

Latin America and the Caribbean: Landscapes of Inequality

Geo 2020B

Fall 2015

time & location: Thursday 1:30-4:30 pm (SSC-3022)

instructor: Dr. Tony Weis

office: SSC 1403

office hours: Wednesdays 1.30-2.30, or by appointment

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Overview

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region marked by great extremes of wealth and poverty, from skyscrapers to sprawling shantytowns; magnificent rainforests to degraded pastures; lucrative mines and agro-export plantations to widespread land hunger; and stunning resorts to steaming sweatshops. A basic aim of this course is to provide a foundation for understanding these contrasts by examining how struggles for land, resources, and labour have driven uneven development and environmental change over time, going back to the European Conquest but giving relatively more attention given to the past century. Repeatedly the question is posed: where do past injustices end, and present inequalities begin? This is not to suggest that countries are prisoners of their past, but it is to emphasize that contemporary inequalities, social relations, and landscapes cannot be understood in an historical vacuum.

The nations of Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced many similar political and economic processes, though of course with important variations. This course will try to be sensitive to the specificities of historical experiences while examining a number of cross-cutting themes, including: violence and domination; indigenous survival and resilience; colonial economic organization and forced labour; authoritarian political structures and the role of the military; neo-colonialism and economic dependency; revolution and counter-insurgency; migration; urbanization; structural adjustment, austerity, and debt; resource extraction and environmental degradation; enduring social hierarchies; and new manifestations of enduring social and economic struggles. The net aim is to vibrant, contested contemporary political dynamics.

Format

This is a lecture course involving directed readings, with occasional film-segments, and a short written assignment. You will find it helpful, and get more out of each lecture, if you keep up with the assigned weekly readings. This will also benefit you in preparing for the mid-term and the final exam. The organization is both chronological and thematic, emphasizing processes and patterns, with selected contexts chosen to either illustrate broader contours in more detail or to examine distinct outcomes. I will try to stay as close to the thematic outline below, but it is subject to some flexibility.

Objectives

In general, this course seeks to:

- present a basic framework for understanding environmental and development problems in Latin American and Caribbean nations;
- provide a foundation for further studies in the region or in subjects pertaining to global studies or international development;
- help prepare students for active and responsible global citizenship, fostering critical thought and increased awareness about our Hemispheric neighbours.

Course Materials

- Readings and maps will be posted on OWL
- PowerPoint presentations will also be posted on OWL, after each class.

Evaluation

Mid-term exam 25%

- in class: **October 22**
- a combination of multiple choice, map, and fill-in-the blank questions

Short Assignment – movie review/analysis 35%

- due in class: **November 26**
- see page 5

Length: max. 1000 words

Late Policy: No extensions will be granted, and deductions (10% of grade per day) begin immediately after the class in which it is due ends. Assignments will not be accepted if they are more than seven days late.

Final exam 40%

- exam period: **December 11-22**
- a combination of multiple choice, short paragraph and essay questions, covering the course lectures and readings.

Notes: Both the midterm and the final exam will test your understanding of specific events, more general processes, and concepts from both lectures and course readings. *If you fail to write the exam on the scheduled date and time, you will be given 0, unless you communicate with me prior to the exam, in which case you will require a note from your physician (see note on special examination policy below).*

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

No electronic devices will be allowed during tests and examinations.

Feedback

I am eager to help you with any problems you might have with the course, by email, phone, in my office hours, or by appointment, and am open to your suggestions for improving the course.

THEMATIC OUTLINE

1st half of course
Introduction – Landscapes of Inequality
1. Indigenous Civilizations, the Rise of European Imperialism & Conquest
2. Extracting Resources: Colonial Labour Regimes & Expanding Frontiers
3. From Independence & Authoritarian State Building to the Liberal Reformers
4. Land, Inequality, Revolutionary Struggle, and Enduring Authoritarianism
MID-TERM EXAM (25%) in class: Thursday, October 22
FALL STUDY BREAK – October 29-30
2nd half of course
5. Reform Responses to Uneven Development & the Import-Substitution Industrialization (ISI) Model (including rising urbanization, and tourism development)
6. Debt, Structural Adjustment, & Neoliberal Prescriptions (including the rise of remittances and the growth of narco-economies)
7. Resource Extraction and Indigenous Mobilization
MOVIE ASSIGNMENT (35%) due in class: November 26
8. Struggles for Alternatives, New Social Movements, and Contemporary Politics
EXAM PERIOD – December 11-22
**FINAL EXAM (40%) (2 hours - Cumulative) **

Thanksgiving: Monday, October 22

Additional Information

Support Services

- Registrarial Services: <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/>
- Student Development Services: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Geography Counselling

- Angelica Lucaci: alucaci@uwo.ca

Mental Health

- If you or someone you know is experiencing distress, there are several resources here at Western to assist you. Please visit the site below for more information on mental health resources: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>.

Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:

- http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf
- for a downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC) see <https://studentservices.uwo.ca> under the Medical Documentation heading.

Special Examinations

A special examination is any examination other than the regularly scheduled exam. Special exams will be allowed only on receipt of medical documentation verifying a serious illness that kept the student from writing the exam as originally scheduled. Such documentation is strictly confidential and kept in the student's file. In the case of missing a final exam for documented medical reasons, a special exam will be set within 30 days. Special exams will not be granted for occasions such as employment interviews, weddings, bar mitzvahs, family reunions, vacations, misreading an exam timetable, or oversleeping. Neither will special exams be granted in order to facilitate transportation arrangements, such as booking flights for home for holidays. It is the policy to discourage informal arrangements by faculty which circumvent this regulation.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Western's Commitment to Accessibility

The University of Western Ontario is committed to achieving barrier free accessibility for persons studying, visiting and working at Western. Please contact Dr. Weis as soon as possible if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you, and to facilitate a positive learning environment. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

Fire Alarm Policy

UWO Occupational Health and Safety requires that all students are required to evacuate the building when the fire alarm is activated. This is imperative, not an option.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT – movie review/analysis (35%)

- due in class: **November 26**

Select one movie from the list given below and prepare a short paper discussing how it contributes to your understanding of one of the course themes (hint: re-read course overview on page 1). Do not spend too much time focusing on the plot, acting, or cinematography; rather, *focus on developing an argument that situates the events of the movie within their geographical context.*

In your discussion, you are required to make use of *at least two* relevant academic sources (books or academic journal articles). Some suggested sources will be provided.

Options

1) *Che: El Argentino* (2008: Stephen Soderberg)

- about the legendary figure of Che Guevara and his role in the Cuban Revolution.

2) *When the Mountains Tremble* (1983: Newton Thomas Sigel and Pamela Yates)

- documentary made at the height of the Guatemalan civil war, examining the campaign of terror waged by military upon Guatemala's indigenous majority.

3) *The Burning Season* (1994: John Frankenheimer)

- about Chico Mendes, a rubber tapper who became a legendary organizer and defender of the Amazon rainforest.

4) *Romero* (1989: John Duigan)

- about the radicalization and subsequent struggle of Archbishop Romero prior to the explosion of violence in El Salvador in the 1980s.

5) *The Agronomist* (2003: John Demme)

- a documentary about the life of Jean Dominique, a leading Haitian human rights activist

6) *Even the Rain* (2010: Icíar Bollaín)

- this connects the story of a controversial historical filmmaking project to a modern-day struggle against the attempt to privatize water in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

NOTE: if you present a brief proposal (film + 2 sources) to do a different film or a Latin American novel, I will be happy to consider it – but it is best to discuss this with me first