

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

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

– D.W. Griffith

Spring 2009  
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 ideological perspectives 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

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. Two additional books will help us critically dissect these films:

Chasteen, John Charles. *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, 2d ed.

New York: Norton, 2006. ISBN: 0-393-92769-5

Stevens, Donald Fithian, ed. *Based on a True Story: Latin American History at the Movies*.

Latin-American silhouettes. Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1997. ISBN: 0-8420-2781-5

For each class period we will read a chapter in the Chasteen book (or a similar reading) 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. Read the assignments 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** (28 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 (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. The introductions should show evidence of serious scholarly research (perhaps equal to that for a research paper) 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. The films we are watching are on hold in the media library in Pickler; bring the film to class the day your group introduces it. 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 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.
- 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 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** (worth 30 percent of the course grade). 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 5.

## Class Schedule

Jan 13 Introduction

**Read:** Donald F. Stevens, "Never Read History Again? The Possibilities and Perils of Cinema as Historical Depiction"

Chasteen, Introduction

**Films:** *Birth of a Nation*, 1:34-1:47 (Video PN1995.75 .B57 1984; DVD PN1995.75 .B57 1998)

*Americas*, pt. 7, *Builders of Images: Latin American Cultural Identity*, 47-57 (F1408 .A617 1993 pt.7)

*Gringo in Mañanaland* (Video PN1995.9.L37 G75 1995)

*bell hooks: Cultural Criticism & Transformation*, 37-49 (HM101 .B44 1997)

Jan 20 Filming a history movie

**Read:** Juan Bruce-Novoa, "Pancho Villa: Post-Colonial Colonialism, or the Return of the Americano," *Kritikos* 2 (March 2005), <http://mailer.fsu.edu/~nr03/garnet-nr03/Pancho%20Villa.htm>

Aurelio de los Reyes, "With Villa North of the Border--On Location," *Performing Arts Annual* 1987, 124-53, [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/1e/37/02.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1e/37/02.pdf).

Nancy Brandt, "Pancho Villa: The Making of a Modern Legend." *The Americas* 21, no. 2 (October 1964): 146-62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/979058>

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

Jan 27 Introduction to filmmaking

Feb 3 Ancient Civilizations

**Read:** David Freidel, "Betraying the Maya," *Archaeology* 60, no. 2 (March/April 2007): 36-41 (on website).

Traci Ardren, "Is *Apocalypso* Pornography?" *Archaeology*, December 5, 2006, <http://www.archaeology.org/online/reviews/apocalypso.html>

Andrea Stone, "Orcs in Loincloths," *Archaeology*, January 3, 2007, <http://www.archaeology.org/online/reviews/apocalypso2.html>.

**Film:** *Apocalypso* (DVD PN1995.9.F671646 A66335 2007)

Feb 10 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*"

Chasteen, ch. 1  
**Film:** *1492: The Conquest of Paradise* (Video PN1995.9 H5 F68 1993; DVD E111 .F68 2002)

Feb 17 Conquest

**Read:** Thomas H. Holloway, “Whose Conquest Is This, Anyway? *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*”

Benjamin Keen and Keith Haynes, *A History of Latin America*, 7th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 73-74 (on webpage).

**Film:** *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (Video PN1995.9 .F6715 A354 1991; DVD PN1995.9.F6715 A354 2000)

Feb 24 Women

**Read:** Susan E. Ramirez, “I, the Worst of All: The Literary Life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz”

Chasteen, ch. 2

**Film:** *I, the Worst of All* (Video PQ7296.J6 Z982 1990; DVD PN1995.9.F6718 Y63 2003)

March 3 Slavery

**Read:** Randal Johnson, “Carnavalesque Celebration in Xica da Silva,” in *Brazilian Cinema*, ed. Randal Johnson and Robert Stam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 216-24 (on webpage).

Susan Migden Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 130-46 (on webpage).

**Film:** *Xiça* (Video PN1995.9 F67169 X5 1993)

March 17 Indigenous peoples

**Read:** James Schofield Saeger, “*The Mission* and Historical Missions: Film and the Writing of History”

Chasteen, ch. 3

**Film:** *The Mission* (Video PN1995.9 A3 M57 1991; DVD PN1995.9.A3 M57 1986)

March 24 Patriarchy

**Read:** Donald F. Stevens, “Passion and Patriarchy in Nineteenth-Century Argentina: Maria Luisa Bemberg's *Camila*”

Chasteen, ch. 4

**Film:** *Camila* (Video PN1995.9.F6718 C25 1995; DVD PN1995.9.F6718 C25 2002)

March 31 Slave resistance

**Read:** John Mraz, “Recasting Cuban Slavery: *The Other Francisco* and *The Last Supper*”

Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760-1860* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 47-62, 162-66 (on webpage).

Chasteen, ch. 5

**Film:** *The Last Supper* (PN1995.9.F6718 L3 1988)

#### April 7 Nationalism

**Read:** Seth Fein, "Frida," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (October 2003): 1261-63, [http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/108.4/mr\\_1.html](http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/108.4/mr_1.html).

Eli Bartra and John Mraz, "Las Dos Fridas: History and Transcultural Identities," *Rethinking History* 9, no. 4 (December 2005): 449-57, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=afh&AN=18807081&site=ehost-live>

Chasteen, ch. 6-7

**Film:** *Frida* (DVD ND259.K33 F73 2004)

#### April 14 Revolution

**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 (on webpage).

Chasteen, ch. 8

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

#### April 21 Reaction

**Read:** Michael Löwy, "Marxism and Christianity in Latin America." *Latin American Perspectives* 20, no. 4 (January 1993): 28-42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633912>

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, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3712232>

Chasteen, ch. 9

**Film:** *Romero* (Video BX4705.R669 R64 1990; DVD BX4705.R669 R64 2000)

#### April 28 Neoliberalism

**Read:** Juan Carlos Ibáñez and Manuel Palacio, "Olvidados = The young and the damned," in *The cinema of Latin America*, ed. Alberto Elena and Marina Díaz López (London; New York: Wallflower, 2003), 53-61 (on webpage).

Chasteen, ch. 10

**Film:** *Los Olvidados* (Video PN1995.9 F6718 O49 1993)

May 5 Present film from class project to campus community.