Rebellion and Revolution in Twentieth-Century Latin America

This course examines the major revolutionary movements in Latin America during the twentieth century—particularly—but not exclusively—those movements that developed in Mexico (1910), Cuba (1959), Chile (1973) and Nicaragua (1979). This course asks what were the political, economic, and cultural forces at work that compelled ordinary people in these countries to rebel against their government and the status quo.

We will begin by questioning the meaning, or meanings, of “revolution” in order to give us a theoretical framework for understanding our Latin American case studies. We will then proceed by discussing how each revolutionary movement unfolded, paying close attention to the causes that led people to mobilize, as well as to the declared objectives of revolutionaries and the revolutions’ final results. We will ask who stood to benefit from revolutionary programs, and how did everyday life change for people once a push for revolutionary change took place. These questions will urge us to consider divisions within revolutionary movements, such as the differences between women and men, young and old, as well as divisions between those who formed a revolution’s leadership and those who supported revolution through grassroots political activism. Along the way, students will be asked to think comparatively in order to assess how and why revolutionary strategies and outcomes in one country resembled or differed from those in another.

Expectations and Assignments: Students will be expected to have completed each session’s readings before our meeting in order to be prepared to ask questions and participate in class discussion. Students should note that class discussion will be graded, and those students who express opinions informed by the readings will earn points toward their final grade. Likewise, failure to offer informed opinions during class will be taken into consideration when assigning grades. In addition, students will be required to write five short papers—three response papers and two analytical papers. The response papers must be no shorter than two pages; the analytical papers must be no shorter than five pages. The reading, discussion, and writing requirements should help students develop critical thinking, public speaking, and writing skills. Finally, students should expect unannounced reading quizzes.

Students who demonstrate responsibility, hard work, and curiosity will do fine in this course. I want you to do well, so please see me if you have any questions or concerns.

Grading:
Response paper on the readings on the Mexican Revolution: 10 %
Response paper on readings on Guatemala, 10%
Response paper on the Sandinistas, 10 %
Analytical Paper Comparing the Mexican Revolution with the Cuban Revolution, 30%
Analytical paper on Winn’s *Weavers of Revolution*, 30%
Reading Quizes and Participation, 10%

**Attendance:** Students will be allowed *three absences without penalty*. Every absence thereafter will result in the reduction of one-half grade. For instance, if you averaged a “B+” for your assignments grades but missed two classes, you will receive a “C+” for the semester.

**Special Concerns:** If you have a disability or any sort of special condition that will in any way affect your performance in this course, please let me know as soon as possible. I will make every effort to accommodate you.

**Academic Integrity:** All papers must properly cite references whenever paraphrasing or quoting a book. Unintentional failure to cite will affect the paper’s grade. However, *plagiarism will not be tolerated*. Students caught plagiarizing will receive an “F” for their final grade. In addition, I will submit the student’s name to the proper authorities, who will then decide if the student ought to be expelled from the university.

The following books are available for purchase at the university bookstore:

Castañeda, Jorge G. *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left after the Cold War.*
Skidmore, Thomas and Peter Smith, *Modern Latin America.*
Winn, Peter. *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile’s Road to Socialism.*

**Week 1**

Wednesday, Jan. 22:

Introduction.

**Week 2 Contextualizing Revolution in Twentieth-Century Latin America**

Monday, Jan. 27 and Wednesday, Jan. 29:

During these classes, we will discuss Latin America’s supposed and real *economic and cultural dependency* on Europe and, later, the United States. We will discuss how intellectuals, government officials, and everyday people have associated Latin America’s “underdevelopment” or poverty with its relationship with Europe and the United States. We will begin by outlining the colonial relationship between Spain and its colonies and then proceed to discuss how the legacies of colonialism affected the modern period.


**Week 3: Paradigms of Revolution; Discussion of the Mexican Revolution of 1910.**
Monday, Feb 3.:

**What is “revolution”?** This session we will discuss different ways of defining “revolution”. Because the meaning of “revolution” can be vague, varied, and grandiose, this is no small project. Nevertheless, it is a critical for us to engage this question in order for us to have some foundation for analyzing our case studies. Since nearly all major revolutionary movements in modern Latin America have in some way been informed by and/or identified with some form (and there are many) of Marxism, we can do no better than begin by reading one of Marx’s most accessible and influential writings.

Reading: Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (on reserve)

Wednesday, Feb. 5:

This class session will focus on political instability and economic inequality in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Mexico. We will be trying to assess the political and economic conditions that may have given ordinary people reason to believe that life had gotten so difficult that revolution was their best option.


**Week 4: Mexico continued**

Monday, February 10:

During this session, we will outline the main events and figures of the Mexican Revolution. Our discussion of the “big picture” will give us the context to analyze in upcoming classes the interests and actions of various social groups.

Reading: Skidmore and Smith, pp. 221 – 253.

Wednesday, Feb. 12: Much emphasis has been given to peasant resistance in Mexican history; and some historians view the Mexican Revolution as primarily a peasant revolution. During this and next session, we will examine the reasons peasants may have had to mobilize against the Diaz regime. We will pay close attention to differences in geographical location and how it might explain why some peasants chose to rebel while others did not.


**Week 5: More Mexico**


Joseph, Revolution from Without, Chapters 1 and 2 (on reserve).

2 pg. response papers on Mexican Revolution are due at the beginning of this period.

Wednesday, Feb 19. The Institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution.

This class session will focus on the consolidation of the post-revolutionary state. We will ask what was gained through the revolution, what promises were broken and what problems persist. Students will be expected to come to class prepared to share their informed opinions.

Reading: Joseph and Nugent, Everyday Forms of State Formation, Chapter 1.

Week 6: The Cold War: Elite Politics, Native Industrialization and Grassroots Subversion

Monday, February 24:

Apart from the Mexican Revolution, most major revolutionary activity in modern Latin America took place in the context of the Cold War between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Hence, both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R imposed their politics and ideologies on Latin America. Latin American governments and people responded by appropriating certain ideas and rejecting others. Most important, Latin Americans tried to chart their own course despite the influence from outside actors. This class examines Import-Substitution Industrialization (ISI)--one important measure that Latin American governments used to try to gain a measure of autonomy.

Read: Skidmore and Smith 48 – 59.

Wednesday, February 26:

The United States has demonstrated a strong interest in thwarting Latin American revolutionary movements. This session examines the CIA’s role in overthrowing Guatemala’s President Arbenz in 1954. We will ask what interests the U.S. believed to be defending and how this event may have hinted at a broader U.S. policy in regard to Latin America. The case of Guatemala will be compared to Mexico and students will be expected to keep the Guatemalan case in mind when considering the Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Chilean cases as well.

Monday, March 3:

Perhaps no Latin American revolutionary is more romanticized than Che Guevara. This class will examine what Che stood for, what he contributed to Latin American revolutionary strategy, and what he symbolizes today as an icon. We will talk about the romantic and masculine character of revolution, and what this might mean to people who make, imagine, and dream of revolution.


Week 8: The Cuban Revolution

Wednesday, March 5:

During this session, we will discuss the historical background to the Cuban Revolution. We will emphasize Cuba’s economic development as well as its relationship with the U.S.

Read: Skidmore and Smith, 254 – 283.

2 pg response papers on Guatemala are due at the beginning of this session.

Monday, March 10:


Film, “Memories of Underdevelopment”.

Week 9:

Wednesday, March 12: During this class session, we will discuss the role of women and race in the process of the Cuban Revolution. Students will be expected to share their opinions of the assigned reading.


Week 10: Spring Break
Finish writing paper comparing the Cuban Revolution with the Mexican Revolution.

Week 11: Chile’s Attempt at Autonomy

Monday, March 24: Chilean President Salvador Allende has been the only democratically-elected socialist president in world history. Elected in 1970, he became a casualty of the Cold War in 1973, when he was assassinated in a C.I.A.-sponsored coup. During this section of the course, we will delve deeply into the Allende years by reading a classic of Latin American historiography: Peter Winn’s Weavers of Revolution.

For this session read, Skidmore and Smith, 112 – 143.

PAPERS COMPARING THE CUBAN REVOLUTION AND MEXICAN REVOLUTION ARE DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS PERIOD

Wednesday, March 26: Read, Winn, pp. 3 - 79.

Week 12: Chile Continued

Monday, March 31:
Read: Winn, pp. 79 - 159

Wednesday, April 2:
Read: Winn, 159 – 197

Week 13:

Monday, April 7: Finish Winn; Film, “Missing”

Wednesday, April 9: Central America Overview
Read: Skidmore and Smith, 326 – 344

Week 14: Nicaragua

Monday, April 14:
Read: Sandinistas Speak, pp. 13 – 42 and 107 – 111 in course packet.

Wednesday, April 16:
Read: “Leticia: A Nicaraguan Woman’s Struggle” in Beezley and Ewell, The Human Tradition in Latin America in course packet.

2 pg. response papers on the Sandinistas are due at the beginning of this period.
Week 15: Terror in Peru

Monday, April 21:
Read Castañeda, 119 – 128 and Daniel Masterson, “In the Shining Path of Mariátegui, Mao Tse-tung, or Presidente Gonzalo? Perú’s Sendero Luminoso in Historical Perspective” (course packet).

Wednesday, April 23:
Video on The Shining Path

Week 16: EZLN and the Failed Promises of Globalization

Monday, April 28:
Read: Begin reading EZLN primary sources in course packet.

Wednesday April 30: Finish reading EZLN sources.

Monday, May 4: Conclusions

Papers on Winn’s Weavers of Revolution are due no later than May 14.