Peoples and Cultures of Latin America

Anthropology 162A || International Studies 177J || Chican@/Latin@ Studies 120
University of California, Irvine
Summer Session II 2016

Instructor: Dr. Taylor C. Nelms, Department of Anthropology, UC Irvine
Meeting time: Tuesday & Thursday, 9-11:50am
Meeting location: Donald Bren Hall, Room 1300
Office hours: Tuesdays, 12:30-1:30pm at the Merage School of Business courtyard
Email: tnelms at uci dot edu

§ Course description

Sex. Drugs. Zombies.

News about Latin America is often sensationalist, advertising poverty and violence. But such representations ignore the cultural diversity of the people living in the region and the political and economic histories that have shaped their lives and livelihoods. This course introduces students to the geographic region now known as “Latin America” (to which is often appended “the Caribbean”), investigating what unites and divides the people and cultures across the hemisphere. We will focus specifically on North-South patterns of economic circulation through which particular forms of value—commodities, technologies, ideas, even human beings—are extracted, produced, exchanged, transformed, and consumed. From silver mining to oil extraction, narcotrafficking to ideas of security, zombie movies to models of economic development, we will explore the economic past, present, and future of Latin America and the ways the economy has shaped social and political life there. Through a cross-section of anthropological research conducted in the region—supplemented by films, lectures, class discussion, and writing assignments—this course is designed to provide students with the framework and resources to understand contemporary Latin America and the Caribbean in historical and sociocultural context.

§ Course objectives

1) To offer a survey of research and debates in anthropology about the diverse peoples and cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean, focusing on questions of economy, politics, and value;
2) To introduce important problems and issues affecting life in Latin America and the Caribbean today, emphasizing poverty, inequality, and development;
3) To foster a critical understanding of how the region’s history has impacted contemporary living conditions, social and cultural forms, political debates, and imaginations of the future;
4) To develop the skills to find, evaluate, comprehend, and analyze primary and secondary research materials, written and otherwise, and to construct evidence-based arguments on the basis of those materials; and
5) To cultivate a sensitivity to and understanding of sociocultural difference, historical conditions, and power inequalities, including those of race, gender, and class.

§ Course requirements

Students in this course will be evaluated on the basis of their regular attendance and participation, in-class free-writing exercises and quizzes/reading responses on assigned readings, and a final research project with several components: a proposal, annotated bibliography, class presentation and an 8-10-page paper.
1) Your **attendance** at all class sessions is mandatory and expected. You are required to complete all readings and assignments before coming to class the day for which they were assigned. Attendance also requires that you remain attentive in class.

2) The success of this course depends on your **participation**, which means informed speaking and listening, as well as finishing group work, in-class presentations, and other in-class assignments, as requested on a weekly basis. I expect you to have completed the readings and come to class ready to engage your fellow classmates respectfully and generously.

3) At the beginning of each class, I will ask you to take 5-10 minutes to **free-write** on a question or set of questions related to the readings assigned for that meeting. I will collect this writing for proof of attendance/participation, but it will not be graded. However, two times during this five-week course, I will ask you to respond to the readings by answering a few questions about them instead of free-writing. These brief **quizzes/reading responses** will require you to reflect on the readings in the context of the themes of the course. Based on your responses, you will be graded on whether or not you did the readings.

4) This course will build towards a final research project: a **cultural biography of a commodity**, which investigates, from production to consumption, the social and cultural meanings of a particular Latin American form of value. The project has four components: a **1-page project proposal**, an **annotated bibliography**, a **class presentation** to be delivered the last week of class, and an **8-10-page final paper**. Assignment details will be given separately.

**§ Evaluation**

Grades for this course will be assigned as follows:

- Attendance and participation ........................................... 20%
- In-class quizzes/reading responses .................................. 10% each (20% total)
- Project proposal .......................................................... 10%
- Annotated bibliography .................................................. 10%
- Class presentation ...................................................... 20%
- Final paper .................................................................. 20%

**§ Readings**

You are required to purchase one book for this class. It is:


**§ Diversity and accessibility**

All of us learn in different ways, and I am committed to providing a learning environment that is equitable, inclusive, and conducive to the education of all students. Please talk to me about your individual learning needs and how this course can best address them.

Students with disabilities or students who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Disability Services Center as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

**§ Academic honesty**

Academic dishonesty is unacceptable and plagiarism will NOT be tolerated. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty or plagiarism, contact me directly.
§ Course schedule

Tuesday, August 2—Beginnings: Colonialism, Then and Now

Film: “When Worlds Collide” (Rubén Martínez, 2010)

Thursday, August 4—Gold, Silver, and Tin

Readings:

Tuesday, August 9—Sugar and Zombies

Readings:

Read in class:

Thursday, August 11—Coca and Corridos

*Due: Paper proposal*

Readings:

Listen:

Tuesday, August 16—Bananas

Readings:

Thursday, August 18—Oil

Readings:

Film: “Crude” (Joe Berlinger, 2009)

Tuesday, August 23—Dictatorship, Debt, and Development

Due: Annotated bibliography

Readings:

Background:
Read in class:


Thursday, August 25— Dollars, Tupperware, and Inca Kola

Readings:


Tuesday, August 30—Security, Guns, and Democracy

Readings:


Thursday, September 1—Final presentations!

Due: Deliver your final presentation in class!

Tuesday, September 6—Final papers!

Due: Upload your final papers to the designated EEE dropbox by 5pm.