HSTR 585: READINGS IN LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY

Latin America in the World:
Modes of Comparative, Transnational, and Global History

The University of Montana; Fall 2018
W, 1-3:50 pm; LA 250

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Colton’s map, 1852

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Historians of Latin America continually wrestle with questions about the cultural, political, ethnographic, and geographical boundaries of our area of study—what is “Latin America”? Forged through conquest and colonization, divided along lines of language, culture, and politics by European imperial powers, about thirty-five sovereign states emerged in the Western Hemisphere over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two of these countries—Canada and the United States—gained a level of industrialization, affluence, and global power to become part of the twentieth century’s “first world”—the West—while the thirty-three states south of the Rio Grande (after 1848) became “Latin America and the Caribbean”—a region of the “third world,” also known as the “global south”

Yet, viewed from a deeper historical perspective, especially before the apparently ordained divergence in the 19th and 20th centuries, the northern and southern halves of the western hemisphere might well be seen to have a shared, intertwined, or unified story—a story of the New World discovered and colonized by the Old. This is a story of migration, genocide, enslavement, and exploitation; a story of colonial insertion in global mercantilism/capitalism; and, of elite-dominated wars for independence leading to liberal republics. Such a singular history of “the Americas” would cover the totality of the continents of North and South America, which make up most of the landmass in the Earth’s western hemisphere.

A strong advocate of this view of the Americas, which would break down divisions among Canadian, U.S., and Latin American historians, was 1930s president of the American Historical Association (AHA) Herbert Eugene Bolton. His 1932 AHA conference address, boldly titled “The Epic of Greater America,” generated considerable debate, at the heart of which
was the question posed by Lewis Hanke in response to Bolton’s thesis: “Do The Americas Have a Common History?”

For those who have refuted the notion of a shared Pan-American or Western Hemisphere history, the next question is where the most salient divergences lie. Is the critical historical division between British versus French/Spanish/Portuguese colonies and post-colonial states (Anglo/Saxon America versus “the romantic nations”)—that is to say, Canada and the United States versus Latin America? This was the view of revolutionary Cuban poet José Marti who, back in 1891, warned that the imperial aspirations of the United States made it critical to understand North and South America as having distinct cultural, racial, political, and economic histories. Pan-Americanism, whether as a series of continental meetings and agreements, or as a cultural, scholarly, and institutional promotion of “the Americas,” could prove disastrous for Latin America, Marti warned. In the midst of Cuba’s war for independence from Spain, he wrote, “there is yet another danger which comes from “the difference in origins, methods and interests between the two halves of the continent. The hour is fast approaching when your America will be confronted by an enterprising and energetic nation seeking close relations, but with indifference and scorn for us and our ways.”

Marti called on his fellow Cubans and on all his compatriots “from the Rio Grande to the straits of Magellan . . . to sow the seed of the new America through the romantic nations of the continent and the sorrowful islands of the sea!” Marti’s call for a distinctly Latin unity against the encroaching Anglo colossus raises the question as to what binds the disparate regions and diverse peoples south of the Rio Grande into a cohesive, unitary “our America”? Or, as Marshall Eakin asked, playing off the Bolton/Hanke debate: “Does Latin America Have a Common History?” Mexico, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Guadeloupe… Do they share enough culture and history to warrant sweeping syntheses of local, regional, and nation-state histories?

And, when/if we do find meaningful, empirically-based master narratives of Latin American history, we must ask how they fit with dominant narratives of western civilization? In a recent survey of Latin American history, a respected historian declared that his intent was to chart the region’s “entry” into the “Western” world, and to retell the story of the region without “the rhetoric of exoticism, oral history and memory.” In other words, he aimed to show that Latin America is part of the West. The title of his book--The Other West: Latin America from Invasion to Globalization--nonetheless suggests that, if Latin America is Western, it is only so in a qualified, “other” way. In this course, we will explore the ways that in Latin America “Western and non-Western spheres exist simultaneously and overlap.” What did the historian mean when he said the region’s history had been dominated by “exoticism, oral history, and memory”? What is “the West,” anyway?

Latin American history textbooks, both colonial and modern, frequently rest on generations of scholars who have focused on the nation-state or equivalent territorial levels. These scholars offer rich studies of processes of nation-state building, the international relations

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2 José Marti, “Our America,” in José Marti: Writings, p. 149.
3 Ibid., p. 151.
history of individual states, and the history of the state’s relations with its own citizens or inhabitants (via laws; exercise of force; education; etc.). Within the paradigm of history focused on the nation-state, many historians have made rich use of comparative techniques and perspectives. Some of these, especially in the heyday of subaltern studies and “history from the bottom up” have especially highlighted local and regional comparisons within and across nation-states. In more recent decades, innovative scholars, both junior and senior, have been developing new understandings and practices of “transnational history,” history that does not simply compare across borders—or erase borders altogether. These works instead show the continual movement of people, goods, and ideas across national borders.

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As its organizing principle, this graduate readings course highlights different conceptual frameworks for studying Latin America in the World—from national and comparative to transnational and global histories. What are the logics, methodologies, and implications of different spatial and geographic paradigms (local, regional, national, comparative, transnational, and global) for historical research, interpretation, and teaching?

The study of Latin American history serves many University of Montana graduate students as a basis for teaching fields, whether as a component of world history, a point of comparison or connection with U.S. or European history, or as a teaching field in its own right. This course thus emphasizes critical reading, writing, and oral discussion with an eye to teaching more than to research. We begin the semester discussing a Latin American history textbook, and in our discussions of scholarly monographs, we will discuss how those subjects might be incorporated into classes on U.S. or World history.

This graduate course involves substantial reading and discussion of scholarly texts, and a few primary sources, addressing specific episodes, themes, periods, and countries in Latin American history—all in some way or another reflecting on modes of comparative, transnational, and/or global history. We will work to comprehend the content and context of each of our readings, as well as their methodological and theoretical underpinnings, especially in relation to significant historiographic debates.

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6 See, for example, Olssen, *Agrarian Crossings*, early comparative chapters.
ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Participation (40%):

Attendance and Engagement:
As in most graduate seminars, active student participation and preparation is the core of
the course. On most weeks you will be submitting discussion questions and notes or presenting
on the reading. For all weeks, you should to come to class fully prepared to discuss the
reading—its content, source base, methodology, context, and relevant historiographic or
theoretical debates. Read as many reviews of the works as possible, and read and think about
your classmates questions. Also, be prepared to refer to specific passages and/or page numbers,
as appropriate.

Discussion Questions:
Students’ written discussion questions will anchor our seminar discussions. In
preparation for each class, students should contribute 1-2 thoughtfully written and edited
discussion questions about that week’s reading (14 weeks). Students should read and think about
their classmates questions before class. Post your questions on Moodle and/or circulate via
email before Tuesday 6 pm. Since these questions are vital for our class discussion, no late
questions will be accepted.

Good discussion questions should:
• keep in mind the diversity of backgrounds and interests of everyone in the class
• address the central meaning, significance, or methodology of the reading
• provoke lively classroom conversation
• link the work to broader historiographical or theoretical discussions (ie. in relation to other
course readings)
• promote discussion of the reading itself or of subjects that can be addressed from the
reading (in other words, not wild speculation or lengthy discussions of other subjects)
• raise comparisons only with readings or cases about which everyone in the class is
informed (ie. readings or cases covered previously in this class)
• refer to specific passages and/or page numbers as appropriate

Written Notes (20%):
For any 7 of the 14 weeks of class (after the 1st), I also invite you to submit 2-3 pages of
notes on the reading, following the template given to you in a separate handout.

Class Presentations (20%):
For 2 class periods, you are invited to prepare a short presentation (10-15 mins; 20 max)
to introduce our reading and then to begin our discussion. You may or may not be working with
a partner. You are strongly encouraged to provide us with a handout that will serve for later use
in activities such as field exams or syllabus preparation. Use of the white board, powerpoint, or
other media is also great.

All presentations should introduce the author(s) and conditions of the work’s production;
outline its main arguments and significance; and briefly summarize its content and organization.
With whatever time you have left, share with us a little something more, something you think
interesting and relevant for a discussion of that reading. You might provide a more in-depth look
at the author’s biography or lifework; you might offer a sketch of the historiographic field or an
introduction to one or more comparable works; you might highlight certain features of the methodologies and sources used or discuss the text’s reception and significance, etc. Whenever possible try to focus your presentation on ways this work connects with the central course themes about Latin America history in comparative, transnational, and/or global perspective. This will likely involve a small amount of research and reading beyond the assigned text(s). Again, other scholars’ reviews should help you identify salient and interesting aspects of our readings, which you can then investigate a bit further.

End your presentation with a clear, succinct statement of what you see to be the most interesting and important question or questions to discuss about this reading or set of readings. In other words, think carefully before class about how you would lead a discussion about these readings, keeping in mind the content of the reading, the author’s methodology or positions on historiographic debates, relation of this text to others, etc. Be sure to consider the questions contributed by your classmates (uploaded by 6 pm on Tues), though don’t feel compelled to use them if you want to go in a different direction.

**Syllabus Topics and Reflection on Course Design (20 %):**

Over the course of the semester, work to design a set of 10-12 themes that can serve as the basis for a syllabus at an academic level of your choice (high school, lower or upper div undergraduate course, or graduate course). This syllabus may be in Latin American history; history of the Americas; history of comparative Empires and Colonies; world history; western civ; or any cognate field. But, the syllabus must do the following: (a) cover a large sweep of Latin American history (b) problematize or raise questions about the concept of “Latin America”, and (c) assemble themes into a narrative account that students can latch onto, preferably with some chronology. Submit the themes (sketch of a syllabus) and accompanying essay of 2-3 pages by Mon, Dec 10.
SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

- Books are available at the UMT Bookstore and online, used & new. Articles and book chapters are available as PDFs on the course Moodle site.
- The schedule below includes some texts and even a few whole sessions identified as REC. This means they are recommended subjects and readings, not required. I may discuss them a bit in class, but I do not expect you to do much, or any, of this reading. You may want to look at them to fill in gaps in your draft syllabus.

Aug 29: Course Introduction

UCLA Department of English “Keywords” for Imperial, Transnational, Postcolonial (ITP) Studies. http://itp.english.ucla.edu/keywords.php

Sept 5: “Latin American History” Narratives


Sept 12: “The Americas”: Theoretical Considerations


- O’Gorman, “Do the Americas Have a Common History, pp. 103-111.


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**Sept 19: “Latin America” in World History: Theoretical Considerations**


- Vaughn & Weinstein, eds. Intro to the Forum, pp. 391-92.


**[REC: Latin America in Global Economic History]**


Sept 26: Exploration and Encounters (Tampa Bay to Gulf of California)


Oct 3: Comparative Empires and Colonies (Britain & Spain)

Elliott, J. H. Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830. Yale UP, 2007. [first ½] [free online copy at archive.org]


Oct 10: Comparative Empires and Colonies (Britain & Spain)


Oct 17: Enlightenment in “the Other West” (Mexico, Peru, & Spain)


REC: Uribe-Uran, Victor M., “The Great Transformation of Law and Legal Culture: ‘The Public’ and ‘the Private’ in the Transition from Empire to Nation in Mexico, Colombia, and

[REC: Slave Emancipation and Revolution in the Caribbean: Atlantic World Transformations]


Oct 24: Building American Republics and a Pan-American Hemisphere: Theoretical Considerations


Oct 31: Mid-19th Century Social, Environmental, and Economic Connections (Chile-California)


[REC: From “Inside the Monster”: José Martí’s Revolutionary Nationalism and anti-Imperialism]


Or, any other collection of Martí writings; some available online, as at: historyofcuba.com; Digital Library of the Caribbean; Internet Archive

Nov 7: Transnational Anarchism (Mexico-US)


Nov 14: Transnational Anarchism (Mexico-US)

Lomnitz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo* [Second ½]


Nov 28: Connections between Rural Reform Projects (Mexico-US South)


Dec 5: Before the Wall (Mexico-US)

