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## **LATIN AMERICAN ICONS**

### COMM 282 - Spring 2009

#### **Course Description**

This course examines the rise of political icons in modern and contemporary Latin American societies. In particular, it highlights the intersections between historical context, individual biographies, and symbolic representations in the cases of four of the most important and controversial political leaders of the region: Simón Bolívar, Eva Perón, Che Guevara, and Hugo Chávez. By looking at discourses and cultural forms that have been mobilized to construct and challenge the iconic status of these individuals, we will explore some of the most important political movements and conflicts that have shaped Latin America's history, including nationalism, populism, and revolution.

When looking at the four chosen biographies, we will discuss the role of *virtue* and *fortune* (in Machiavelli's terms) in the construction of political icons. The course therefore considers the role of personal skills and random chance in the emergence of iconic figures, as well as the specific historical contexts and pressures that help explain them. We will also analyze the centrality of symbols and narratives in creating, maintaining, and challenging the mythic status of these individuals. The course emphasizes, in particular, the role of the mass media and symbolic representations in shaping the global and local understandings of political icons, including paintings, photography, literature, film, and television.

#### **Course Goals and Objectives**

There are two central goals in this class: first, the development of conceptual and analytical tools that will enable students to analyze the role of the mass media and symbolic representations in the construction of political icons; second, students will learn about Latin American history and politics through the examination of the biographies of four of its most important iconic figures.

Our objectives to reach these goals include learning how to:

- apply theories and concepts to develop a critical and comprehensive analysis of the role of symbols and communication practices in the construction of political icons;
- identify key historical trends in modern and contemporary Latin America;
- analyze the role of personal traits, historical context, and symbolic representations in the construction of political icons in Latin America;
- conduct research and gather data in library archives to apply the analytical frameworks of the course in the development of a specific case study.

#### **Blackboard**

Blackboard will be used for posting announcements, assignments, and other information. It will also be used for online discussions. The system can be accessed at < <http://mytulane.blackboard.com/>>. If you have problems using the system, you can call the help desk: 862.8888.

### Course Texts

- Gabriel García Márquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*. New York: Everyman's Library, 2004.
- Tomás Eloy Martínez, *Santa Evita*. New York: Vintage International, 1997.
- Bart Jones, *Hugo! The Hugo Chávez Story from Mud Hut to Perpetual Revolution*. Hanover: Steerforth Press, 2007.

The three books are available through Tulane Bookstore.

### Required texts

Besides the three textbooks, we will also work with several articles and book chapters which will be available online at Blackboard. Assigned readings should be completed prior to the classes for which they are listed in the syllabus. All students should have hard copies of the texts and bring them to the respective sessions. Failure to do so will affect your participation grade.

### Attendance

Regular attendance is required and attendance will be taken in every class meeting. You can miss five class sessions without penalty in your participation grade. Nine unexcused absences will result in the final grade recommendation of a "WF."

### Evaluation

Your final evaluation will be based on the following:

1) Midterm exam: Students will take an in-class midterm exam which will cover the first three units (Parts I, II, and III). A list of possible questions will be delivered to students in advance and one of the questions will be on the exam. The midterm is a closed book exam. Students should bring a pen and a blank blue book on the scheduled date for the exam;

2) Final paper: Students will be required to write a 10-page final paper (excluding front page and references), which should be typed and spaced 1.5. Specific guidelines for the paper will be given later;

3) Participation: Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions. To have an effective participation, students should complete the assigned readings prior to the sessions for which they are listed in the syllabus and be ready to discuss them. Attendance will also be considered when assessing participation;

4) Readings summaries: Students should bring a one-page summary of the reading/s assigned for each session, which will be due in the beginning of class. They can be typed or hand-written, and should include the student's full name and the date of the session. Summaries will be graded as "sufficient" and "insufficient" and only the former will satisfy the requirement. If you deliver all summaries and they are graded "sufficient," you will receive full credit for this portion of your grade (you can miss up to three summaries without penalty). If you do not, your grade will be proportionally lowered down to a possible "F" (50 points);

5) Analysis of iconic representation: Students should write a short paper (5-page long) with a systematic analysis of a symbol (painting, sculpture, photograph, short video or film, etc) related to one of the four political icons discussed in the class. Students will also prepare a 10-minute long oral presentation of the results of the analysis.

6) Discussion board: Students will be evaluated for their participation in the "Discussion Board" area of Blackboard. This is where our online discussions will take place. There will be 8 discussion periods and each of them will be led by at least one discussion leader. Discussion leaders are responsible for proposing themes and questions for their respective periods by posting

original threads. They should post at least two threads in the day before the respective period is supposed to start and they can add extra threads later, if they wish. Discussion leaders will be in charge of commenting on classmates' postings, connecting them to readings and other materials, and eventually answering specific questions that emerge in the discussions. There are no major restrictions on the postings in terms of their contents, but students should be cordial and respectful when discussing classmates' arguments. Failure to do so will disqualify the respective postings and may result in other penalties. After the conclusion of each period, discussion leaders should submit a 2-page long typed report, containing a personal evaluation of the discussions, as well as the number of messages posted by each student.

How to post to a discussion board: 1) click on the discussion board button; 2) click on the respective "Period" (Period 1, Period 2, etc.); 3) Discussion leaders can add a new "thread" (a new topic, with a new subject title) to the discussion, while other students can post a message (response or comment) in an existing thread by clicking on "reply."

Evaluation of discussion board participation: students should post at least two messages in each of the 8 designated periods for online discussions (listed below). Whether you post more than these 16 required messages is entirely up to you. As long as you complete the 16 minimum posts, with at least two in each period, with serious and thoughtful contributions, you will receive full credit for this portion of your grade. If you do not post all required messages, your grade will be proportionally lowered down to a possible "F" (50 points). The evaluation of discussion board leaders will be based on the written report and on the quality of their threads and postings.

The 8 designated periods for online discussions are: Period 1: Jan 26-Feb 1; Period 2: Feb 2-8; Period 3: Feb 9-15; Period 4: Feb 16-27; Period 5: March 9-15; Period 6: March 16-22; Period 7: March 30-April 8; Period 8: April 20-26.

Your final grade will be calculated in the following manner:

|                                   |      |                                |      |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|------|
| Midterm Exam                      | 15 % | Participation                  | 15 % |
| Readings summaries                | 15 % | Final Paper                    | 25 % |
| Discussion board participation    | 10 % | Discussion board leader report | 5 %  |
| Analysis of iconic representation | 15 % |                                |      |

### Grading scale

|    |               |    |              |    |              |    |              |
|----|---------------|----|--------------|----|--------------|----|--------------|
| A  | 94.0 to 100.0 | B  | 84.0 to 86.9 | C  | 74.0 to 76.9 | D  | 64.0 to 66.9 |
| A- | 90.0 to 93.9  | B- | 80.0 to 83.9 | C- | 70.0 to 73.9 | D- | 60.0 to 63.9 |
| B+ | 87.0 to 89.9  | C+ | 77.0 to 79.9 | D+ | 67.0 to 69.9 | F  | 00.0 to 59.9 |

### Academic dishonesty

Remember that plagiarism is a form of cheating. Do not present someone else's ideas without citing the source. This course adheres strictly to the Code of Academic Conduct of the Newcomb-Tulane College, available at: < <http://college.tulane.edu/code.htm> >

### Course Schedule

#### PART I THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

**Jan 12 (Mon) – Introduction to the procedures and contents of the course.**

(No readings).

**Jan 14 (Wed) – The semiotic approach.**

\* Jonathan Biegnell, *Media Semiotics: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997 (chapter 1, “Signs and myths”, pp. 5-29).

**Jan 16 (Fri) – Key concepts: political icon, myth, charisma.**

(No readings).

**Jan 19 (Mon) – No class. Martin L. King Holiday.****Jan 21 (Wed) – Analyzing images and representations.**

\* Roland Barthes, “The photographic message.” In *Image/Music/Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996, pp. 15-31.

**Jan 23 (Fri) – Analyzing images and representations: in-class exercise**

(No reading)

PART II – SIMÓN BOLÍVAR AS ICON:  
INDEPENDENCE AND NATION BUILDING IN LATIN AMERICA

**Jan 26 (Mon) – Lecture: The colonization of Latin America.**

\* Marquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*, pp. 9-64.

**Jan 28 (Wed) – Lecture: Independence wars.**

\* Marquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*, pp. 65-119.

**Jan 30 (Fri) – Lecture: Nation building: Liberal ideas, conservative oligarchies.**

\* Marquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*, pp. 121-174.

**Feb 2 (Mon) – Simón Bolívar as a foundational icon.**

\* Marquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*, pp. 175-232.

**Feb 4 (Wed) – The role of words and paintings in shaping Bolívar as a founding myth.**

\* Stephen Hart, “Blood, ink and pigment: Simón Bolívar as proteus.” *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, Vol. 82, n. 3-4, 2005, pp. 335-352.

**Feb 6 (Fri) – Student presentations: images of Bolívar.**

PART III – EVA PERÓN AS ICON:  
NATIONALISM, GENDER, AND POPULISM

**Feb 9 (Mon) – Lecture: Populism in Latin America.**

\* Martínez, *Santa Evita*, pp. 3-66.

**Feb 11 (Wed) – Film screening: “Evita” (Alan Parker).**

\* Martínez, *Santa Evita*, pp. 67-123.

**Feb 13 (Fri) – Film screening: ‘Evita’ (Alan Parker).**

\* Martínez, *Santa Evita*, pp. 124-188.

**Feb 16 (Mon) – Film screening: “Evita” (Alan Parker).**

\* Martínez, *Santa Evita*, pp. 189-260.

**Feb 18 (Wed) – The mythic constructions of Eva Perón.**

\* Martínez, *Santa Evita*, pp. 261-302.

**Feb 20 (Fri) – Eva Perón as Icon.**

\* Martínez, *Santa Evita*, pp. 303-362.

**Feb 23 (Mon) – No class. Mardi Gras break.**

**Feb 25 (Wed) – Documentary screening (TBA).**

**Feb 27 (Fri) – Documentary screening (TBA).**

**March 2 (Mon) – Alan Parker’s *Evita*: Controversies in the representation of an icon.**

\* Marta Savigliano, “Evita: The globalization of a national myth.” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 24, n. 6, 1997, pp. 156-172

**March 4 (Wed) - Student presentations: images of Eva Perón.**

**March 6 (Fri) - MIDTERM EXAM.**

#### PART IV - CHE GUEVARA AS ICON: REVOLUTION AND COUNTER REVOLUTION IN LATIN AMERICA

**March 9 (Mon) – Guevara and revolution in Latin America.**

\* Alma Guillermoprieto, “The harsh angel.” In *Looking for History*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002, pp. 73-86.

**March 11 (Wed) – Guevara’s death and his resurrection as an icon.**

\* Jorge Castañeda, “Death and resurrection.” In *Compañero*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998, pp. 391-410.

**March 13 (Fri) – Alberto Korda’s portrait of Guevara.**

Documentary screening: Excerpts from “Kordavision” (Hector Cruz Sandoval).

**March 16 (Mon) – The construction of Che as icon by the U.S. media**

\* Hanno Hardt, Luis Rivera-Perez, and Jorge Calles-Santillana, “The death and resurrection of Ernesto Che Guevara: US media and the deconstruction of a revolutionary life”. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. Vol. 1, n. 3, 1998, pp. 351-372.

**March 18 (Wed) – Representations of Guevara’s dead body and religious iconography.**

Documentary screening: Excerpts from “El Día en que me Quieras” (Leandro Katz).

\* David Kunzle, “Chesucristo: Fusions, myths, and realities.” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 35, n. 2, 2008, pp. 97-115.

**March 20 (Fri) – Student presentations: images of Che Guevara.****March 23, 25, and 27 – No class. Spring break.**

PART V – HUGO CHÁVEZ AS ICON:  
CONTEMPORARY CONTROVERSIES OVER

**March 30 (Mon) – Hugo Chávez: Revolutionary or populist?**

\* Bart Jones, *Hugo!*, pp. 1-23.

**April 1 (Wed) – No class.****April 3 (Fri) – Chávez, the military, and political insurgency.**

\* Bart Jones, *Hugo!*, pp. 56-75.

**April 6 (Mon) – The “Caracazo” and the collapse of Venezuela’s political system.**

\* Bart Jones, *Hugo!*, pp. 111-130.

**April 8 (Wed) – The 1992 coup attempt and Chávez’s rise as a national icon.**

\* Bart Jones, *Hugo!*, pp. 131-160.

**April 10 and 13 – No class. Easter break.****April 15 (Wed) – Chavez’s rise to the presidency in 1998.**

\* Bart Jones, *Hugo!*, pp. 187-204 and 214-225.

**April 17 (Fri) – The media-centered presidency**

\* Bart Jones, *Hugo!*, pp. 226-247..

**April 20 (Mon) – Political polarization and media wars: the 2002 coup.**

\* Bart Jones, *Hugo!*, pp. 311-340..

**Apr 22 (Wed) – Evaluating Chávez as a political icon.**

\* Bart Jones, *Hugo!*, pp. 446-455 and pp. 473-487..

**Apr 24 (Fri) – Student presentations: images of Hugo Chávez.****Apr 27 (Mon) – Conclusions. Class evaluation.****FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 6, WEDNESDAY, 10:00 a.m. – noon.**

Papers should be delivered at the instructor’s office: 219 Newcomb Hall. Late papers will not be received.