



Central American Revolutions and Counterrevolutions*

LAH 3931/Spring 2026

Tuesday, 1:55-2:45pm / Thursday, 1:55-3:50pm

This elective course explores the many revolutions and counterrevolutions that occurred in Central America during the twentieth century. Between 1944 and 1996, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador experienced numerous political and social transformations that indelibly shaped the lives of their citizens. We will study the groups and individuals who formed the many organizations who waged these revolutions and counterrevolutions, and those who opposed them. We will explore questions like: Who joined revolutionary movements? Why? How were military and paramilitary groups organized? What roles did civilians play in these conflicts? When and why did the wars end? What roles were played by international actors? How are the wars remembered today and what roles do these memories play in contemporary politics? We will come to understand how and why revolutions and counterrevolutions occur and explore their outcomes, including human rights and reconciliation, war-related disability, traditions of protest, and impunity.

Course Goals:

- to define basic concepts in the study of revolution and counterrevolution
- to study the causes, historical contexts, and effects of revolutions and counterrevolutions in Central America and the Americas, more broadly
- to come to understand several key social, political, economic, and cultural changes in Central America before, during, and after the Cold War
- to recognize how these changes affected Central America lives over time
- to identify and explain the diverse and interconnected histories of Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador
- to understand the role of the history of revolutions and counterrevolutions in Central America in relationship to the United States and Latin America, in terms of labor, migration, law, religion, and more
- to recognize and be able to analyze primary sources, including newspapers, speeches, diaries, music, photographs, films, and other visual sources
- to improve your critical thinking skills & your thesis-driven writing skills

* 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.

Format of the Class:

The readings listed in the course calendar for the week are **due for Tuesday** and we'll discuss them all week. On Tuesdays, you will take a reading quiz, I will give a lecture, and we will begin to discuss the readings. On Thursday, we will finish lecture and focus on discussing the readings critically, particularly primary sources.

Readings:

This is a 3000-level class, so you can expect to read about 50 pages or so a week, although some weeks will have longer readings (because they are novels)!

Books to Buy:

- Manlio Argueta, *One Day of Life*
- Gioconda Belli, *The Country Under My Skin*
- Rigoberta Menchú, Elizabeth Burgos Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*
- Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *Human Matter*

During weeks when we are not reading one of the novels or memoirs listed above, your assigned readings will generally include one secondary source article or chapter that will offer an overview or context; one poem, short story, or song lyrics; and one other type of primary source historical document.

Assignments

Attendance & Participation	Your participation in class is crucial to our and your success. I will take attendance during every class period. But students will grade their own participation on a scale of 0-10 once every two weeks on Canvas. I reserve the right to modify the grade, either up or down.	200 points
Reading Quizzes	Reading Quizzes will occur weekly. They are worth 10 points each. There are no makeups for reading quizzes, but I will drop your two lowest quiz grades.	100 points total
Map Activity	Instead of a map test, you will do this map activity. It is sort of like a scavenger hunt and sort of like a coloring activity. The idea is that you learn a bit about the geography of the region. Due January 22 in class	50 points
Debates	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. Debate 1: February 10 in class Debate 2: March 3 in class Debate 3: April 7 in class	50 x 3 (150 total points)

Podcast	<p>Working in groups, you will research a topic in Mexican history since 1821 that we may or may not have touched upon in class to produce three short (20-30 minute) podcast episodes. You will engage theories of history, secondary materials, and original primary sources. Try and include an interview or oral history, if possible. What you research is largely up to you, but your podcast should be well organized, based on a script, and include transitions sounds and/or music. It should be transmitted in mp3 format.</p> <p>Episode 1: Due February 5 (midnight) Episode 2: Due March 12 (midnight) Episode 3: Due April 16 (midnight)</p>	100 x 3 (300 total points)
Write a Revolution or Counterrevolution	<p>For this final assignment, you will design a Central American revolution or counterrevolution. You should demonstrate your understanding of real-life counterrevolutions and revolutions by drawing on what you have learned in our class, including citing or referring to course readings, lectures, and discussions. You can make up a country, but it should clearly resemble one of our three case studies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Required elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Cover page o Manifesto with statement of principles o Poem or song o Flag o Motto o Map of your country and strongholds o Bibliography - Optional: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Uniforms o Roster of leaders with biographies o Additional songs/poems o More poems or songs o Flyers and posters <p>Due May 1 by noon (UF Final Exam Period)</p>	200 points

Total: 1000 points*

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

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.

Requirements for make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies.

Grade Scale

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

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.ufl.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 Tuesday's class

Week 1: What is Revolution? Counterrevolution? Central America's Colonial Past

January 13 & 15

- John A. Booth, "Socioeconomic and Political Roots of National Revolts in Central America," *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 1 (1991): 33-72 [note: don't be intimidated—the last 10 pages are a bibliography!] [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
 - NB. Read this for Thursday's class!

Question: What is a revolution? A counterrevolution? Who participates in them and what are the stakes for different historical actors? What kinds of sources do we have as historians to assess them?

Tuesday: Syllabus Day & defining our terms

Thursday: Central America's colonial past and independence movements

Week 2: Liberals & Conservatives (and Coffee and Railroads)

January 20 & 22

- David McCreery, "State Power, Indigenous Communities, and Land in Nineteenth-Century Guatemala, 1820-1920," in *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540-1988* ed. Carol A. Smith University of Texas Press, 1994. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Rubén Darío, "To Roosevelt" (1904) [CANVAS]
- "Salvador," *New York Times* July 12, 1858 [Canvas or NYT online]

Question: What were the chief differences between liberals and conservatives in 19th century Central America? How did these parties approach the United States? How did the U.S. government and business interests approach liberals and conservatives?

Tuesday: The (briefly) United Provinces, liberals, and conservatives

Thursday: The U.S.'s hopes and dreams for the region, plus how Central American politicians and business leaders responded

Map Activity due in class on Thursday

Week 3: Dictatorships

January 27 & 29

- Michel Gobat, "Chapter 9: Revolutionary Nationalism: Elite Conservatives, Sandino, and the Struggle for a De-Americanized Nicaragua," in *Confronting the American Dream*, pp. 232-266. [CANVAS]
- Augusto Sandino, "Political Manifesto," July 1927 [CANVAS]

- Héctor Pérez Brignoli, “Indians, communists, and peasants: the 1932 Rebellion in El Salvador,” in *Coffee, Society, and Power in Latin America*, pp. 232-261. [CANVAS]
- “A Landowner’s Account, 1932” in *Remembering a Massacre*, pp. 333-337 [CANVAS]
- “Message of the Distinguished President of the Republic...” in *Remembering a Massacre*, pp. 337-340. [CANVAS]

Question: Who were the most impactful dictators in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador in the early to mid-20th century? What did they believe and how they did they implement their political aims? Where and among whom did resistance to these leaders emerge?

Tuesday: Utopian imaginings for Nicaragua from William Walker to Augusto Sandino

Thursday: Napoleon of the Tropics and El Brujo

Week 4: Democratic Springs

February 3 & 5

- Sarah Foss, “Chapter 2: Sons Like Juan Are the Pride of Guatemala: Creating the Permitted Indian, 1945-1951” in *On Our Own Terms*, pp. 50-72 [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Jim Handy, Chapter 5: The Ten Years of Spring: ‘Spiritual Socialism’ and the Capitalist Revolution” in *Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala* [CANVAS]
- Selected poems, Otto René Castillo [CANVAS]
- Juan José Arévalo, “A New Guatemala,” in *The Guatemala Reader* [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios (AEU), “Manifiesto” (1946) in *Anti-Colonial Texts from Central American Student Movements*, pp. 29-31. [CANVAS]

Question: 1944 was a pretty exciting year for Central America, not just for Asia & Europe. What happened? Who took part in it? What ideologies motivated it?

Tuesday: El Salvador, 1944

Thursday: Guatemala, 1944-1954

Podcast Episode 1 Due Thursday by midnight

Week 5: Counterrevolutions

February 10 & 12

- Kirsten Weld, “The Other Door: Spain and the Guatemalan Counter-Revolution, 1944–54,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 51, no. 2 (2019): 307-331. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- “Arévalista to Counterrevolutionary: Luis Tárano, interviewed...” in *The Guatemala Reader*, pp. 221-225. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano, “Enemies of Christ” in *The Guatemala Reader*, pp. 226-229. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]

- Nick Cullather, “Operation PBSUCCESS” in *The Guatemala Reader*, pp. 230-237. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Anonymous, “Sabotage for Liberty” in *The Guatemala Reader*, pp. 238-241. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Committee of Guatemalan Anti-communist University Students in Exile (CEUAGE), “Standing Up to the Red Dictatorship in Guatemala,” (1953) in *Anti-Colonial Texts*, pp. 76-80. [CANVAS]
- Excerpts, Committee of Anti-communist University Students (CEUA), “Plan of Tegucigalpa,” (1954) in *Anti-Colonial Texts*, pp. 80-92. [CANVAS]

Question: What led to the counterrevolution in Guatemala in 1954? How did it impact indigenous Guatemalans? Ladinos? Rural people? Urban people?

Tuesday: Debate 1

Thursday: Guatemala’s Counterrevolution

Week 6: Dynasties

February 17 & 19

- Neale J. Pearson, “Nicaragua in Crisis,” *Current History* 76, no. 444 (Feb. 1979): 78-80, 84, 96. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Jeffrey L. Gould, “‘For an Organized Nicaragua’: Somoza and the Labour Movement, 1944-1948,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 19, no. 2 (Nov. 1987): 353-387. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- David Sánchez Sánchez, “The Study Body as a Political Force,” *El Universitario* (1945) in *Anti-Colonial Texts from Central American Student Movements*, pp. 46-48. [CANVAS]
- Juan F. Gutiérrez, “Let’s Build the Fatherland” (1946) in *Anti-Colonial Texts from Central American Student Movements*, pp. 48-50. [CANVAS]
- AGEUS, “Manifesto,” *Opinión Estudiantil* (1956), in *Anti-Colonial Texts from Central American Student Movements*, pp. 105-107. [CANVAS]
- AGEUS, “Solidarity with Nicaraguan Exiles,” *Opinión Estudiantil* (1956), in *Anti-Colonial Texts from Central American Student Movements*, pp. 107-108. [CANVAS]

Question: Who were the Somozas? Why did their political dynasty endure? How did they garner the support of rural peasants and when did that begin to falter? Who opposed the Somozas? Why?

Tuesday: Anastasio Somoza García builds a political dynasty with carrot and stick

Thursday: After ASG’s assassination, his sons try to pick up the pieces & Midterm Reflection

Week 7: Revolutionaries & Continuismo

February 24 & 26

- Phillip J. Williams and Knut Walter, “Chapter 4: The Era of National Conciliation,” in *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador’s Transition to Democracy*, pp. 63-84. [CANVAS]
- Roque Dalton, “Ultraleftists” and “El Salvador, Country with a Heart” [CANVAS]
- Otto René Castillo, “Vámonos patria a caminar” and “Intelectuales apolíticos” [CANVAS]

- “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* [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Miguel Angel Sandoval and María del Rosario Ramírez, “Long Live the Students!” in *The Guatemala Reader* [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Watch “El Salvador: Can Civil War Be Avoided?” on the Associated Press Archives on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blsPLlaqLbY>) (25 mins.)

Question: What motives compelled former military officers in Guatemala to launch a revolution? Why did Guatemalan students and peasants begin to oppose the government? How did El Salvador’s military respond to a similar rising tide of opposition?

Tuesday: Revolutionary organizations form and Guatemala’s civil war begins in the cities

Thursday: El Salvador’s military reforms and resists revolution

Week 8: July 1979

March 3 & 5

- Gioconda Belli, *The Country Under My Skin*, pp. ix-193 [Intro through Chapter 28]
- Ernesto Cardenal, “Zero Hour” [CANVAS]
- Optional: Michel Gobat, “Epilogue: Imperial Legacies,” in *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule*, pp. 267-280. [CANVAS]

Question: Who comprised the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front)? What did they believe? How did individuals like Belli reflect on, challenge, or even amend these beliefs?

Tuesday: Debate 2

Thursday: The FSLN fights the Somoza dynasty and wins

Week 9: The Sandinista State (1979-1990)

March 10 & 12

- Gioconda Belli, *The Country Under My Skin*, pp. 194 [Chapter 29 to 57]
- Julio Cortázar, “Nicaraguan Sketches” [CANVAS]

Question: What challenges did the FSLN face as its leadership sought to set up a new government in Nicaragua? How did they try and solve them? Where were they successful? Where did they fail?

Tuesday: The FSLN endeavors to establish a revolutionary state

Thursday: Sandinista diplomacy and the FSLN’s relationships with the world

Podcast Episode 2 due Thursday by midnight

Week 10: The Salvadoran Civil War

March 24 & 26

- Manlio Argueta, *One Day of Life*
- Claribel Alegria, selected poems from *On the front line: guerrilla poems of El Salvador* [CANVAS]

Question: Who were the five organizations that formed the FMLN? How did they agree? How did they disagree? According to Argueta, why did peasants join the resistance? How did gender shape the experience of war?

Tuesday: Five organizations form the FMLN and the Salvadoran Civil War begins and Book Discussion, pt. 1

Thursday: Book Discussion, pt. 2 and the representations of the war in Salvadoran and foreign media (including in-class screenings of Charlie Clements' "Witness to War" (1985), Radio Venceremos' "10 Years of Taking the Sky by Storm" (1991), and President Ronald Reagan's Address to the Nation on Central America, May 9, 1984.

Week 11: Scorched Earth

March 31 & April 2

- Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*

Question: Menchú's book is a testimonio. What is a testimonio and how is it different from both fiction and memoir?

Tuesday: Guatemala's civil war turns to the rural highlands

Thursday: Book Discussion

Week 12: Contrás & Contadora

April 7 & 9

- Jeffrey L. Gould, "On the Road to 'El Porvenir': Revolutionary and Counterrevolutionary Violence in El Salvador and Nicaragua," in *A Century of Revolution*, pp. 88-121. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- Mateo Jarquín, "The Nicaragua Question: Contadora and the Latin American Response to US Intervention Against the Sandinistas, 1982-86," *The Americas* 78, no. 4 (2021): 581-608. [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]
- "Sandinist Renegade Says C.I.A. Hamstrings Him," *New York Times* November 15, 1982. [CANVAS OR NYT WEBSITE]
- Images, David Kunzle, *The Murals of Revolutionary Nicaragua, 1979-1992*

Question: Who were the Contrás? How did the Contra war contribute to the ends of the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala? What was Contadora?

Tuesday: Debate 3

Thursday: The Sandinista government faces serious challenges, internally and from abroad, with ripple effects across the region

Week 13: From Peace to Madness

April 14 & 16

- Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *Human Matter*
- 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* [CANVAS or UF LIBRARIES]

Question: How did the ends of the wars in Guatemala and El Salvador shape their post-peace governments? What is the AHPN? How does it contribute to democracy in Guatemala?

Tuesday: Guatemala’s legal system struggles to live up to its post-peace ideals

Thursday: Across the map, security trumps democracy

Podcast Episode 3 due Thursday by midnight

Week 14: Final Reflections

April 21

Tuesday: Final discussion and reflection

Rubric for Group Podcast Assignment

LAH 3931: Central American Revolutions and Counterrevolutions

Spring 2026

Working in groups of about 3-5 people, you will research a topic in the history of Central American Revolutions and Counterrevolutions 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 4 (Thursday, February 5, midnight)
- Episode 2: Due Week 9 (Thursday, March 12, midnight)
- Episode 3: Due Week 13 (Thursday, April 16, midnight)

Group Members:

Did you...	Exceptionally Well	Well	Acceptably	Poorly
Work in a group?				
Engage theories of history, secondary materials, and original primary sources?				
Create a podcast of 20-30 minutes?				
Have an outline and/or script (or other evidence of clear organization)?				
Use theme music/transition sounds?				
Include an interview (bonus)?				
Other notes/comments:				

Grade: / 100 points each episode

Rubric for Write a Revolution or Counterrevolution

LAH 3931: Central American Revolutions and Counterrevolutions

Spring 2026

For this final assignment, you will design a Central American revolution or counterrevolution. You should demonstrate your understanding of real-life counterrevolutions and revolutions by drawing on what you have learned in our class, including citing or referring to course readings, lectures, and discussions. You can make up a country, but it should clearly resemble one of our three case studies. Due May 1 by noon (UF Final Exam Period).

- Required elements:
 - o Cover page with overview (about 300-500 words)
 - o Manifesto with statement of principles
 - o Poem or song
 - o Press release or paid political advertisement
 - o Flag
 - o Motto
 - o Map of your country and strongholds
 - o Bibliography
- Optional:
 - o Uniforms
 - o Roster of leaders with biographies
 - o Additional songs, poems, manifestos, press releases
 - o Flyers and posters

Did you...	Exceptionally Well	Well	Acceptably	Poorly
Write and submit a cover page with an overview of your counter/revolution?				
Include all the additional required elements?				
Cite and refer to course readings, lectures, and discussions?				
Include a bibliography?				
Submit a project of no less than 1,500 words?				
Add some optional elements?				
Other notes/comments:				

Grade: / 200 points