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LATIN AMERICAN ICONS COMM 281 - Spring 2010

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 Gevara, 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 how the interactions between personal traits, historical context, and symbolic representation shape the emergence 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.

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.
- Patrick Symmes, *Chasing Che: A motorcycle journey in search of the Guevara legend*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
- Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*. London: Verso, 2005.

The four books are available through Tulane Bookstore.

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.

Required texts

Besides the four 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.”

Use of laptops and cell phones

The use of cell phones and pagers is prohibited during class hours, unless the professor has given previous authorization for emergency situations. Chatting, e-mailing, internet browsing, or any activity not related to official class activity will affect your participation grade negatively and may result in other penalties. Laptops are permitted solely for the purpose of taking notes, but students who want to use them need to submit a written request in advance to the professor. If you are authorized to use a laptop, you will be required to submit your notes to the professor as an email attachment at the end of the class. The quality of the notes will not affect your grade, but the authorization to use the laptop can be suspended if they are not considered sufficient.

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 two 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 (excluding front page and references) final paper, 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. 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). Summaries are due in the beginning of the respective class and therefore they cannot be sent by email or delivered after the respective session;

5) Analysis of iconic representation: Students should write a short paper (5-page long) with a systematic analysis of an image (painting, sculpture, photograph, 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 four 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 one thread in the day before the respective period is supposed to start and they should add at least one more thread seven days later. 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 5-page long typed report, spaced 1.5, containing a personal evaluation of the discussions that took place in his/her own threads, as well as a table with the number and the date 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 four messages in each of the four 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 four 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). You cannot post more than one message per day and your first posting has to be created in the first four days (Saturday and Sunday excluded) of discussion. The evaluation of discussion board leaders will be based on the written report and on the quality of their threads and postings. The four designated periods for online discussions are: Period 1 – Simón Bolívar: January 25 - February 12; Period 2 – Eva Perón: February 19-March 8; Period 3– Che Guevara: March 12-26; Period 4–Hugo Chávez: April 12-26.

Your final grade will be calculated in the following manner:

Midterm Exam	15 %	Participation	15 %
Readings summaries	15 %	Final Paper	20 %
Discussion board participation	10 %	Discussion board leader report	10 %
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 11 (Mon) – Introduction to the procedures and contents of the course (No readings).

Jan 13 (Wed) – The semiotic approach.

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

Jan 15 (Fri) – Key concepts: charisma, myth, political icon (No readings).

Jan 18 (Mon) – No class. Martin L. King Holiday.

Jan 20 (Wed) – Analyzing images and representations.

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

Jan 22 (Fri) – Analyzing images and representations: in-class exercise (No readings).

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

Jan 25 (Mon) – Background: The colonization of Latin America.

* Marquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*, pp. 9-64.
DISCUSSION BOARD’S FIRST FORUM BEGINS!

Jan 27 (Wed) – Background: Independence wars.

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

Jan 29 (Fri) – Background: Nation building: Liberal ideas, conservative oligarchies.

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

Feb 1 (Mon) – Simón Bolívar as a foundational icon.

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

Feb 3 and 5 – No class.

Feb 8 (Mon) – 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 10 (Wed) – Guest Lecture: Robert Freeland, “Simón Bolívar on coins, currency, and stamps” (No readings).

Feb 12 (Fri) – Bolívar and race: The case of General José Padilla.

The session will be held in the Latin American Library, in the 4th floor of the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library (No readings). DISCUSSION BOARD’S FIRST FORUM ENDS!

Feb 15 (Mon) – No class. Mardi Gras break.

Feb 17 (Wed) – Student presentations: Images of Bolívar (No readings).

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

Feb 19 (Fri) – Background: Nationalism and development in Latin America.

* Martínez, *Santa Evita*, pp. 3-66.

DISCUSSION BOARD'S SECOND FORUM BEGINS!

Feb 22 (Mon) – Background: Populism.

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

Feb 24 (Wed) – Background: Peronism, gender, and politics in Argentina.

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

Feb 26 (Fri) – Eva Perón as icon.

* Martínez, *Santa Evita*, pp. 189-252.

March 1 (Mon) – Eva Perón as icon (Cont.).

* Martínez, *Santa Evita*, pp. 252-302.

March 3 (Wed) – Eva Perón as icon (Cont.).

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

TBA (Make-up session): Film screening: “Evita” (Alan Parker).

March 5 (Fri) – 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 8 (Mon) - Student presentations: Images of Eva Perón (No readings).

DISCUSSION BOARD'S SECOND FORUM ENDS!

March 10 (Wed) - MIDTERM EXAM.

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

March 12 (Fri) – Background: Introducing Guevara.

* Symmes, *Chasing Che*, pp. 3-51.

DISCUSSION BOARD'S THIRD FORUM BEGINS!

March 15 (Mon) – No class. Mardi Gras Break.

March 17 (Wed) – Alberto Korda’s portrait of Guevara.

Documentary screening: Excerpts from “Kordavision” (Hector Cruz Sandoval). No readings.

March 19 (Fri) – Background: Revolution and counter revolution in Latin America.

* Symmes, *Chasing Che*, pp. 79-136.

March 22 (Mon) - Guevara as icon.

* Symmes, *Chasing Che*, pp. 137-189.

March 24 (Wed) – Guevara as icon.

* Symmes, *Chasing Che*, pp. 190-238.

March 26 (Fri) – Photography, Guevara’s death, and religious iconography.

Documentary screening: Excerpts from “El Día en que me Quieras” (Leandro Katz). No readings.
DISCUSSION BOARD’S THIRD FORUM ENDS!

March 29 (Mon) / April 5 (Mon) – No class. Spring Break.**April 7 (Wed) - Guevara as icon.**

* Symmes, *Chasing Che*, pp. 239-302.

April 9 (Fri) – Student presentations: Images of Che Guevara (No readings).

PART V – HUGO CHÁVEZ AS ICON:
CONTEMPORARY CONTROVERSIES OVER POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

April 12 (Mon) – Background: The rise and fall of Venezuela’s *Punto Fijo* democracy.

* Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, pp. 1-31.
DISCUSSION BOARD’S FOURTH FORUM BEGINS!

April 14 (Wed) – Chávez, the military, and political insurgency.

* Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, pp. 35-87.

April 16 (Fri) – Chávez’s rise to power and the first years of his presidency.

* Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, pp.119-156.

April 19 (Mon) – Political polarization, media wars, and the 2002 coup.

* Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, pp. 217-255.

April 21 (Wed) – Chávez’s appropriation of Bolívar and political conflict in Venezuela.

* Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, pp. 91-109 and 260-274.

April 23 (Fri) – The media-centered presidency.

Documentary screening: “The Hugo Chavez’s Show” (PBS).

April 26 (Mon) – Student presentations: Images of Hugo Chávez (No readings).

Conclusions. Class evaluation.
DISCUSSION BOARD’S FOURTH FORUM ENDS!

FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 5, WEDNESDAY, 10:00 a.m. – noon.

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