

HIST291S13: Latin America in the U.S. Imagination

- [Home](#)

Steve Volk

Class meets Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-10:50 AM (King 239)

Office: Rice 309

Office Phone: 58522

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11-Noon; Wednesdays 2:00-3:00; Thursdays 1:30-2:30, and by appointment

Email: svolk@oberlin.edu (see below for e-communication policy)

In the midst of the Sonia Sotomayor's confirmation hearings for a seat on the Supreme Court, Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) joked in a discussion about local laws and gun rights that the judge would "have some 'splaining to do" if she came after him with a gun. Everyone laughed, and it was only a bit later when the blogosphere lit up with a discussion of the phrase, which was a signature exclamation Ricky Ricardo (Desi Arnaz), a Spanish-accented Cuban bandleader on the famous "I Love Lucy" show used when exasperated with Lucy (Lucille Ball), his ditzy (Anglo) wife. I have very little doubt that (at that moment), Coburn thought he was both funny and hip in a pop culture sort of way. Yet it also suggested that what he was thinking about when he questioned the nominee was not a New York accented judge, but a Spanish-accented Cuban, i.e., *another* Latino. That move, in one sense, is what this course will attempt to understand.

The basic theme of the course is not what happened in Latin American history (take my survey courses, HIST 109/110 for that), and it's not about the nature of U.S.-Latin American relations (ditto: HIST 294), but rather how (US) Americans frame their understanding of both of these things. Do you remember the "Far Side" cartoon below? Well, to return to the Sotomayor-Coburn example, I'm interested in exploring the gap between what

Picture Sotomayor said ("If I go home, get a gun, come back and shoot you, that may not be legal under New York law because you would have alternative ways to defend...") and how Coburn heard it ("blah blah blah Latina blah blah blah limited English blah blah").

What I find interesting about this is precisely that I don't believe Coburn *consciously* was looking to demean Sotomayor at that moment. Rather, he recurred to those *images* in his mind that *unconsciously* shaped his response. This class is not about why Coburn opposed Sotomayor's nomination (i.e., his politics), but why, when he *saw* her, he couldn't get past...Ricky Ricardo.

Some of the main representational devices which we will analyze to help us understand how this process works, *how meanings are made*, are those of semiosis (a study of "signs"), metaphor and stereotype. Language, of course, is one of the means through which these representational operations occur, but they also work via images, sounds, artifacts, etc., all of which help shape a culture. When we talk of people sharing a "culture," at least one way to understand that is that when they see, hear, or read a particularly

“representational” item (for example, the man with a large hat in the image on the first page of the syllabus), they will derive similar meanings from what they see, hear or read, meanings that go beyond the pure image (man, hat, tree) itself to suggest things such as “lazy,” “beggar,” or “stupid.” This course will explore how these various representational operations work, how meanings are made and shared, and how they continue to shape understandings long after we have stopped “thinking” about them.

Purpose and Learning Goals of Course:

This semester's course will focus on increasing students' abilities to better understand the nature of U.S. interactions with Latin America, Latin Americans, and Latinos/as in the United States via an exploration of how Latin America came to be represented (“imagined”) in the United States. To do this, students will examine not only the historical context of these interactions (wars fought in Mexico or Cuba; the expansion of U.S. corporate activities in Latin America, etc.), but the representational frames through which (US) Americans came to understand these events. In the process students will gain skills in information literacy, skillful writing, image analysis, critical thinking, and the ability to work collaboratively. Among the specific learning goals are the following:

- To introduce students to the study of semiosis, how meanings are produced, consumed, regulated, challenged, reformulated, or overturned, particularly through an examination of some major forms of representation embedded in culture such as metaphor and stereotype. And, because culture and power are closely entwined, we will also examine issues of power and persuasion.
- To introduce students to the history of some important interactions between the United States and Latin America.
- To help students understand some historical approaches to asking and answering questions, including:

How to identify, closely read, and analyze primary sources.

How to work with and evaluate useful secondary sources, specifically identifying and evaluating their central arguments.

How to work with non-written sources (including images and sound).

To understand and appreciate ambiguity in historical argument and presentation.

To further students' abilities to work collaboratively in shaping and answering questions and in solving problems.

Picture Course Organization:

As we will discuss in class, my approach to teaching is based on a “constructivist” philosophy that students learn not by listening to endless lectures, but by engaging in discussions, forming their own understandings through questioning and investigating, and constructing their own insights. For that reason, while I will have some short lectures, we will try to keep the class to an active learning framework, even though it is much larger than a seminar. As such it required that students complete

readings on time and come prepared for class discussions.

Accessing Course Materials:

You can access the course texts in a variety of ways: (1) Books recommended for purchase are on sale at the bookstore (or can be purchased on-line). (2) **All required articles are on Blackboard under "Readings" (not on ERES).** (3) You can find all the required books in the library. (4) Books can also be obtained through OHIO LINK, and some are available via OBIS in a digital format. Please let me know if you are having any difficulties accessing any materials.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING POLICY. (You will be receiving further instructions on each of these assignments.) This class is not about memorizing facts, nor does it require the mastery of a specific historical content, as do most history courses. It is more organized around helping students understand approaches, techniques, and methods of making meanings. For that reason, I have constructed most of the assignments as relatively frequent, but short ones that allow you to apply what we are talking about in class and what you are reading to other materials. Only the final assignment is a "typical" research-paper, where you can put it all together.

First Project: Road testing some ideas...Due at start of class, Tuesday, March 12

Using any of the primary sources I will give you, prepare an analysis of the *rhetoric* (metaphors, stereotypes, etc.) used in discussions of the war with Mexico. (5 pages)

Reading/Film Responses (6 due throughout the semester). Writing responses are typically 2-3 pages in length and address salient issues raised in the text (written or visual) that you are responding to, not summaries of content. I expect that you will have written *at least* 3 of these before spring break (although you can do more), and the full 6 by the end of the semester. The benefit of this assignment (at least I think it's a benefit), is that you can do more when you have more time and skip a week or two when you have less time. **NOT EVERYTHING WE READ WILL BE 'AVAILABLE' FOR A RESPONSE.** You'll see the full list on the Discussion Board in Blackboard, which is where you will be posting your reading responses. These will be available for other members of the class to also see and comment on.

Blog (on-going conversations that measure your ability to "see" and analyze more widely). You will be expected to use this blog (acting more as an electronic bulletin board than a threaded discussion) as a way to bring the world and your daily experiences into the class: things you see, hear, read, or think about that are pertinent to the class should be posted. Your intervention on the blog will be a relatively small part of your final grade, as I want you to think of this part of the overall assignment as something you actively want to do rather than something you *have* to do. Use it as you see fit, but do use it. (I will give you directions on using the blog in class.)

Final Project: Due Thursday, May 16, 4:00 PM

A major content analysis using the tools gained in the class of any single issue that has received wide coverage in the news and which deals with Latin America and/or Latino/as. Examples: immigration;

d

Picture, taken as the show was videotaped, shows Academy Award winning actor Lee Marvin (L) as bounty hunter 'Slim Premise' confronting Bob Hope as the Mexican bandit 'El Crummo'. Source: Cleveland State University. Michael Schwartz Library. Special Collections (1966).

popular culture, the Chavez government in Venezuela; etc. (You will get a longer list.) (12-15 pages)

Assignments are to be turned in on (or before) the due date noted in the syllabus. Late papers turned in without prior permission - you must request an extension **before the due date of the assignment** - will be reduced by one grade-step for each day that the assignment is late. For example, a paper due on Tuesday, March 12 which is turned in on March 13 will get a "B-" instead of the "B" that it merited; if it is turned in on March 14, it will get a "C+", etc.

All but your final assignment (all papers, reading responses, blog entries, etc.) *must* be turned in by the last day of the Reading Period, May 14, or they won't be counted. I will not allow an "Incomplete" in the course to allow you to finish those assignments. Your final papers are due no later than 4:00 PM on May 16. No papers turned in after that time will be accepted unless you decide to take an "Incomplete" in the course; in which case you must talk to me and fill out the appropriate paper work.

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

- **First Project: 10%**
- **Reading Responses: 40%**
- **Blog entries: 15%**
- **Final Paper: 35%**

Note: I do not have a final "participation" grade both because this is a relatively large class and because participation is a hard thing to judge. We will talk in class about what it means to create a "community of practice," and of your responsibilities in that regard. I will factor in your participation if it seems to be very positive (active, on target, encouraging others into the conversation, etc.) or negative (little engagement or a practice that discourages others).

Plagiarism and the Honor Code: "The word plagiarism derives from Latin roots: *plagiarius*, an abductor, and *plagiare*, to steal. The expropriation of another author's work, and the presentation of it as one's own, constitutes plagiarism and is a serious violation of the ethics of scholarship." [American Historical Association, Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct]. Copying the work of others goes against everything that a liberal education is about. It is a serious affront to the other students in the course, to me as a member of the course, and to the plagiarizer him/herself. The college requires that students sign an "Honor Code" for all assignments. This pledge states that "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment." For further information, see the student Honor Code which you can access via Blackboard>Lookup/Directories>Honor Code. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, particularly in the context of joint or collaborative projects, please see me or raise it in class.

Students with Disabilities:

Appropriate accommodations will always be granted to students with documented disabilities. Any questions about the necessary process of documenting disabilities should be addressed to Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters G27-28; x5-5588). If you have a documented disability, please see me early in the semester.

Research help:

If you need help finding information or conducting library research, you may wish to schedule an appointment with a reference librarian. Librarians can help you plan a research strategy, search databases

effectively, and locate books, articles, quality web sites, data, and other resources for any type of research project. Fill out the form on the library's web site to get started. Drop-in research assistance is also available in all campus libraries.

Blogs: The Tex[t]-Mex Galleryblog@: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America -- written by William Anthony Nericcio, San Diego State University, and which he describes as a blog which "devotes itself to the aggressive, relentless, and, at times, **pathological** interrogation of Mexican, Latina/o, Chicana/o, "Hispanic," Mexican-American, and Latin American stereotypes," is an important blog to follow and comment on.

FINAL NOTE: If you are having problems with the readings, the lectures, or just want to discuss further any aspect of the course (from content to class dynamics), I strongly encourage you to see me during office hours or to make an appointment. Please don't wait until late in the semester to express these concerns.

Books Recommended for Purchase

Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (NY: Cambridge University Press), 2005.

Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2008.

Otto Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse* (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2002.

Otto Santa Ana, *Juan in a Hundred: The Representation of Latinos on Network News* (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2013.

Syllabus

Theories

Picture

Uncle Sam watches over Peru and Ecuador fighting.

Feb. 5: Introduction: Making Meanings

Feb 7: Semiosis: The Production and Interpretation of Meaning

Ideology, Semiotics

Semiotics/Semiology

Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield, "Semiotics and Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies and Critical Theory*, 2nd ed. (NY: Oxford University Press,

2000), pp. 47-55.

Thomas A. Sebeok, *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics* (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2001), Chapter 1 (“Basic Notions”) and 3 (“Six Species of Signs”) (pp. 3-23 and 39-63).

Otto Santa Ana, “Semiotic Analyses of Network News Stories about Latinos,” and “Inside-the-Beltway Stories,” in *Juan in a Hundred: The Representation of Latinos on Network News* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), pp. 23-50.

Ideology

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The German Ideology” [301-303]; Louis Althusser, “Ideology” [304-310]; and John Fiske, “Interpellation” [311-315], in Michael Ryan, ed., *Cultural Studies: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

Feb. 12: Metaphors and Understanding Meanings

Louis A. Pérez, Jr., “Introduction,” and “Metaphor between Motive and Meaning,” in *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 1-23.

Otto Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), Part I: Theory and Method (pp. 13-62).

Feb. 14: Theory to Practice.

You will be divided into groups that will prepare a discussion of one of the following:

O. Henry (William Syndey Porter), “The Caballero’s Way”.

“Broncho Billy and the Greaser” (1914): 17 min.

Vito Perrone, "Image of Latin America: A Study of American School Textbooks and School Children, Grades Two through Twelve." (pgs. 72-99 only; other sections deal with how Latin America appears in elementary and middle school texts).

Deep Meanings: Geography, Religion, Gender

Feb. 19-21: Deep Historical/Cultural Meanings

Feb. 19: The Cartographic Imagination

J. B. Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, eds., (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 277-312.

Susan Schulten, "Introduction," and "Maps for the Masses 1880-1900," in *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880-1950* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 1-44.

Feb. 21: The Black Legend: Spanish Imperialism vs. English Imperialism

Edmund Valentine Campos, "West of Eden: American gold, Spanish greed, and the discourses of English imperialism," in Margaret R.

Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan, eds., *Rereading the Black Legend : The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 247-269.

W. M. Ivins, Jr., "South America and Our Responsibility," *World's Work*, VII (Feb 1904), pp. 4480-4484.

John J. Johnson, "Domestic Factors II: Racial and Ethnic Influences," in *A Hemisphere Apart: The Foundations of United States Policy Toward Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 44-77.

Feb. 26: Reading Mexico: Between Fear and Contempt

Feb. 26: Reading Mexico/Mexicans

David J. Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land. Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), Part II: pp. 52-86.

James O'Sullivan on "Manifest Destiny" (1839).

James K. Polk, President of the United States at Washington, D.C., to the Congress of the United States. A special message calling for a declaration of war against Mexico (May 1846).

Feb. 28 and March 5: Weak Men and Fertile Women

Feb. 28: Manifest Destiny

Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and Antebellum American Empire* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Chs 1 (pp. 18-27); 2, 3.

March 5: Gender and Latin American Imaginings

Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, Chs. 4, 6, Conclusion.

Neighborhood Anxieties

March 7 and 12: The "Spanish American" War and Cuba

March 7: Fighting "for" Cuba: Damsels in Distress

Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination*, Ch. 2 (pp. 24-94).

March 12: Fighting "against" Cuba: Misbehaving Children

Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination*, Chs. 3-4 (pp. 95-228).

Picture

"The Kiss of the Oceans" - Meeting of the Atlantic and Pacific, Artist: C.A.DeLisle, 1910

FIRST PROJECT DUE AT START OF CLASS, MARCH 12**March 14: Neighbors as Enemies**

Agnes C. Laut, "In the Hells of Tehuantepec," *Forum*, LXI, No. 6 (June 1919), 641-651.

Editorials, *New York Times*, 1910-1919.

Miguel Antonio Levario, "Muerte a los gringos! The Santa Ysabel Massacre and the El Paso Race Riot of 1916," *Militarizing the Border: When Mexicans Became the Enemy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), pp. 38-52.

Allen L. Woll, "The Attack of the Greasers," *The Latin Image in American Film*, rev. ed. (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1980), pp. 6-28.

"The Cisco Kid" #10 (Comic) (NOTE: Also in "Readings" as a pdf)

Gold Hat ("We don't need no stinking badges") scene from "Treasure of Sierra Madre"

March 19-21: Good Neighbors: Popular Culture Invents Latin America**March 19: Beyond Mexico?**

Allen L. Woll, "Hollywood's Good Neighbor Policy," *The Latin Image in American Film*, rev. ed. (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1980), pp. 53-75.

Mary C. Beltrán, "The Good Neighbor on Prime Time: Desi Arnaz and *I Love Lucy*," *Latinalo Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (University of Illinois Press, 2009): 40-61.

Mary C. Beltrán, "A Fight for 'Dignity and Integrity': Rita Moreno in Hollywood's Postwar Era," *Latinalo Stars in U.S. Eyes. The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 62-85.

Lupe Velez

I Love Lucy (Desi Translates for Lucy)

Optional: “Lucy takes a trip to Havana” (either begin at start or at 8:03 of Part II) – full program is about an hour.

Part I

Part II

Part III

Part IV

Part V

Part VI

Part VII

Optional: (Focusing on Mexico and Mexicans in film): Chon Noriega, "Citizen Chicano: The Trials and Titillations of Ethnicity in the American Cinema, 1935-1962," in Clara E. Rodríguez, ed., *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the US Media* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 85-103.

March 21: Disney Does Latin America

Disney: Carl Barks, "Lost in the Andes," in *Walt Disney's Donald Duck, "Lost in the Andes"* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2011), pp. 1-32. [1949]

The Three Caballeros (Disney, 1945): (1:08:42)

Optional: Scott Schaffer, "Disney and the Imagineering of Histories." in *Postmodern Culture* VI:3 (May 1996).

Optional: (Focusing on the connection between politics and business as they come together in the shaping of popular culture):

Rosalie Schwartz, "Musical Fantasies, Political Realities," in *Flying Down to Rio: Hollywood, Tourists, and Yankee Clippers* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2004), pp. 303-342.

March 26-28 [Spring Break]

April 2-4: Cold War Dangers and Opportunities

April 2: Cold War imagery before the Cuban Revolution

Four articles from *Time Magazine*:

- “Guatemala: Fishing Season,” May 8, 1950.
- “The Problem of Guatemala,” January 11, 1954.
- “Battle of the Backyard,” June 28, 1954.
- “Guatemala,” June 28, 1954.

News coverage of Nixon’s trip to Caracas, 1958.

CBS Radio news special following Nixon’s trip to Latin America to understand what went wrong. You can find the program on

Blackboard>Video>Nixon in Caracas, 1958. The broadcast, from May 15, 1958 featured moderator Stuart Novins and Galo Plaza, former President of Ecuador, Adolf A. Burleigh, former Assistant Secretary of State. Serafino Romualdi, Inter-American Representative for the AF of L/CIO (and also, it was later found, a long time CIA agent), Robert Alexander, Associate Professor of Economics at Rutgers University, Frances Grant, Secretary General of the Inter-American Center for Democracy and Freedom and CBS news correspondent Wells Church, who was traveling with the Nixon party. [[Audio link](#)]

Dennis Merrill, “The Safe Bet: Batista’s Cuba,” in *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 103-140.

April 4: What are we talking about when we talk about Cuba?

Picture
"New Habitat?" Sun-Telegram (San Bernadino, CA)

Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination*, Ch. 5 (pp. 229-256).

PBS: Saving Elian [NOTE: We will screen film in class]

Isabel Molina-Guzmán, “Saving Elián: Cubana Motherhood, Latina Immigration, and the Nation,” in *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media* (NY: New York University Press, 2010), pp. 24-49.

SECOND PROJECT DUE AT START OF CLASS APRIL 9

April 9-11: Late-Cold War Communism: Red Dawn?

April 9: Latin America and the Red Menace

Nixon and Kissinger on Chile: The “Red Sandwich” – excerpts

Nixon Phone tapes on Chile (Selected transcripts under readings; link to (often indistinct) audio here.

Reagan on Central America

- March 10, 1983: Remarks on Central America and El Salvador at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Manufacturers
- April 27, 1983: Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on Central America
- May 9, 1984: Address to the Nation on United States Policy in Central America
- March 16, 1986: Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua
- June 24, 1986: Address to the Nation on the United States Assistance for the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance
- Feb. 2, 1988: Address to the Nation on Aid to the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance

Picture

Tony Auth, Philadelphia Inquirer, March 13, 1983

April 11: *Red Dawn* and U.S. politics

The Committee of Santa Fe, *A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties* (Washington: Council for Inter-American Security, 1980), pp. 1-11.

Red Dawn (1984, dir. John Milius)

Enduring Themes: Crime, Drugs, Sex, Immigration

April 16: Crime

Steven W. Bender, "Greasers and Gangsters: Latinas/os and Crime," in *Greasers and Gringos: Latinas, Law, and the American Imagination* (NY: New York University Press, 2003), pp. 30-63 (plus notes).

The "Sleepy Lagoon" Case

West Side Story (1961) [On reserve in Mudd]

Sarah Garland, "'The World's Most Dangerous Gang,'" *Gangs in Garden City. How Immigration, Segregation, and Youth Violence Are Changing America's Suburbs* (New York: Boulder, CO: Nation Books, 2009), pp. 18-30.

April 18: Drugs

Miami Vice

Traffic (2000, dir. Steven Soderbergh) [On reserve in Mudd]

April 23: Sex & Violence

Gillian Rose, "Semiology: Laying Bare the Prejudices Beneath the Smooth Surface of the Beautiful," in *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), pp. 69-99.

Advertising:

Ksenija Bilbija, "Tortured by Fashion: Marketing Memory Through Corporate Advertising," in Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh Payne, eds., *Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 291-312.

Picture

Rodarte/MAC "Juárez" inspired cosmetics line

Nicole Guidotti-Hernández, "More Violence Against the Women of Juárez." *Ms. Blog* (July 26, 2010)

"MAC & Rodarte Thought They Could Sell Latina Femicide as Beautiful," *VivirLatino: Living & Luichando la Vida Latin@*

"MAC withdraws make-up line in Mexico inspired by Juárez femicides." *FashionMag.com* (August 11, 2010)

MAC Rodarte Collection for Fall 2010+ Official Statements, *Temptalia.com* (July 16,

2010)

April 25: Immigration and Prop 187

Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising*, Chapter 3 (pp. 65-103).

April 30: Immigration and Prop 209

Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising*, Chapter 4 (pp. 104-155).

May 2: Immigrants on the Evening News

Otto Santa Ana, *Juan in a Hundred: The Representation of Latinos on Network News*
(Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013):
Chapters 4-6 (pp. 84-154).

May 7: Immigration: Reading the Contemporary News

News articles from the current immigration policy debate (to be assigned)

May 9: Conclusion: Making Meanings

Santa Ana, *Juan*, Chapters 7-9.

Final Project Due Thursday, May 16 at 4:00 PM

Proudly powered by [Weebly](#)