

HIST 199 - Fall 2012

## Freshman Seminar: Che Guevara: From Marxist Guerrilla to Pop Icon

Instructor: Carlos Aguirre

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 2-3 pm; Wednesdays, 10-12 am.

### Course Description

Che Guevara must be one of the most recognizable historical characters in the world. His face –actually, one specific version of it, the famous photo that has been used millions of times in posters, graffiti, t-shirts, magazine covers, political banners, and virtually every type of commodity, from watches to beer– has been seen by generations of peoples in all corners of the planet. And yet, his life and ideas are not as well known today as one would think. Guevara remains a symbol for different forms of protest and contestation, albeit the people that embrace him are not always aware of his trajectory. He has also been transformed into a commercial icon, somehow contradicting his anti-capitalist, socialist, and revolutionary ideas.

This seminar will introduce students to the life and times of Che Guevara and will address the paradoxical survival of Che Guevara as a symbol of rebelliousness, the appropriation of his figure –and at times his ideas– by a variety of movements (radical, socialist, communist, environmentalist, Indigenous, nationalist, gay, youth, and more), and his transformation into a commercial emblem. This seminar will allow students to understand one of the key figures in twentieth-century world history, but also some of the most important social, cultural, and political transformations that have shaped the world in the last six decades.

### Course policies

1. Students are expected to attend lectures consistently. A passing grade will be hard to achieve without regular attendance. Students must also consistently read the assigned materials and actively participate in class discussions.
2. A common form of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, will not be tolerated. Students must become familiar with the University of Oregon rules about this issue. More information will be offered at the appropriate time.
3. An atmosphere of mutual respect, tolerance, and fairness will be enforced by the instructor. Students must behave in ways proper to an academic environment--i.e. no talking, eating, or newspaper reading during lecture. Cell phones, i-pods, and other electronic devices can not be used during class. Laptops are allowed ONLY for note-taking, and students who use laptops in class must seat in the front row. If a student uses his/her laptop for other purposes during class time (web browsing, chatting, e-mail

checking), he/she will be banned from bringing a laptop computer to the classroom.  
 4. "Incomplete" grades will be granted only in cases of extreme need and only to those students that have an acceptable record of class attendance and have at least a C average in their evaluations. Students that need an "incomplete" grade must make arrangements with the instructor on or before the last week of classes.

### Requirements

- Individual research project: 10%. More details in attached page.
- Group research project: 30%. More details in attached page.
- Group presentation: 10%. More details in attached page.
- Midterm exam: 20%
- Final exam: 30%

### Required readings

The following books are available for purchase at the Duckstore and on reserve at Knight Library:

Ernesto Che Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries. Notes on a Latin American Journey* (Ocean Press, 2003).

Michael Casey, *Che's Afterlife. The Legacy of an Image* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009).

In addition, a number of required materials will be available on Blackboard. These materials are marked BB on the schedule below.

### Schedule of topics, readings and other activities

Week 1: Introduction. Who was Ernesto Guevara? Early years and the motorcycle trip, 1928-52

Reading: Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries* (all)  
 Screening of film *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004)

Week 2: Witnessing social change and US intervention: Guatemala, 1953-54

Reading: Guevara, *Back on the Road* (BB)

Week 3: Ernesto Guevara becomes Che: The Cuban Revolution, 1955-1959

Readings: Dosal, “The Making of a Guerrilla” and “Comandante Che” (BB)

Week 4: Che, Cuba, and the making and impact of *Guerrilla Warfare*

Readings: Guevara, “The Guerrilla Band”; Matt Childs, “An Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara's Foco Theory”

Individual research project DUE: October 18.

Week 5: From Congo to Bolivia

Readings: Dosal, “The History of a Failure,” Castañeda, “Betrayed by Whom in Bolivia?”; Fidel Castro, “Introduction” to Guevara’s *The Bolivian Diary* (BB)

MIDTERM EXAM: October 25

Week 6: The death of Che Guevara and the beginning of his legend: Bolivia, 1967

Readings: Castañeda, “Death and Resurrection,” and Ryan, “The Kill –and after.” (BB)

Video: *El Che* (1997)

Week 7: The making of a revolutionary icon: the Korda picture and its curious history

Reading: Casey, *Che’s Afterlife*, pp. 25-109.  
Screening of film *Kordavision*

Week 8: *Chevolution*: Che as commodity

Reading: Casey, *Che’s Afterlife*, pp. 298-338.  
Screening of film, *Chevolution*

Week 9: The meaning of Che today and his appropriation by political and social movements

Reading: Casey, *Che’s Afterlife*, pp. 135-255.

Week 10: Group presentations

Final exam: Monday, December 3, 8:00 am.

Final research papers due: Friday, December 7, 5 pm.