complex history of Latin America-US relations is exceedingly important today, as globalization, immigration, and technology reveal blur and obviate national and cultural boundaries, binding us all. The US is the world's second-largest Spanish-speaking nation, and cities like Miami and Los Angeles are integral parts of the Latin American cultural sphere. Tourism promotes economic ties even as it nurtures stereotypes in both the tourist and the local. Idealists from the US routinely flock to Cuba to study strategies of radical social change, even as Latin American macroeconomic policies are developed in US universities. Catholicism in the US increasingly speaks Spanish and Portuguese just as evangelical churches headquartered in the US are reshaping the spiritual landscape of Latin America. And at the same time that young immigrants seek their fortunes north of the Rio Grande, a million elderly retirees from the US reside in expatriate colonies in Mexico and Central America. This course is not merely the history of our relationship with a distant and exotic land, but a history of us.

HISTORY DEPARTMENT LEARNING GOALS

1. Analyze historical duration, succession, and change in terms of human agency and larger systems or structures in a wide variety of places and periods. [*Historical Comprehension*]
2. Use historical thinking to contextualize and analyze primary and secondary sources representing different points of view. [*Historical Analysis*]
3. Conduct original research by investigating and interpreting primary and secondary sources. [*Historical Research*]
4. Use evidence-based reasoning to interpret the past coherently while developing and presenting an original argument, orally and in writing. [*Historical Interpretation*]

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

As an advanced course in History, the graded component will consist primarily of reading comprehension, historical analysis, and writing. Grades will be given for: 1) attendance; 2) a geographical quiz; 3) regular contributions to an online journal; 4) two short essays (~5-6 pages each); and 5) a final exam. All written work is assigned letter grades.

Map Quiz	5%
Attendance	10%
Online Journal	20%
Essay 1	20%
Essay 2	20%
Final Exam	25%

A = fulfills assignment entirely while amply demonstrating **original insight and reflection**
B = fulfills assignment entirely and thoughtfully
C = mostly fulfills assignment, but without originality (e.g., merely echoes the instructor)
D = partially incomplete, or betrays non-comprehension of theme or issue
F = severely incomplete, irrelevant, plagiarized, or never turned in

TEXTS

This class requires heavy—but interesting!—reading. **All readings are mandatory.** There is one required text, a sources reader titled *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, edited by Robert Holden and Eric Zolov (Oxford, 2010). All other sources are posted to the course website in pdf format: additional articles, images, and other materials.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance at all class meetings is **mandatory, and I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences.** Understanding that life happens, all students start with a “perfect” attendance score (that is, 100 points, or A+) and are allowed three absences without penalty. After that, I will subtract 20 points per missed class. I may drop any student with more than 6 unexplained absences. Since lateness is disruptive, I will also penalize excessive or habitual tardiness 5-10pts. **I reserve the right to drop any student with more than six absences.** In Since lateness is disruptive, I also penalize excessive or habitual tardiness.

CLASS WEBSITE AND EMAIL

You must have a working email address, and check it regularly, as it is the primary means of communication out of class. I will send out reminders, assignments, and other announcements regularly. Students are responsible for any information sent out via email, as it has the same force as if it were announced in class.

The website on Blackboard will also play a major role. I will post the mandatory readings, topics for short assignments, study questions, links, and other materials necessary to perform well. Occasionally, I will also use the website to follow up on themes covered in lectures and discussions, and respond to student questions. **You should check the website regularly for updates.**

ONLINE JOURNAL

About eight times during the semester, I will post “thought questions” to the course website prompting students to reflect upon and integrate the lectures and readings. Students will respond to these questions in the designated place online. Each post should be about two paragraphs in length, 150-200 words. Bullet points and outlines are not acceptable.

STANDARDS AND POLICIES

All written work must meet basic university writing standards regarding spelling and grammar. Proofread and spell-check, as grades account for clarity and quality. **Essays are to be typed in Microsoft Word (or its equivalent), double-spaced, in 12-pt New Times Roman font, with all the standard 1-inch margins.**

Plagiarism—that is, when you quote or paraphrase somebody else’s words or ideas without crediting him or her—is the “cardinal sin” of the university, the academic equivalent of lying, cheating, or stealing. **Plagiarism is simultaneously fraud and theft. 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! The UNCG Academic Integrity Policy is online at <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu>. I reserve the right to fail and press for disciplinary action against any student who has plagiarized on any assignment, no matter how minor.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Civility and respect

In this course we discuss sensitive and emotionally charged topics, such as race, class, gender, imperialism, exploitation, and immigration. We will also see and read primary materials representing archaic and (frankly) offensive perspectives. They are part of our history whether we like it or not, and we will not censor or ignore them. Students should be prepared to address them directly and in a mature, academic fashion. We will not always agree with one another, yet we welcome diverse interpretations, as a discussion in which everyone agrees is more of a pep rally than a classroom, and unlikely to be enlightening. We aim instead to foster an atmosphere in which all students 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 think harder and question our own assumptions.

Technology

The proliferation of laptops, tablets, and other gadgets is a mixed blessing. While it can be useful, it can also be the ultimate distraction, and grades may suffer. My policy is as follows:

- **Students are adults**, and can decide for themselves whether to bring technology into the classroom, or if it would damage their class performance.
- **However, it is unacceptable to distract other students.** Students who wish to use a laptop or tablet in class must sit in the back row.
- I reserve the right to ask students whose laptop/tablet activities are disruptive to others, **for any reason**, to shut down the machines.
- **Cell phone use—including texting—is always prohibited.**

Food and drink

You may have drinks—but not food—in class, unless you bring enough for everybody, plus a double portion for the instructor.

Have a great semester!

“That [the Spanish Americans] will throw off their European dependence I have no doubt; but in what kind of government their revolution will end I am not so certain. History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government.

- **Thomas Jefferson, 1813**

“The United States...seem destined to plague America with torments in the name of freedom.”

- **Simon Bolívar, 1829**

“We are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement. Equality of rights is the cynosure of our union of States, the grand exemplar of the correlative equality of individuals....

We must onward to the fulfillment of our mission

-- to the entire development of the principle of our organization -- freedom of conscience, freedom of person, freedom of trade and business pursuits, universality of freedom and equality.... For this blessed mission to the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth, has America been chosen; and her high example shall smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs.... Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity?”

- **John L. O’Sullivan, 1839**

“Whenever barbarism and civilization, or two distinct forms of civilization, meet face to face, the result must be war.”

- **William Walker, 1860**

*“More than any other form of government, a democracy lacks protections that can efficiently ensure the inviolability of high culture.... Spiritual selection -- the exaltation of life fostered by the altruistic stimuli of taste, art, gentility, admiration for eternal ideals, and respect for the supremacy of nobility -- will be considered an indefensible weakness **IN SOCIETIES WHERE EQUALITY HAS DESTROYED THE RULING HIERARCHIES.**”*

- **José Rodó, 1900**

“There must be two Americas:

one that sets the captive free, and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away, and picks a quarrel with him with nothing to found it on; then kills him to get his land.”

- Mark Twain, 1901



“The public revenues ...must be placed out of reach of the revolutionary robber or the dictator. Capital must be brought in to establish peaceful husbandry and unmolested industry. Education and civilization must bring justice.”

- F.M. Huntington Wilson, 1916

*“We are, in fact, a nation of evangelists; every third American devotes himself to improving and lifting up his fellow citizens, usually by force; **the messianic delusion is our national disease.**”*

- HL Mencken, 1919

I asked, "Where is the black man's Government?" "Where is his King and his kingdom?" "Where is his President, his country, and his ambassador, his army, his navy, his men of big affairs?" I could not find them, and then I declared, "I will help to make them."

- Marcus Garvey, 1923

“The experience of history shows that the immense power of American Imperialism cannot be overthrown without the unity of the Latin American countries.

- Victor Haya de la Torre, 1926

“We do not wish to intervene in the affairs of any American Republic. We simply wish peace and order and stability and recognition of honest rights properly acquired so that this hemisphere may not only be the hemisphere of peace but the hemisphere of international justice.”

- Charles E. Hughes, 1928

Actually, as of today, the protection of U.S. investments in Latin America rests predominantly on the self-interest of the governing groups in the Latin American countries.... In many instances, bribery may be said to have replaced diplomatic intervention as the main protection of private capital; and the best sanction for its continued operation lies in the corruptibility, rather than the enlightenment, of the local regimes.

- **George F. Kennan, 1950**

*Standard Oil has arrived beforehand
with its lawyers and its boots,
with its checks and its guns,
with its governments and its prisoners.*

*Its obese emperors
from New York are suave,
smiling assassins
who buy silk, nylon, cigars,
petty tyrants, and dictators.*

- **Pablo Neruda, 1950**

To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge--to convert our good words into good deeds--in a new alliance for progress--to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty.... So let us begin anew.

- **John F. Kennedy, 1961**

We awaited [Kennedy's] inauguration to see if he would do something different.... He himself said: "Let us begin anew." He did not begin anew; he began as of old.

- **Fidel Castro, 1961**

*"But even more than interests, we're bound by shared values. In each other's journey we see reflections of our own. Colonists who broke free from empires. Pioneers who opened new frontiers. Citizens who struggled to expand our nations' promise to all people—men and women, white, black, and brown.... This is our common history. This is our common heritage. **We are all Americans. Todos somos Americanos.***

- **Barack H. Obama, 2011**