Revolutions in Modern Latin America

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Description of the course

Social revolutions constitute exceptional and dramatic events in human history. They bring about radical and sweeping transformations of the existing political, social, economic, and cultural orders. The three most conspicuous Latin American revolutions of the 20th century (Mexico 1910, Cuba 1959, and Nicaragua 1979) had a tremendous impact not just within those countries and the Latin American region, but on hemispheric relations and world politics as well. Using a comparative perspective, this course will discuss the causes, course, actors, and outcome of Latin American revolutions, seeking to highlight the peculiarities of Latin American revolutions, and paying close attention to the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of revolutionary transformation. In addition, we will also study the case of the "Shining Path" of Peru, trying to understand the reasons behind its emergence and ultimate failure. Finally, we will address the role and legacy of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence in twentieth-century Latin America.

What you can expect to learn in this course

- A historical and comparative understanding of the nature and effects of revolutions
- An in-depth knowledge about the origins, development, and outcome of the three most important revolutionary experiences in twentieth-century Latin America (Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua)
- How to think about revolutions in history in terms of the political, economic, ideological, social, and cultural forces that shape them
- The construction of revolutionary myths and narratives and the way they shape our understanding of revolutions
- The role of violence in the shaping of Latin American societies
- Some of the most important controversies surrounding the study of revolutions in Latin American history
Requirements

Undergraduate students:

1. Three quizzes (10% each, 30% total).
2. One book review (10%). Students will write a 2-3 page review of one of the two books assigned (by Zimmermann and Degregori). More details will be offered in class.
3. Midterm exam: 30%.
4. Final exam: 30%

Graduate students:

1. Two book reviews (10% each, 20% total).
2. A 15-page paper on a topic related to the course (10% for proposal and bibliography; 10% for first draft; 40% for final version). Details will be offered in class. Topics must be chosen by the beginning of the second week of classes.
3. Oral presentation (20%).

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. Late book reviews will be penalized with one letter grade per day.
3. 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.
4. 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 and tablets are allowed ONLY for note-taking, and students using them must seat on 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.
5. “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.

Required Readings

The following books will be available for purchase at the U of O Bookstore and are also on reserve at Knight Library.


In addition, a number of articles will be available through Canvas.

**Outline of lectures**

Week 1

01/10 Introduction
01/12 Theorizing Revolutions. Latin American revolutions in comparative perspective

Readings:
Goldstone, The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolution.
Wickham-Crowley, Structural Theories of Revolution.

Week 2

01/17 Pre-Revolutionary Mexico: Land, Capitalist Development, and Authoritarian Rule
01/19 The Revolutionary Decade (1910-1920)

Reading:
Gilly, Capitalism Development
Document 1, “Plan de Ayala”

Week 3

01/24 The Post-Revolutionary Period: Institutionalization and Consolidation (1920-1940)
01/26 Forging the myth of the Mexican Revolution / Quiz # 1

Readings:
Knight, Revolutionary Project.
Katz, Peasants in the Mexican Revolution.
Benjamin, La Revolución.
Week 4

01/31 Pre-Revolutionary Cuba
02/02 The Making of a Revolution: Ideology, Actors, and Armed Struggle

Readings:
Sweig, Inside the Revolution
Perez, Between the Old and the New.

Week 5

02/07 Socialism or Death: The Revolution in Power, 1959-1990
02/09 The Special Period and Beyond

Readings:
Document 2, “Cuba is a Socialist Nation”
Chomsky, Experiments with Socialism
Gordy, What Would Che Say?

Week 6

02/14 Midterm exam
02/16 Che Guevara and the Theory of Guerrilla Warfare

Readings:
Childs, Che Guevara’s Foco Theory

Week 7

02/21 Guerrillas in Latin America / Quiz # 2
02/23 The FSLN, popular mobilization and the Sandinista victory

Readings:
Zimmermann, Sandinista, all

Week 8

02/28 The US, the Contras, and the Demise of the Sandinista Revolution
03/02 “Military Revolution” in Peru (1968-1975) / Book review # 1 due.
Reading:
Document 4, “The Fear of Communism in Central America”
Klaren, The Military Revolution of 1968

Week 9

03/07 Maoism in the Andes: The Origins of the “Shining Path” / Quiz # 3
03/09 Time of Fear: The Development of “The People’s War”

Reading:
Degregori, How Difficult it is to be God, all.
Document 5, “The People’s War”

Week 10

03/14 Revolutionary and Counterrevolutionary Violence in Twentieth-Century Latin America: Balance and Discussion / Book review # 2 due.
03/16 Review for Final Exam

Reading:
Grandin, Living in Revolutionary Time

Final exam: Thursday, March 23, 8:00-10:00