

Latin America: Revolution, Dictatorship, and Democracy

21H.171

Fall 2017 / MW 12:30 – 2pm / 4 – 251

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Course Description:

President Trump’s recent remarks on a “possible military option” in Venezuela has renewed discussions on the long history of U.S. intervention in Latin America in defense of democracy. Thus, it is worth asking how Latin American history and politics have shaped the U.S.’ own conceptions about revolution, democracy, and dictatorship. Today, these critical concepts seem to be taking on new meaning on both sides of the border and are reshaping the history of inter-American relations.

By combining the analysis of politics, technology, social movements, and environmental change, this course will offer a comparative perspective on how nations and communities have shaped contested notions of democracy, revolution, and dictatorship in the Americas from the 1850s to the present.

We will study military intervention, extractive economies, social media and technology, human and civil rights violations, environmental justice movements, and public infrastructure as part of an entangled process defining the limits of democracy and its challenges today.

Course Goals & Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the semester, students will have developed the following skills:

Factual knowledge: Acquire a comparative background in major social, political, ecological, and technological processes in the history of revolutions, dictatorships, and democracies in the Americas from the 1850s to the present.

Historical method and analysis: Know how to read different kinds of historical sources and secondary writings by identifying the central arguments, evaluating evidence critically, and recognizing the writers’ perspectives or biases. Demonstrate the ability to use primary and secondary sources to create and discuss thesis arguments that are supported by evidence, and that critically interpret the past and present.

Requirements & Grading:

Attendance, In-class Activities, and Participation: 20%

Map Quiz: 10%

Report & Facilitation of Class Discussion: 20%

Paper: 20%

Final Paper/Blog/Presentation: 30%

Policies and Meetings Format:

- Sessions will combine lecture, discussion, and group analysis of written and audiovisual materials.
- Attendance and active participation are required. Participation grade includes reading assigned materials and critically engaging with course material.
- Plagiarism will result in disciplinary action. For details on what constitutes plagiarism please visit <http://integrity.mit.edu>
- Laptops are allowed but for only classroom purposes.

Resources:

The writing and communication center (WCC) offers free one-on-one professional advice for native English speakers and English as second language students. For more information please visit <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/> To make appointments please visit <https://mit.mywconline.com>

Required Materials:

- John Charles Chasteen. *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (Fourth Edition). 2016.
- Greg Grandin. *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*. 2007.
- Seth Garfield. *In Search of the Amazon. Brazil, the United States, and the Nature of a Region*. 2013.
- Other readings and in-class materials available on Stellar and the class blog

Course Schedule**Week 1: Introduction: Three Concepts, Twenty Love Poems, and a Song of Despair**

Sept. 6: No assigned readings

Week 2: Going Comparative & Transnational: Challenges and Perspectives

Sept. 11: Chasteen, Chapter 1 “Welcome to Latin America”
Grandin, Introduction & Chapter 1 “How Latin America saved the United States from itself”

Sept. 13: No assigned readings

Week 3: Old & New Tangos: A Long History of Revolution, Dictatorship, and Democracy

Sept. 18: Chasteen, Chapter 3 “Colonial Crucible”
Sept. 20: Map Quiz (Based on Chasteen, p. 13)

Week 4: Modern, Liberal, and Postcolonial

- Sept. 25: Chasteen, Chapter 5 “Postcolonial Blues”
Sept. 27: Chasteen, Chapter 6 “Progress”

Week 5: Becoming Global: Political Ecologies of Export Economies

- Oct. 2: Chasteen, Chapter 7 “Neocolonialism”
Oct. 4: Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal and Zephyr Frank (Eds.) *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000*. Duke University Press, 2006. [“Commodity chains in theory and in Latin American History”]
Brannstrom, Christian (Ed.) *Territories, Commodities and Knowledges: Latin American Environmental History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Inst. for the Study of the Americas, 2004. [“An Introduction to Latin American Environmental History”]

Week 6: Becoming National: Ecological Politics of State Formation I

- Oct. 11: Chasteen, Chapter 8 “Nationalism”
Wakild, Emily. *Revolutionary Parks: Conservation, Social Justice, and Mexico's National Parks, 1910-1940*. University of Arizona Press, 2011. [Introduction]

Week 7: Becoming National: Ecological Politics of State Formation II

- Oct. 16: Garfield, Introduction, Chapter 1 “Border and Progress” & Chapter 2 “The Quicksands of Untrustworthy Supply”
Oct. 18: No assigned readings

Week 8: Synthesis I: A Choreography of Political, Social, Material, and Ecological Narratives

- Oct. 23: Garfield, Chapter 5 “War in the Amazon”
Oct. 25: Paper due

Week 9: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: A Long History of the Cold War

- Oct. 30: Chasteen, Chapter 9 “Revolution”
Nov. 1: Grandin, Chapter 2 “The Most Important Place in the World” & Chapter 3 “Going Primitive”

Week 10: Of Ethereal Nature: Dictator(s) and Dictatorship(s) I

- Nov. 6: Chasteen, Chapter 10 “Reaction”
Grandin, Chapter 4 “Bringing it all back home”

Nov. 8: No assigned readings

Week 11: Of Material Nature: Dictator(s) and Dictatorship(s) II

Nov. 13: Final Paper Draft Due

Nov. 15: No assigned readings

Week 12: Of Human Nature: Human Rights, Justice, and Truth

Nov. 20: No assigned readings

Nov. 22: No assigned readings

Week 13: Democracies & Post-violence(s): The Rise of Neo-liberal Politics and Economics

Nov. 27: Grandin, Chapter 5 “The third conquest of Latin America”
Chasteen, Chapter 11 “Neoliberalism and Beyond”

Nov. 29: No assigned readings

Week 14: Resurrecting Macondo: New Left(s) & the Socio-ecological Turn

Dec. 4: Grandin, Chapter 6 “Globalization’s Showpiece” & Conclusion
Garfield, Epilogue

Dec. 6: No assigned readings

Week 15: Synthesis II: The Challenges of Democracy, Dictatorship, and Revolution in the 21st Century

Dec. 11: Final Paper/Blog/Presentations

Dec. 13: Final Paper/Blog/Presentations