HIST 407/507
Fall 2019

Seminar: Race and Ethnicity in Modern Latin America

Instructor: Professor Carlos Aguirre
Office: 333 McKenzie Hall
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 8-10 am or by appointment
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Description

In 1977, the authors of a book on inequality in Peru argued that “the problems of ‘race’... are of only peripheral significance in Spanish America.” Today, very few analysts would agree with such statement. Recent scholarly trends, as well as current developments in the region, have combined to bring race, ethnicity, and related issues to the forefront of political as well as academic debates. The “problems of race” are far from insignificant, and any attempt to understand contemporary Latin America from a historical perspective should take into account the evolution of racial ideas and practices in the region. This seminar attempts to examine the social, cultural, and political constructions of race and ethnicity in modern Latin America and their connections with the processes of class, gender, and national formation in the region.

What you can expect to learn in this course

- An overview of recent theoretical and historiographical debates about race and ethnicity as historically- and culturally-constructed categories
- A summary of the complex ways in which race and ethnicity have shaped the history of Latin America, particularly since 1800.
- How to think about the connections between multiple and ambiguous forms of identity and the changing political, economic, social, and cultural scenarios in which they take form
- An understanding of the legacies of colonialism in contemporary Latin American societies
- An enhancement of your ability to critically read historical materials, interpret primary sources, and produce research papers.

Requirements

Attendance, participation, and weekly reports: 20%

Attendance is mandatory. More than one unjustified absence will automatically be penalized with one letter grade. Participation is evaluated on the basis of the student’s engagement with the discussions in class and the quality of the weekly written reports.
These reports (2-3 pages) should include short summaries of at least three key arguments presented by the author(s) under review, and at least three stimulating questions for discussion in class.

Oral Presentation: 20%.

Each week, one or two students will be in charge of leading the discussion by offering a critical commentary of the materials and presenting issues and themes to the rest of the class. These presentations will last about 15 minutes. Students should avoid offering lengthy summaries of the readings and must focus, instead, on the theoretical, historiographical, comparative, and critical issues stemming out of the reading(s). A meeting with the instructor before the presentation is recommended.

Paper proposal (due on October 16): 10%.

This will consist of one page describing the topic of the paper, the research question(s) that the student seeks to address, the sources to be used, and a tentative bibliography. Although late proposals will be accepted, they will not receive any points towards the student’s grade.

Final research paper (20-25 pages): 50%.

Students will choose a topic related to the content of the course and use the best and up-to-date bibliography available on their topic. Students are expected to make use of primary sources. I will be available for consultation on paper topics and bibliographical assistance.

Readings: All books are available for purchase at the UO Bookstore, and will be placed on reserve at Knight Library. PDFs of articles and book chapters will be available through Canvas.

Schedule of Sessions and Readings

October 2: Introduction / Video and discussion: “Race: The Floating Signifier”

October 9: Indians and the Nation-State in Nineteenth-Century Andean Societies

Required Reading:


October 16: Paper proposals due / Race, Nation, and Science in Cuba

Required Reading:

October 23: Representations of Indians and the Making of Indigenismo in Spanish America

Required reading:


October 30: Deconstructing Mestizaje

Required Readings:


November 6: Brazil and the Myth of Racial Democracy

Required Readings:


November 13: Race, Labor, and Governmentality in Peru

Required Reading:


November 20: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Guatemala

Required readings:


November 27 and December 4: No class meetings. Students will work on their papers and will meet individually with the instructor.

FINAL PAPERS DUE: Friday, December 13, 5 pm.