Latin American History at the Movies (HIST 365.01)

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

– D.W. Griffith

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MC209, T 6:30-9:20
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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 biases which go into the making of a film on Latin America. Through this process, we will develop a deeper appreciation for the complexities which embody Latin American and the problems which the region faces.

Requirements
You are expected and required to attend every class session, and you are responsible for the material covered in the lectures, readings and films, and for any announcements made in class. Unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade. Please drop me an email note if you are sick or otherwise unable to attend class. If you have a disability or any conflicts which may affect your class performance, please bring this to my attention immediately so that we can make arrangements for this to be a positive learning experience for you. Please let me know if you have suggestions for improving the class. I do not treat students as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge; we need to be constituents rather than simply recipients of our education. Our goal 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.

Readings
There are three texts for the class. The primary text is the films we will watch on Latin American history. Two additional books will help us critically dissect these films:


For each class period we will read a chapter in the Martin/Wasserman book that talks very broadly about the themes that the film discusses, as well as an essay (from Stevens’ edited
collection or elsewhere) that specifically critiques the film under consideration. We are also watching several films that are not in Stevens’ book; there will be supplementary readings for these films assigned later. Read the assignments before class so that you are prepared to carry on a intelligent discussions of the films in class.

Assignments and grades

Course grades will be based on the following assignments:

• **Film introductions and discussions** (28% of course grade). Student groups will introduce each of the films and lead the discussion of that film. This will involve previewing the film (and perhaps other films by the same director or on the same topic), researching the historical context of the film, and engaging students actively in a discussion of the film. 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 film maker 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 handout for the class that may include items such as a list of discussion questions, a study guide, related web sites, and/or class exercises for discussing the film.
  • An annotated bibliography of sources related to this film and its historical context (either included in the class handout or given directly to the instructor).
  • Copies for the class of a short primary source document related to the historical themes portrayed in the film.
  • For films not included in the Stevens’ text, a similar scholarly article of about 20 pages related to the film and its historical context.
  • 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.

• **Discussion board postings** (3% each, for a total of 42% 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? 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 seen the film.

- **Final project** (worth 30% of the course grade). Working in small groups, rewrite the script of one of the films we have viewed in order to make it historically more accurate. What were the shortcomings of the historical interpretations and ability to communicate historical concepts, and how would you improve the film’s ability to communicate this information? This assignment must be conducted as a scholarly work which includes library research and proper citations. The form and prose of the project, however, should be creative and can take a variety of forms (a script, a story board, re-filming parts of the film, etc.), but must include an annotated bibliography. The last day of class we will present and critique these projects.

**Class Schedule**

Jan 17 Introduction
- **Read:** Donald F. Stevens, “Never Read History Again? The Possibilities and Perils of Cinema as Historical Depiction” Martin/Wasserman, ch. 1
  *Gringo in Mañanaland* (Video PN1995.9.L37 G75 1995)

Jan 24 Work on film presentations and final projects
- **Read:** Martin/Wasserman, ch. 2

Jan 31 Columbus
- **Read:** Sonya Lipsett-Rivera and Sergio Rivera Ayala, “Columbus Takes On the Forces of Darkness, or Film and Historical Myth in *1492: The Conquest of Paradise*” Martin/Wasserman, ch. 3
- **Film:** *1492: The Conquest of Paradise* (Video PN1995.9 H5 F68 1993; DVD E111 .F68 2002)

Feb 7 Conquest
- **Read:** Thomas H. Holloway, “Whose Conquest Is This, Anyway? *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*” Martin/Wasserman, ch. 4

Feb 14 Women
Read:  Susan E. Ramirez, “I, the Worst of All: The Literary Life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz”  
Martin/Wasserman, ch. 6  

Feb 21 Indigenous peoples  
Read:  James Schofield Saeger, “The Mission and Historical Missions: Film and the Writing of History”  
Martin/Wasserman, ch. 5  

Feb 28 Patriarchy  
Read:  Donald F. Stevens, “Passion and Patriarchy in Nineteenth-Century Argentina: Maria Luisa Bemberg's Camila”  
Martin/Wasserman, ch. 8  

March 7 Slavery  
Read:  John Mraz, “Recasting Cuban Slavery: The Other Francisco and The Last Supper”  
Martin/Wasserman, ch. 7  

March 21 Regionalism  
Read:  Barbara A. Tenenbaum, “Why Tita Didn't Marry the Doctor, or Mexican History in Like Water for Chocolate”  
Martin/Wasserman, ch. 9  

March 28 Historical Memory  
Read:  Mark D. Szuchman, “Depicting the Past in Argentine Films: Family Drama and Historical Debate in Miss Mary and The Official Story”  
Martin/Wasserman, ch. 10  

April 4 Mexican Revolution  
Read:  Martin/Wasserman, ch. 11  
TBA  
Film:  *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* (DVD F1234.V63 A63 2004)
April 11 Class politics
Read: Martin/Wasserman, ch. 12
TBA

April 18 Progress
Read: Martin/Wasserman, ch. 13
TBA
Film: *Frida* (DVD ND259.K33 F73 2004)

April 25 Revolution
Read: Martin/Wasserman, ch. 14
TBA
Film: *The Motorcycle Diaries* (DVD F2224 .G783 2005)

May 2 Social Issues
Read: Martin/Wasserman, ch. 15
TBA

May 9 Final Presentations
Bibliography

This is a basic bibliography of sources on Latin American Cinema which are available in the library. Many more items are also available in Siegmund’s bibliography (http://www.libs.uga.edu/lais/laision7.html). The Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture (Ref F1406 .E53 1996) and the Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures (Ref F1406 .E515 2000) include good background information on the topics discussed in the films we will watch in class. Use Latin American-specific databases such as the following to search for more information on your film and the historical events depicted in it.

- HAPI Online, Hispanic American Periodicals Index (http://hapi.gseis.ucla.edu/)
- HLAS Online, Handbook of Latin American Studies (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/hlas/)
- UT-LANIC, University of Texas -- Latin American Network Information Center (http://lanic.utexas.edu/)


Filmography

This is a select list of feature length films on Latin America. Films included in the syllabus are starred (*), and films critiqued in Stevens’ edited book have a hatch mark (#). Films in the Truman media library include call numbers.

* # 1492: Conquest of Paradise (1992). The film chronicles the first two landmark voyages of Columbus and takes us to the brink of his third and last. (Video PN1995.9 H5 F68 1993; DVD E111 .F68 2002)


Amores perros (2001). Three different people (young punk, supermodel, ex-radical turned hit man) and their dogs are catapulted into dramatic and unforeseen circumstances in the wake of a terrible car crash. (DVD PN1995.9.F6718 A55 2001)


At Play in the Fields of the Lord (1992). Missionaries try to contact and convert a group of Indians in the Brazilian rainforest.


Blood of the Condor = Yawar Mallku (1969). A dramatization of an actual incident which involved charges of sterilization of Quechuan Indian women without their consent as part of a birth control program administered by the United States Peace Corps.


Central Station = Central do Brasil (1998). An emotive journey of a former school teacher, who writes letters for illiterate people at Rio de Janeiro's central station, Central do Brasil; and a young boy, whose mother has just died in a car accident, to Brazil's remote Northeast, in search for the father he never knew. (PN1995.9.F67169 C45 1999)

Christopher Columbus: The Discovery (1992). Depicts Columbus' first trans-Atlantic voyage as an epic and heroic adventure.


Como Era Gostoso o Meu Frances = How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman (1971). In the coastal wilds of 16th-century Brazil, a French soldier is captured by a tribe of people-eating Indians. (Video F2230.2.T84 C6 1995)

Courage = Coraje (1998). A true story based on the last months in the life of Maria Elena Moyano, a leader of a women's organization in a slum outside of Lima who was killed by the Shining Path for her resistance. (Video HQ1236.P47 C68 1998)


The Emerald Forest (1985). Bill Markham, an engineer, returns to the Amazon year after year searching for his son who had disappeared into the jungle. After ten years of searching, Markham finds the man that had once been his boy, but now is a warrior from a different world.


Fidel (2001). Showtime biography of Fidel Castro’s rise to power in Cuba.


* Frida (2002). The life of artist Frida Kahlo, from her humble upbringing to her worldwide fame and controversy that surrounded both her and her husband, Diego Rivera. (DVD ND259.K33 F73 2004)
* Gabriela (1983). Set in Brazil, story of a middle-aged bar owner whose passionate romance with young Gabriela sends sparks flying in a town where sex and politics are the main diversions.


The House of the Spirits (1993). Based on Isabel Allende's novel, examines political, social, and economic changes in Chile. (Video PQ8098.1 L54 C323 1993; DVD PQ8098.1.L54 C323 2001)

* I, the Worst of All = Yo, la peor de todas (1990). This historical drama tells the story of Juana Ines de la Cruz, one of the greatest poets of the Spanish Siglo de Oro who enters a convent in order to pursue her passion for writing. (Video PQ7296.J6 Z982 1990; DVD PN1995.9.F6718 Y63 2003)


Latino (1985). A Chicano Green Beret begins to question the morality of the secret war he is fighting in the jungles of Nicaragua.

Lucia (1968). Follows the lives of three different women named Lucía during three different revolutionary periods of Cuba's history, the Cuban War of Independence in 1895, the Machado era in the 1930's, and post-revolutionary Cuba of the 1960's. (Video PN1995.9.F6718 L83 1990Z)


Memorias del Subdesarrollo = Inconsolable Memories. Memories of Underdevelopment (1968). A study of Cuban society before and after the revolution as seen through the eyes of a man who is a landlord and selfstyled writer. (Video PN1995.9 F6718 M44 1980Z)


# Miss Mary (1986). Set in 1930s Bueno Aires, this is the story of a cultured English governess whose display of compassion disrupts the tradition-bound existence of the wealthy household in which she works.


The Mosquito Coast (1986). Angered by the decline of American society, a brilliant inventor leads his family into the remote Central American jungles to carve out a new society. (PS3570.H4 M6 1999)


* # The Official Story (1985). In the mid-70's, Argentina's military dictatorship carried out a brutal campaign of torture and murder against thousands of its own citizens. This is the story of the sheltered wife of a wealthy businessman who comes to face the legacy of that terror. (Video PN1995.9 F6718 H57 1995; DVD PN1995.9.F6718 H57 1998)

Los Olvidados (1950). Luis Bunuel's study of street gangs set in the outskirts of Mexico City; a good boy is contaminated by young thugs in the slums, and both he and his tormentor die violently. (Video PN1995.9 F6718 O49 1993)

La otra conquista/The other conquest (2002). The story of Mexico in the decade after the conquest by Spain in 1520.


Rodrigo D: No Futuro (1991). A shocking portrayal of the reckless existence of youths in Medellín, Colombia, one of the most dangerous cities in Latin America.


Thirteen Days (2001). About the Cuban Missile Crisis. (DVD E841 .T45 2001)


Y tu mamá también (2002). Two teens set off on a wild cross-country trip with seductive, 28-year-old Luisa.


