

**Latin American History at the Movies (HIST 368):  
Political Films**

*“Certainly they will never be obliged to read history again.”*  
– D.W. Griffith

Spring 2012  
MC209, T 6:00-8:50  
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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.

**Requirements**

Our goal in this class is to challenge existing assumptions, engage alternative viewpoints, and encourage critical thinking. Through the study of history, we seek to empower ourselves to be better citizens, and to provide ourselves with the skills necessary to play a positive and educated role in society. We need to be active constituents rather than mere recipients of our education. To accomplish those tasks, we should strive to create an open and supportive learning environment. Regular attendance and active participation are also necessary. Please drop me a note if you are unable to attend, or if you have any concerns or suggestions for improving the class.

**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 or essays 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** (18 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 should 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.
- Overheads, powerpoint, 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.

**Please Note:** It is your group's responsibility to pick up the film from Pickler library 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). Selection one book or two articles and/or book chapters related to the historical topic of the film and critique the argument in those readings. 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.

**Discussion board postings** (3 percent each, for a total of 42 percent of course grade). After each class discussion, post to the discussion board on the class 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 the Monday following the day we have watched the film.

**Final project** (20 percent). 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. We will present this film to class as our final exam on Tuesday, May 1.

## Class Schedule

Jan 10 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)

Jan 17 Pancho Villa

**Read:** Aurelio de los Reyes, "With Villa in Mexico--On Location," *Performing Arts Annual* (1986): 98-131; "With Villa North of the Border--On Location," *Performing Arts Annual* (1987): 124-53.

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

Jan 24 Indigenous peoples

**Read:** James Schofield Saeger, "The Mission and Historical Missions: Film and the Writing of History," *The Americas* 51, no. 3 (January 1995): 393-415.

**Film:** *The Mission* (PN1995.9.A3 M57 1986)

Jan 31 Slave resistance

**Read:** John Mraz, "Recasting Cuban Slavery: *The Other Francisco* and *The Last Supper*," in *Based on a True Story: Latin American History at the Movies*, ed. Donald Fithian Stevens (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1997), 103-122

**Film:** *The Last Supper* (PN1995.9.F6718 U48 2008)

Feb 7 Mexico

**Read:** Peter Biskind, "Ripping off Zapata Revolution Hollywood Style," *Cineaste* 7, no. 2 (1976): 10-15; Paul J. Vanderwood, "An American Cold Warrior: Viva Zapata! (1952)," in *American history/American film: Interpreting the Hollywood image*, ed. John E O'Connor and Martin A Jackson (New York: Ungar, 1980), 183-201.

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

Feb 14 1950s Guatemala

**Read:** Jim Handy, "'The Most Precious Fruit of the Revolution': The Guatemalan Agrarian Reform 1952-1954," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (November 1988): 675-705.

**Film:** *El Silencio de Neto = The Silence of Neto* (PN1995.9.F6718 S545 1998)

Feb 21 1980s Guatemala

**Read:** Carlota Mcallister, "A Headlong Rush Into The Future: Violence and revolution in a Guatemalan Indigenous village," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and counterinsurgent violence during Latin America's long cold war*, ed. Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 276-308.

**Film:** *Men With Guns* (PN1995.9.F6718 M45 2003)

Feb 28 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)

March 13 Che

**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)

March 20 Guerrillas

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

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

March 27 Coups

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

**Film:** *Missing* (PN1995.9.P6 M57 2004)

April 3 Sandinistas

**Read:** Roger Peace, "Winning Hearts and Minds: The Debate Over U.S. Intervention in Nicaragua in the 1980s," *Peace & Change* 35, no. 1 (January 2010): 1-38.

**Film:** *Latino* (PN1995.9.W3 L38 2011)

April 10 Sendero Luminoso

**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)

April 17 Dirty Wars

**Read:** O'Neill Blacker, "Cold War in the Countryside: Conflict in Guerrero, Mexico," *The Americas* 66, no. 2 (October 2009): 181-210.

**Film:** *El Violín = The Violin* (PN1995.9.F6718 V56 2008)

April 24 Liberation Theology

**Read:** Timothy Shortell, "Radicalization of Religious Discourse in El Salvador: The Case of Oscar A. Romero." *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 87-103.

**Film:** *Romero* (BX4705.R669 R64 2000)

May 1 Present film from class project to campus community.