

LAH 3300: Contemporary Latin America

MWF 12:50-1:40pm / Keene-Flint 0111/ Fall 2025

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Office hours: Monday, 11:30am – 12:30pm,
Weds 2 – 5pm, and by appointment



This class offers an introduction to Latin America's 20th century through an examination of four key events as represented in historical narrative, film, fiction, and primary sources.

This class is not a fast overview of the entire hemisphere's twentieth century. That class would be almost impossible to teach. It would (probably) not be fun for you.

Instead, think of these four units as previews or sampler of what the history of Modern Latin America has to offer. We will



focus on 1) Mexican Revolution 2) Brazil's Estado Novo 3) Allende and the 1973 Coup d'état in Chile and 4) Guatemala's Civil War.

We will read scholarly articles and excerpts of books. These are available on our course Canvas page.

Additionally, you will buy/rent the following required books:

- Nellie Campobello, *Cartucho and My Mother's Hands*
- Jorge Amado, *Captains of the Sands*
- Roberto Bolaño, *Distant Star*
- Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *Human Matter: A Fiction*

You are responsible for buying, renting, or checking out from the library these four books in a format (like a paperback, hardcover, e-book, pdf) that will allow you to bring them to class for the class meetings when we are discussing them. These four books above are English-language translations of renowned works of Latin American literature. They are also widely available in their original Spanish or Portuguese.

If you feel you need or want an additional text or broad overview of Latin American history from the colonial period to the early 2000s, you can read John Charles Chasteen's *Born in Blood and Fire*. It is inexpensive and widely available.

Assignments:

1. Map Activity – 50 points – Due September 5

2. Attendance/Participation – 200 points
 - Attendance – Attendance will be recorded for every class
 - Participation – You are expected to participate actively in class by answering questions, asking questions, and taking notes
 - You will grade your own participation on a scale of 0-10 once every two weeks. I will convert this into a 25-point scale. I reserve the right to modify the grade—either up or down—and will inform you of these modifications. If you are sick, please use caution and take care of yourself and your classmates by staying home. If you need to discuss an attendance concern, feel free to reach out to me. Requirements for make-up exams, assignments, and other work are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>
3. Weekly Reading Quizzes – 100 points
 - There will be 12 (nearly) weekly 10-point quizzes across the semester worth 10 points each; I will drop the 2 lowest grades. We will do reading quizzes on Mondays.
4. Debates – 50 each, 3 x 50 – 150 points
 - Three times during the semester, we will have an in-class debate on important questions related to a recent unit. You are responsible for participating meaningfully and actively in these debates. You will submit to me a brief 3-4 sentence summary of your contributions to your team, whether as a researcher, organizer, understudy, or speaker. You should try and participate in each role across the three debates.
5. Group Podcast Project – 100 points per episode, 3 x 100 – 300 points
 - Working in groups of about 3-5 people, you will research a topic in the history of Contemporary Latin America that we may or may not have touched upon in class. You will engage theories of history, secondary materials, and original primary sources. You should try to include one interview. What you research is largely up to you, but it should in some way reflect key themes of our semester. With this research, you will create two episodes of a podcast. Each episode should be between 20-30 minutes long and it may be in English or Spanish (or Spanglish). Each episode should have an outline; a script; and use theme music and transition sounds. You will share your podcasts with your classmates periodically in the semester. You will share your outlines or scripts with me.
 - Episode 1: Due Week 8 (Friday)
 - Episode 2: Due Week 12 (Friday)
 - Episode 3: Due Final Exam Period (December 11 @ 2:30pm)
6. Final Paper – 200 points – Due December 3 (midnight)
 - For this final assignment, you will reflect on all four units of the course. Think first, then write a formal essay answering the following questions: what have you learned in this class? Try and distill your learning into a single or a couple ideas. Which unit was most impactful on you? How has it changed your view of the world? Which readings were most impactful and why? Make clear reference to as many of the course readings as possible. Your essay should be between 1000-1500 words in length. I will provide a rubric for this assignment. More details will come soon!

Total: 1000 points*

I will make every effort to enter grades into Canvas, but you are responsible for monitoring your own grade by adding the points you earned on assignments by the points you could have earned.

*Extra credit opportunities will be possible during the semester; in order to earn extra credit points, you must have completed all assignments.

Grade Scale

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|----|-----|----|-----|
| A | 930 | C | 730 |
| A- | 900 | C- | 700 |
| B+ | 870 | D+ | 670 |
| B | 830 | D | 630 |
| B- | 800 | D- | 600 |
| C+ | 770 | | |

Note: I may update the syllabus, if necessary, through the course of the semester. If changes are made, the updated syllabus will be announced in class and on the course Canvas site.

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For up to date information on those policies and resources for students, please see [this link \(https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/\)](https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/). Here are some highlights:

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for this class. There are many acceptable reasons for absence, including illness, serious accidents or emergencies (affecting you, your roommates, or your family), severe weather, “special curricular requirements,” military obligation, jury duty, subpoenas, and religious holidays. Other reasons, like a job interview or club activity, are a little more debatable. The key is that you reach out to me as soon as possible.

“For all planned absences, a student in a situation that allows an excused absence from a class, or any required class activity must inform the instructor as early as possible prior to the class. For all unplanned absences because of accidents or emergency situations, students should contact their instructor as soon as conditions permit.”

Regarding makeup work: “Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered during absence from class or inability to engage in class activities because of the reasons outlined above.”

Accessibility & Accommodations

Students with disabilities who want to access academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center (<https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>).

We will work together to make this classroom and syllabus accessible. Please let me know how I can support you by increasing accessibility and I, too, will proactively seek opportunities to make assignments, discussion, the classroom itself, and technologies accessible.

UF’s Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the

following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [See the UF Conduct Code website for more information](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me.

****Uncited use of AI, including ChatGPT and other Large Language Models (LLMs), is plagiarism and a violation of the Honor Pledge.****

Campus Health & Wellness

UF Whole Gator Resources: Visit <https://one.uf.edu/whole-gator/discover> for resources that are designed to help you thrive physically, mentally, and emotionally at UF.

Course Schedule*

*Unless otherwise noted, reading should be completed for Monday's class

Week 1: Introduction

Friday, August 22

- Syllabus review
- Introduction to Contemporary Latin America

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION (1910 – APPROX.1920)

Week 2: Mexican Revolution: Lecture & Historical Context

Reading

- Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, "The Promise and Legacy of the Mexican Revolution," *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies* Spring-Summer 2010): 30-33, 50-55 (10 pp.)

Question: According to Cárdenas, why did the Mexican Revolution break out and what were some key moments in the war? Bonus: Who was Cárdenas and why might his view of the revolution be unique?

Monday, August 25 – Lecture (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, August 27 – Lecture

Friday, August 29 – Discussion (and Finish Lecture)

Week 3: Mexican Revolution: In the Documents

Reading

- Francisco Madero, "The Plan of San Luis Potosí," Nov. 20, 1910
- John Reed, "What About Mexico?," 1914
- The Constitution of 1917

Question: According to Madero, what did Mexicans stand to gain from rising up against Díaz? Why were they obliged to do so? Did John Reed agree? How did people's hopes for revolution change over the almost a decade, comparing the three primary sources?

Monday, September 1 – NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)

Wednesday, September 3 – 5Ps Document Discussion (and Reading Quiz)

Friday, September 5 – Discussion (Map Activity Due)

Week 4: Mexican Revolution: In Film & Fiction

Reading

- *Cartucho*

- *Los Olvidados* (85 mins.) [Available on Amazon Prime or YouTube]

Question: How does the Revolution look different through the eyes of children? What about the revolution's legacies through the eyes of children and youth?

Monday, September 8 – Discussion on *Cartucho* (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, September 10 – Start the film

Friday, September 12 – Finish the film and discuss both book and film

ESTADO NOVO (1930-1946) AND ITS AFTERLIFE

Week 5: Brazil's Estado Novo: Lecture & Historical Context

Reading

- Robert M. Levine, "Many Getúlios" in *Problems in Modern Latin American History: Sources and Interpretations*, pp. 216-221.
- Maria Helena Capelato, "The *Estado Novo*: Politics and Political Propaganda in Brazil, 1937–1945," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History* [UF Libraries or Canvas]
- Seth Garfield, "The Roots of a Plant that Today is Brazil": Indians and the Nation-State under the Brazilian *Estado Novo*," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 29, no. 3 (1997): 747-768.
- Browse the Library of Congress Research Guides on "Brazil-U.S. Relations" > "The Vargas Era," plus read the two linked pages (found on the menu on the lefthand side of the screen) on "Brazil and the Good Neighbor Policy" and "Brazil in World War II." Here's the link: <https://guides.loc.gov/brazil-us-relations/getulio-vargas-era>.

Question: What major changes did the administrations of Getúlio Vargas bring to Brazil? Overall, how were these changes both beneficial and detrimental, and for whom? How did nationalism shape Vargas' social reforms? How did this impact Brazil's relations with the U.S.?

Monday, September 15 – Lecture (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, September 17 – Lecture and Debate Prep

Friday, September 19 – DEBATE 1

Week 6: Brazil's Estado Novo: In the Documents

- Gilberto Freyre, Excerpt of *The Masters and the Slaves*, in *The Brazil Reader*
- Getúlio Vargas, "Vargas and the *Estado Novo*," in *The Brazil Reader*
- Luís Carlos Prestes, "Manifesto of the National Liberating Alliance," in *The Brazil Reader*
- Joana de Masi Zero, "The Life of a Factory Worker" in *The Brazil Reader*
- Vargas, "Vargas's Suicide Letter," in *The Brazil Reader*

Question: Vargas was a consummate populist. Known as “the father of the poor,” among other things, he referred to Brazil’s history and its contemporary social inequalities to bolster support among the poor. Find some specific examples of this in these primary sources. How did the opposition respond?

Monday, September 22 – Debate Debrief and Finish Lecture (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, September 24 – 5Ps Document Discussion

Friday, September 26 – Document Discussion

Week 7: Brazil’s Estado Novo: In Fiction

Reading

- Jorge Amado’s *Captains of the Sands*

Question: Among the characters in this novel, who captures your attention (and maybe your heart) first? Who is harder to appreciate? Why? Why do you think Amado chose children to illuminate the conditions of life in Bahia? Taking this novel and Cartucho, how do children’s perspectives in literature contribute to our understanding of history?

Monday, September 29 – Discussion of the novel (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, October 1 – Discussion of the novel

Friday, October 3 – NO CLASS

Week 8: Midterm Check-In & Debate 2

Monday, October 6 – Midterm Reflection

Wednesday, October 8 – Debate Prep

Friday, October 10 – DEBATE 2

CHILE AND THE 1973 COUP D’ETAT

Week 9: Chile: Lecture & Historical Context

Reading

- Office of the Historian of the US State Department, “The Allende Years and the Pinochet Coup, 1969–1973” <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/allende> [Or Canvas]
- Peter Goldberg, “The Politics of the Allende Overthrow in Chile,” *Political Science Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 93-116. (24 pp.)
- James Doubek, “The U.S. set the stage for a coup in Chile. It had unintended consequences at home,” *NPR* September 10, 2023. <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/10/1193755188/chile-coup-50-years-pinochet-kissinger-human-rights-allende> [Or Canvas]

Question: How did the US government intervene in Chile's 1970 presidential election? How did it attempt to impede Allende's government from functioning? How do these three accounts of the election, the role of the US government, and Allende's presidency differ?

Monday, October 13 – Lecture (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, October 15 – Lecture

Friday, October 17 – NO CLASS (UF HOMECOMING)

Week 10: Chile: In the Documents

Reading

- Salvador Allende, "Public Health Crisis (1939)," *The Chile Reader* [UF Libraries or Canvas]
- Eduardo Frei Montalva, "Between Capitalism and Communism: Social Christianity as a Third Way (1949)," *The Chile Reader* [UF Libraries or Canvas]
- U.S. Embassy Cable, "Allende Wins," Confidential, September 5, 1970. Document 3 on the GWU National Security Archive website: <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/chile/2020-09-04/allende-wins> [Or Canvas]
- President Salvador Allende Gossens, "The Chilean Revolution One Year In," in *The Chile Reader* [UF Libraries or Canvas]
- President Salvador Allende Gossens, "These are my final words" in *The Chile Reader* [UF Libraries or Canvas]
- Peter Winn, "Diary of a Coup," *The Chile Reader* [UF Libraries or Canvas]

Questions: What problems in Chilean society did Allende and Frei identify? How did these two views seem to differ? How did they agree? What did Allende promise the Salvadoran people? How did the US initially view Allende's election? How were these promises reflected in Allende's last speech? Finally, what was the tone of the day of the coup, according to Winn?

Monday, October 20 – Finish Lecture (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, October 22 – Document Discussion

Friday, October 24 – Document Discussion

Week 11: Chile: In Film & Fiction

Reading

- *Distant Star* (150 pp.)
- *Machuca* (Chile, 2004) [116 mins, streaming on Kanopy]

Questions: At the heart of the novella and film is the question of motive. Why did supporters of Pinochet do what they did and how did they justify their actions? Why did supporters of Allende and, later, resisters of the Pinochet government do what they did? How do the novella and the film portray each side's motives? In what ways are these portrayals different? How are they similar?

Monday, October 27 – Book Discussion (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, October 29 – Film Discussion

Friday, October 31 – Book & Film Discussion

THE GUATEMALAN CIVIL WAR & GENOCIDE

Week 12: Guatemala: Lecture & Historical Context

Reading

- Greg Grandin, “To End With All These Evils: Ethnic Transformation and Community Mobilization in Guatemala’s Western Highlands, 1954-1980,” *Latin American Perspectives* 24, no. 2 (March 1997): 7-34.
- Heather Vrana, “Revolutionary Transubstantiation in ‘The Republic of Students’: Death Commemoration in Urban Guatemala from 1977 to the Present,” *Radical History Review* 114 (Fall 2012): 66-90.
- Diane M. Nelson, “Low Intensities,” *Current Anthropology* 60, supplement 19 (February 2019): S122-S33.
- Kirsten Weld, “Dignifying the Guerrillero, Not the Assassin,” *Radical History Review* 113 (2012): 35-54.

Question: Who participated in the Guatemalan civil war? Why, for each group? How did the war differently impact various social groups? How have these groups sought closure after the war’s end?

Monday, November 3 – Lecture (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, November 5 – Lecture

Friday, November 7 – NO CLASS

Week 13: Guatemala: In the Documents

Reading

- Juan José Arévalo, “A New Guatemala” in *The Guatemala Reader*
- Guatemalan Army High Command, “Inverting Clausewitz,” in *The Guatemala Reader*
- “Guerrilla Armies of the Poor: Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes, Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas, and Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca” in *The Guatemala Reader* [UF Libraries or Canvas]
- Miguel Angel Sandoval and María del Rosario Ramírez, “Long Live the Students!” in *The Guatemala Reader* [UF Libraries or Canvas]
- Look through the *Diario Militar* here: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEBB/NSAEBB15/dossier-color.pdf>
- Commission for Historical Clarification, “Acts of Genocide” in *The Guatemala Reader*

Question: Returning to one of last week’s questions, what do these sources tell you about why the civil war was fought? About the pursuit of justice post-war?

Monday, November 10 – 5Ps Document Discussion (and Reading Quiz)

Wednesday, November 12 – Discussion

Friday, November 14 – Debate Prep

Week 14: Guatemala: In Film & Fiction

Reading

- *Human Matter: A Fiction* (192 pp.)
- *La Llorona* (97 mins.) [UF Libraries has a DVD; streaming on Tubi, YouTube, Amazon Prime]
(Watch outside of class—but there are several films by the same title, so be sure to get the film directed by Jayro Bustamante!)

Question: How do these two texts approach the pursuit of truth and reconciliation? What does justice mean in the novella and the film? How does this compare to the previous two weeks' readings?

Monday, November 17 – DEBATE 3

Wednesday, November 19 – Book and Film Discussion (and Reading Quiz)

Friday, November 21 – Book and Film Discussion

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15: Closing Discussions

Monday, December 1 – Discussion & Evaluation

Wednesday, December 3 – Final Thoughts

Final Essay due by midnight on December 3, 2025