The Cold War in Latin America

Description of the course

The Cold War had a profound impact in Latin America, as it also had on most regions of the world, but that impact has not been sufficiently explored in the vast literature devoted to analyzing the super-power confrontation that shaped the world between 1947 and 1991. At the same time, however, events and processes taking place in Latin America before and during the Cold War -in particular, efforts towards social justice in the region- had a dynamics of their own and decisively contributed to shaping both the national and international dimensions of the Cold War. This course attempts to explore the Latin American experience during the Cold War, emphasizing the interaction between the region’s socio-political processes, actors, and agendas, and the different forms of intervention in the region by the United States and the Soviet Union. Students will hopefully come out of this class with a more nuanced understanding of the global dynamics of the Cold War and the multiple dimensions of the Latin American experience during that period, including processes of revolutionary transformation, protracted military intervention, massive human rights violations, and renewed intellectual and cultural conflict.

What you can expect to learn in this course

• A solid understanding of the global dimensions of the Cold War, its ideological and political aspects, and its impact on Latin American societies
• The role of the US and the USSR in shaping the history of the region through economic, military, and/or political intervention
• The emergence of radical projects of social transformation in Latin America as well as the ways in which conservative regimes and social forces responded to them
• How to think about the history of Latin America as it relates to global forces and ideologies
• How to conceive Latin America as a complex geographical and human area with both commonalities and differences among the various countries that belonged to the region

Course policies

1. Students are expected to attend lectures consistently. A passing grade will be difficult to achieve without regular attendance. Students must also consistently read
the assigned materials.
2. The course instructor will hold regular office hours every week. Students are encouraged to visit him to discuss pertinent issues or get additional information about the course's themes, policies, and grades.
3. A common form of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, will not be tolerated. Students must become familiar with the University of Oregon rules about this issue. More information will be offered at the appropriate time.
4. An atmosphere of mutual respect, tolerance, and fairness will be encouraged and enforced by the instructor. Students must behave in ways proper to an academic environment—i.e. no talking, eating, or newspaper reading during lecture. No electronic devices will be allowed in the classroom, except laptop computers and tablets and only for note-taking purposes. Students that plan to use a laptop computer or a table must seat in the front row(s).
5. An “incomplete” grade will be granted only in cases of extreme need and only to those students that have an acceptable record of class attendance and get at least a C in the mid-term. Students that need an “incomplete” grade must make arrangements with the instructor on or before the last week of classes.
6. No late homework will be accepted, except in cases of health-related and other types of emergency that could be documented.

Requirements and evaluations

a) For undergraduate students:

- Attendance and participation: 10%
- Take-home midterm exam: 30%.
- Two quizzes: 10% each.
- Final exam: 40%.

b) For graduate students

- Attendance and participation: 10%.
- 1 book review: 10%. Students will write a 2-3-page review of Jean Franco’s book (due 11/25). More details will be offered in class.
- Oral presentation: 20%. Towards the end of the term, graduate students will make a 15-20 minute presentation on their research topics.
- 12-15 page research paper or historiographical essay: 60%. Students will choose a topic related to the class and will produce an essay using at least 6 books or monographs and primary sources (if feasible). The topics for these papers and a preliminary bibliography will be discussed with the instructor during week 3.
Required readings

The following book is available for purchase at the UO Bookstore and has been placed on reserve at Knight Library. All other readings will be available through Canvas:

Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2002)

Course Schedule

Week 1

09/28 Introduction

09/30 Conceptualizing Cold War history: approaches, actors, motivations, and legacies


Week 2

10/05 The Cold War in Latin America: an overview of historiographical and methodological issues and frameworks

Reading: Gilbert M. Joseph, “What We Now Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies,” in Joseph and Spenser, eds. *In From the Cold. Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War* (Duke University Press, 2008).

10/07 Latin America, the US, and the Soviet Union before 1945


Document No. 1: Carleton Beals, “A Skeptic Views the Good Neighbor Policy”

Week 3

10/12 The post-WWII era in US and Latin American relations: realities and concerns

Reading: Peter Smith, “Closing Ranks,” in *Talons of the Eagle*, pp. 117-142.
Document No. 2: “The Menace of Communism” (1948)

10/14 Seeing Red in Guatemala, 1950-1954 / Quiz # 1


Week 4

10/19 The Cuban Revolution


Document No. 3: “With Castro in the Sierra Maestra” (1957)

10/21 A Soviet beachhead? Cuba’s impact on Cold War climate


Week 5

10/26 The Cuban effect and the fear of communism


10/28 US and local responses to the communist threat


Week 6

11/02 From Cold War to Dirty War: State Terror in the Southern Cone (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay) / Take-home midterm exam due


Document No. 5: “The United States and Human Rights in Chile” (1976)

11/04 The international dimensions of the dirty way: Operation Condor


Week 7

11/09 Social upheaval, repression, and US intervention in Central America

Reading: Mark Danner, “The Truth of El Mozote,” *The New Yorker*, December 6, 1993,


11/11 Central America, cont.


Week 8

11/16 Mexico during the Cold War: the limits of exceptionalism

11/18 Mexico, cont. / Quiz # 2.

Readings: Seth Fein, “Producing the Cold War in Mexico: The Public Limits of Covert Communications” and Steven J. Bachelor, “Miracle on Ice: Industrial Workers and the Promise of Americanization in Cold War Mexico”, in Joseph and Spenser, eds. *In From the Cold.*
Week 9

11/23 Intellectuals and the Cultural Cold War

11/25 The Cultural Cold War, cont. / Discussion of Jean Franco’s book

Reading: Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, all.

Week 10

11/30 Is the Cold War over? Lasting legacies and the battles over memory

Readings: Daniela Spenser, “Standing Conventional Cold War History on Its Head” and Thomas S. Blanton, “Recovering the Memory of the Cold War: Forensic History and Latin America,” in Joseph and Spenser, eds. *In From the Cold*.

12/02 Review for Final Exam

Final Exam: Tuesday, December 8, 14:45
Graduate papers due date: December 8