

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA – GREENSBORO
HISTORY OF MODERN LATIN AMERICA

HIS 240, Spring 2011

Prof. Peter B. Vilella

Lecture: M W 2-3:15pm, MHRA 2207

Instructor's office: MHRA 2108

Office hours: M W 3:30-4:30

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines the tumultuous diplomatic, economic, 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. The entire New World shares a common history, yet hemispheric relations have been defined by an imbalance between the large and mighty United States and the smaller, less-prosperous nations of Latin America. Thus, our primary focus will be on the consequences of US hegemony, such as US military interventions, economic dependency, cultural imperialism, and the inevitable “blowback” that follows. However, recognizing that history contains many different stories, we will also address other important aspects of hemispheric relations, especially those pertaining to the cultural and intellectual exchanges between individuals (rather than nation-states).

Knowledge of the complex history of Latin America-US relations is exceedingly important today, as globalization, immigration, and technology blur and obviate the national and cultural boundaries of earlier eras, binding us all together in various ways. The US is currently one of the world's largest Spanish-speaking nations, and majority Hispanophone cities like Miami and Los Angeles are integral parts of the Latin American cultural and historical sphere. Tourism promotes economic ties even as it nurtures stereotypes in both the tourist and the local. Idealists from the US routinely flock to Venezuela and 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 religious landscape of Latin America. And at the same time that throngs of young immigrants seek work north of the Rio Grande, a million elderly retirees from the US reside in expatriate colonies in Mexico and Central America. 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 moments in two centuries of hemispheric relations
- 2) *Perceive* the fundamental patterns in thinking and acting that shape US and Latin American policies toward one another
- 3) *Appreciate* the deep historical, cultural, and economic ties of the Western hemisphere
- 4) *Explain* the origins of today's important social, economic, and political issues
- 5) *Understand* the relationship between chronology and context in history, expressed by the paradox of constant change within persistent continuity

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

As an advanced course designed primarily for history majors, 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) a number of short responses to reading assignments, posted to an online journal; 4) two short essays (~5-6 pages each); and 5) a final exam. All written work is assigned letter grades.

<i>Attendance</i>	10%
<i>Map Quiz</i>	5%
<i>Online Journal</i>	20%
<i>Essay 1</i>	20%
<i>Essay 2</i>	20%
<i>Final Exam</i>	25%

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 sources reader, a long essay by the Uruguayan thinker José Rodó, and a series of articles, images, and other materials posted to the course website. The two required purchases are:

- 1) José Rodó, *Ariel*, translated by Margaret Sayers Peden (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).
- 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 AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance at all class meetings is **mandatory**. Understanding that illnesses and life events sometimes get in the way, rather than chase doctors' notes and distinguish "excused" from "unexcused" absences, all students will simply start with a "perfect" attendance score (that is, 100 points) and are allowed three absences for any reason. After that, I will subtract 20 points per missed class, regardless of the reason. I reserve the right to drop any student with more than six absences. In addition, since lateness is disruptive, I will also penalize excessive or habitual tardiness 5-10pts.

CLASS WEBSITE AND EMAIL

You must have a working email address, and check it regularly, as it is the main 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 once a week, I will post "thought questions" to the course website prompting students to reflect upon and integrate the lectures and readings. Over the course of the semester, students will respond to these questions in the designated place online. Responses should be no more than around a paragraph in length.

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 will discuss sensitive and emotionally charged topics, such as race, class, gender, and imperialism. We will also study primary materials representing archaic and offensive perspectives. They are part of our history, so 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 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. 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 critically.

- *Pride in our work*

If you are spending the time, energy, and resources – both yours and those of others – to pursue a university education, you should take it seriously. Students are adults, and nobody is forcing them to be here. UNCG is not an extension of high school or childhood and it should not be approached as if it were. So have some pride in your work and studies; turn in work that is clean and polished, adhere to deadlines, and follow instructions. Otherwise, why be here?

Students who disrupt class or who are otherwise not contributing positively may be asked to leave, counting as an unexcused absence. This includes (but is not limited to): talking loudly, texting, surfing websites unrelated to class, and sleeping. If you cannot or do not wish to abide these rules, please consider dropping the course. In addition, I may refuse to accept written work that is tattered, torn, or excessively messy.

- *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 their 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!

“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.... 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

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. But this peaceful revolution of hope cannot become the prey of hostile powers. Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas. And let every other power know that this Hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house....

So let us begin anew--remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

- 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. He not only followed the policy of Eisenhower, but he was even more aggressive against us. This gentleman has brought this problem on himself, through his lack of commonsense. He has earned this discredit all by himself. While we waited for him to show what policy he was going to follow, he increased the attacks against us. He increased in intensity the aggression against our country.

- Fidel Castro, 1961