

## Latin American History at the Movies (HIST 368)

*“Certainly they will never be obliged to read history again.”*

– D.W. Griffith

Fall 2019, Truman State University  
MC114, T 6:00-8:50  
Office: MC 227

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### Description

How has the popular cinema industry portrayed Latin American History? What can we learn from these depictions? In this class we will watch and analyze feature films from the United States and Latin America which grapple with various events and issues in Latin America. Through these films, we will both critically analyze historical developments in Latin America as well as the assumptions and ideological perspectives that go into the making of a film on Latin America. Through this process, we will develop a deeper appreciation for the complexities that embody Latin American and the problems that the region faces.

See the syllabus addendum on Blackboard for additional class policies.

### Readings

There are three texts for the class. The primary text is the films we will watch on Latin American history. A second text is an essay dissecting either the film or issues presented in the film. The third text is a primary source related to issues portrayed in the film. These last two texts will be posted to the blackboard webpage. Read both of them before class so that you are prepared to carry on intelligent discussions of the films in class.

### Assignments and grades

Course grades will be based on the following assignments:

**Film introductions and discussions** (21 percent of course grade). The class will divide up into small groups for each film. These groups will bring the film to class, present an introduction to the film, and lead a discussion after viewing it. This assignment involves previewing the film (as well as other films by the same director or on the same topic), researching the historical context of the film, selecting a primary source document related to the historical themes portrayed in the film, and engaging students in an active discussion of the film.

The introductions must show evidence of serious scholarly research that informs the presentations. It is the group's responsibility to help the class understand the historical significance of what is happening in the film, and your grade will be based on how well you realize that objective. See the blackboard webpage for a bibliography of suggested starting points for your research. Consider questions such as these in preparing for your presentation:

- Who is the director? What else has this person made and how does this film fit into that genre?
- What evidence is there of historical research that the filmmaker conducted in the process of producing the film?

- What is the potential and limitations of the medium of film for interpreting history as portrayed through this specific film?
- What are the cinematographic virtues of the film?
- How have other reviewers critiqued this film?

To assist in the class discussion of the film, bring to class:

- A list of discussion questions, a study guide, related web sites, and/or class exercises for discussing the film.
- Powerpoints or other visual aids such as maps, photographs, drawings, etc., to assist in the introduction and discussion of the film.
- Anything else that will help in the interpretation and understanding of the film.

The presenters must also:

- Select a primary source document related to the historical themes portrayed in the film. Have me approve it for posting one week in advance to the Blackboard website.
- Develop an annotated bibliography of sources related to the film and its historical context and give it to me.
- Take the lead on guiding the discussion on the Blackboard website.

**Please note:** It is your group's responsibility to pick up the film from Pickler library (or any other source) and bring it to class for viewing. In order to be sure that the film is not checked out when we need it in class, it is a good idea for one person in your group to put a hold on the film for a day or two before we watch it.

**Source analysis** (20 percent). Select one scholarly book related to the historical topic of the film you are presenting and critique its argument. The essay should be three pages long, typed, double-spaced, follow good essay form (have an intro, thesis, conclusion, etc.) and include citations, a bibliography, and page numbers. The essay is due at the time you present your film. Each member of your group must select a different book

**Discussion board postings** (3 points each, for a total of 39 percent of course grade). After each class discussion, post to the discussion board on the blackboard webpage a short essay with *your* assessment of the historical value of the film, including relating it to the day's assigned readings. How successful was the film in communicating historical facts and interpretations? Was it more or less successful than the readings? Did the film have other goals, and did it successfully achieve these? How would you critique the comments of your classmates on this film? I will grade your posting based on your incorporation of assigned readings, synthesis of the material, ability to analyze its significance, an evaluation of its importance to the broader themes of this class, and the extent to which you engage other students in a virtual discussion. Post your essay to the discussion board by Friday following the day we have watched the film.

**Final project** (20 percent). As a class, we will make a film on a historical event in Latin America. This will include conducting research on the topic, writing a script, designing costumes, filming the event, and finally editing the film.

## **Class Schedule**

Aug 20 Introduction

**Read:** Donald F. Stevens, "Never Read History Again? The Possibilities and Perils of Cinema as Historical Depiction," in *Based on a True Story: Latin American History at the Movies*, ed. Donald F. Stevens (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1997), 1-11.

**Films:** *Birth of a Nation*, 1:34-1:47 (PN1995.75 .B57 1998)  
*Americas*, pt. 7, *Builders of Images: Latin American Cultural Identity*, 47-57 (F1408 .A617 1993 pt.7)  
*Gringo in Mañanaland* (PN1995.9.L37 G75 1995)  
*bell hooks: Cultural Criticism & Transformation*, 37-49 (HM101 .B44 1997)

August 27 Emiliano Zapata

**Read:** Jonathan M. Schoenwald, "Rewriting Revolution: The Origins, Production and Reception of "Viva Zapata!," *Film History* 8, no. 2 (1996): 109-30.

**Film:** *Viva Zapata* (F1234.Z37 V58 2010)

Sept 3 Pancho Villa

**Read:** Aurelio de los Reyes, "With Villa in Mexico--On Location," *Performing Arts Annual* (1986): 98-131.

**Film:** *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* (F1234.V63 A63 2004)

Sept 10 Ernesto Guevara de la Serna

**Read:** Claire Williams, "Los diarios de motocicleta as Pan-American Travelogue," *Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Breaking into the global market*, ed. Deborah Shaw (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 11-27.

**Film:** *The Motorcycle Diaries* (F2224 .G783 2005)

Sept 17 Cuba

**Read:** Matt D. Childs, "An Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara's Foco Theory," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, no. 3 (October 1995): 593-624.

**Film:** *Che Part 1* (F1787.5 .G83132 2009)

Sept 24 Bolivia

**Read:** Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 701-39.

**Film:** *Che Part 2* (F1787.5 .G83132 2009)

Oct 1 Brazil

**Read:** A. J Langguth, *Hidden Terrors* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 166-96.

**Film:** *Four Days in September* (PN1995.9 .F67169 O27 2003)

Oct 8 Uruguay

**Read:** Martha Knisely Huggins, *Political Policing: The United States and Latin America* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1998), 13-35.

**Film:** *State of Siege* (PN1995.9 .F6714 E828 2015)

Oct 15 Chile

**Read:** Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: New Press, 2004), 275-330.

**Film:** *Missing* (F3100 .H3872 2004)

Oct 22 Pinochet

**Read:** Paula T. Cronovich, "'No' and No: The Campaign of 1988 and Pablo Larraín's Film," *Radical History Review* 124 (January 2016): 165-76.

**Film:** *No* (PN1995.9 .F6718 N6 2013)

Oct 29 Peru

**Read:** Deborah Poole and Gerardo Rénique, "The New Chroniclers of Peru: U.S. Scholars and Their 'Shining Path' of Peasant Rebellion," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10, no. 2 (1991): 133-91.

**Film:** *La Boca Del Lobo = The Lion's Den* (PN1995.9.F6718 B63 1990)

Nov 5 Presidente Gonzalo

**Read** Jaymie Patricia Heilman, "Family Ties: The Political Genealogy of Shining Path's Comrade Norah," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29, no. 2 (April 2010): 155-69.

**Film:** *The Dancer Upstairs* (PR6069.H286 D363 2003)

Nov 12 Venezuela

**Read:** Fernando Coronil, "State Reflections: The 2002 Coup against Hugo Chávez," in *The Revolution in Venezuela: Social and Political Change Under Chávez*, ed. Thomas Ponniah and Jonathan Eastwood (Cambridge: Harvard Univ David Rockefeller, 2011), 37-65.

**Film:** *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (F2329.22 .C48 R49 2002)

Nov 29: Work on film

Dec 3 Preview film

Dec 10 Present film from class project to campus community.