

Spring 2011, HIS 321

Latin America and the United States

Prof. Peter B. Villella

Lecture: NMOR 330, M W 2 – 3:15pm

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This course examines the tumultuous diplomatic, economic, social, and cultural interactions between the “frenemies” of the Western hemisphere – the diverse peoples of Latin America and the diverse peoples of the United States – since roughly 1800. Shaped by the lopsided balance of power between the large and mighty United States and the smaller, less-prosperous republics of Latin America, the diplomatic and political relations of the New World have been defined by a clear and consistent history of US hegemony. Thus, the primary emphasis of this class will be on the occupations, aid and development programs, and covert actions by the US in Latin America – as well as the Latin American actions and responses that shaped all three. In doing so, we will identify the patterns in thinking, acting, and policy-making that underlay such events. With this background, students will understand that current disputes over free trade, the “war on drugs,” and immigration are merely the latest chapters in a long history going back over two centuries.

However, in addition to political and diplomatic history, the course will also address other important, yet frequently overlooked aspects of hemispheric relations, especially regarding cultural, intellectual, and economic exchanges. For example, US tourists, from the pyramid-seekers of the 19th century to today’s “spring breakers” in Cancún, have played a major role in Latin American economics, while also promoting certain stereotypes in both places. African-American intellectuals have sometimes looked to the south for better models of racial tolerance, while economic theories developed in US universities, both left and right, have been put into practice in Latin America. Brazilian jiu jitsu is a multi-million dollar industry in the United States, while evangelical churches headquartered in the US are reshaping the religious landscape of Brazil. Idealists from the US routinely flock to Venezuela and Cuba to study strategies of radical social change, while a Mexican media tycoon is part owner of the *New York Times*. And at the same time that throngs of young immigrants seek work north of the Rio Grande, a million elderly retirees from the United States reside in expatriate colonies in Mexico and Central America. This class will address these and other ways that Americans from the north and the south have encountered one another as individuals (rather than solely as nation-states).

The history of Latin America and the United States is timely and important today, as globalization, immigration, and technology blur and obviate the national and cultural boundaries

of earlier eras. The United States is today one of the world's largest Spanish-speaking nations. Univision occasionally outdraws the three major English-language networks, and in 2008 it broadcast the first US presidential debates in Spanish. In many ways, we may consider Hispanophone cities like Miami and Los Angeles as parts of the Latin American cultural and historical sphere. In short, the course is not only the history of our relationship with a distant and exotic land, but a history of us.

LEARNING GOALS:

Students who complete this course will be able to:

- 1) *Identify* the major historical events of the past two centuries of hemispheric relations
- 2) *Perceive* the fundamental patterns in thinking and acting that have characterized and shaped US policy toward Latin America and Latin American responses to US dominance
- 3) *Appreciate* the deep historical, cultural, and economic ties between all the nations of the Western hemisphere
- 4) *Explain* the historical origins and contexts behind many of today's important social, economic, and political issues, such as narcotrafficking, immigration, and debates over free trade
- 5) *Understand* the relationship between chronology and context in history, as expressed by the paradox of constant change within persistent continuity

TEXTS AND READING:

This class requires heavy – but interesting! – reading. **All readings are mandatory.** In order to comprehend the material and participate in discussions, **students will have to complete each reading assignment before the corresponding class meeting** as listed on the syllabus. There are three sets of texts in this course: a textbook, a sources reader, and a series of essays, articles, images, and other materials that are available on the course website. The two required physical texts are:

- 1) Lester D. Langley, *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere*, 2nd. ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010). **NOTE: you must obtain the SECOND edition of this text; the first edition is more than twenty years out of date.**
- 2) Robert Holden and Eric Zolov, eds., *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History* 2nd. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

A roll will be taken at the beginning of each meeting, so **attendance is mandatory.** Points will be taken off for unexcused absences or repeated lateness. Students must inform me

of any absences as soon as possible; prior to class is better. Students may be dropped from the course if they have more than five unexcused absences.

COURSE WEBSITE:

The website on Blackboard will play a major role. Besides mandatory readings, I will also post study questions, links, announcements, and other materials that will help you perform well. **You should check the website regularly for updates**, as it is the main means I have for communicating outside of class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Attendance and participation	20%
Short writing assignments and quizzes	15%
Midterm	20%
Analytical and interpretive essay	20%
Final Exam	25%

Graded items include attendance, participation, short writing assignments and quizzes, a midterm exam, an essay addressing a major course theme and several primary sources, and a final exam.

- All students will begin with a “perfect” attendance grade, with unexcused absences and late arrivals resulting in points being subtracted; participation consists of displaying readiness and engagement during classroom meetings and discussions
- There will be a series of short assignments, from an in-class geography quiz, to small-item written assignments, to simple online reading quizzes. The best way to prepare for these is to stay current on assigned readings.
- The essay will address some of the deeper themes of the course and is based on a list of texts and movies by Latin American and US writers. It will be no less than 6 pages long (double-spaced).
- The midterm and final exams will consist of both multiple-choice questions (addressing specific course items) and short-answer written responses (addressing broader course themes).

CLASSROOM STANDARDS AND COURSE POLICIES:

As historians, your ability to write in clear and articulate prose is very important. 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. I am always happy to meet with you during office hours to go over your outlines and drafts and to answer any questions you have.

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

Online work will have clearly listed deadlines and parameters. **Written coursework is due in class on the day it is listed on the course calendar.** It should be double-spaced, in a readable and professional 12-pt font (such as Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins. (Do not mess with the margins; nothing could be more obvious.) Late work will be penalized one letter grade per day. In some circumstances I may be able to accommodate those with true conflicts and emergencies, but only if the student alerts me sooner rather than later.

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 primary materials representing 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, while we will not always agree with one another, we welcome diverse interpretations of the material, as a discussion where everyone agrees is more of a pep rally than a classroom, and unlikely to be enlightening. We aim, therefore, 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. To these ends, during class we will approach these issues as historians and scholars seeking truth, rather than as partisans with a specific agenda. 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 arguments, not a cartoonish, over-simplified, 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, and we all get smarter as a result.

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

Good luck and have a great semester!

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

- Simon Bolívar, 1829

“Yes, 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; and while truth sheds its effulgence, we cannot retrograde, without dissolving the one and subverting the other. 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, and carry the glad tidings of peace and good will where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than that of beasts of the field. 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 from him, 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

“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 govern any American Republic. 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