Agrarian Societies in Latin American History (Tom Holloway, Spring 1996)

History 347, Agrarian Societies in Latin American History Spring 1996
Instructor: Mr. Holloway

Scope:

This course involves a series of lectures, readings, and seminar sessions that will explore the development of patterns of wealth, status, and power in Latin American history, emphasizing the role of country people in the larger society. Beginning with an overview of the European conquest and incorporation of native Americans and Africans into the colonial system, then exploring historical trends with a thematic focus, the bulk of the course deals sequentially with a variety of case studies reflecting export agriculture, peasant and worker protest and political crises, land reform, development programs, and neo-liberal policies of the recent past. Several conceptual approaches will be considered for their relevance for understanding the part agrarian society has played in the historical evolution of Latin America more broadly, and how the region, in turn, has been integrated into the wider world system.

No previous course work in Latin American history is required, but some introduction to Latin American studies or agrarian development issues would be very helpful. Students in doubt about the adequacy of their background should consult with Mr. Holloway at the beginning of the semester.

Structure:

Following the introductory meeting, the course is organized into nine units of three class meetings each, disregarding the calendar week (i.e., some units begin on Tuesdays, others on Thursdays). The first session of each unit will be an informal lecture by the instructor, emphasizing conceptual and/or comparative context for the main reading for that unit. The next two sessions in each unit will be seminar discussions of the assigned reading. Each of these latter sessions will be introduced and moderated by a member of the class, according to a schedule to be arranged early in the semester. All members of the class will be expected to prepare consistently and regularly for, and participate in, these seminar sessions. The common readings must be done prior to each meeting by all participants, and everyone in the class (not only the moderator) should come prepared to pose questions or raise topics for discussion, and respond to the initiatives taken along these lines by the discussion leader of the day. With no final exam, you are reading to prepare for each unit's discussions, not to regurgitate to the instructor at the end of the semester. Anyone who maintains a consistently passive role in discussion:

1. will give others in the class the impression they have not done the readings;
2. will be misusing the opportunity a small class provides;

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3. will be unfairly taking advantage of the efforts and energies of others.

It may eventually become necessary for the discussion leader of the day to turn to members of the group who have had—or taken—less opportunity to contribute than others, look the person in the eye, and ask directly "what do you think about (x)?" The answer, in turn, might very well be "I don't know," followed by something like "because I didn't understand (y) and (z) about the reading." In other words, expressing doubt and seeking clarification are quite acceptable, appropriate, and worthwhile contributions to the joint exercise. Declarative opinions or interpretations are only two of many ways to further the discussion toward the common goal of full and collective understanding of the material at hand. Carpe diem!

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**Paper:**

Each member of the class will be expected to write a research paper of some 20-25 pages, to be due on **Friday, May 3**. By March 14 (just before Spring Break) everyone must submit a tentative title and one or two paragraphs sketching the topic, research issue(s) and initial bibliography of their project. Anyone who would like more orientation, or to discuss possible topics, should see Mr. Holloway before that date. On April 18 a second brief (1-2 page) progress report will be due. The course readings cover a range of times, places, and interpretive themes, but there are many other possibilities. Members of the class are encouraged to cast their net for exploration of possible paper topics more broadly, beyond the times, places, and issues dealt with in the common readings. More detailed discussion of research strategies, approaches, and format will follow in due time.

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**Books:**

The following books and will be read in the order listed.

- Williams, Robert G. Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America UNC Press, 1986.