Latin American Cities in the Twentieth Century

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Description:

Latin American Cities in the Twentieth Century
Yale University
Department of History (History 302J)

Fall 2016
Instructor: Andra Chastain
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Tuesdays 3:30–5:20 pm, HGS 220B

Office hours: Mondays 2:00-4:00 pm and by appointment
Office hours location: History graduate student space on 2nd floor above the Blue Dog Café in HGS. Take the stairway across from the HGS dining hall, and the door (with keycard access) will be on your right. Knock and I will let you in.

Luis Ladrón de Guevara (Santiago, Chile), circa 1974. Courtesy of Rodrigo Booth.

Course Description
When Hernán Cortés arrived in the early sixteenth century at Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire, he found a city dazzling to behold in its size and grandeur, rivaling anything he had seen in Europe. “I do not know how to describe it, seeing things as we did that had never been heard of or seen before, not even dreamed about,” wrote the chronicler Bernal Díaz. Cities in Mexico and Peru stood at the head of sprawling empires, organizing life for nobles and commoners alike. Spanish officials further strengthened the urban character of Latin America by concentrating political and administrative power in colonial plazas and checkerboard streets. In the nineteenth century, following the wars of independence, cities gained greater importance thanks to new patterns of trade and political centralization.

Yet despite the deeply rooted nature of urban life in Latin America, it was the twentieth century that witnessed the wholesale transformation from rural to urban society. Today, with more than 80 percent of its population living in cities, Latin America is the most urbanized region in the world. This course examines the rise of
the modern Latin American city in its many forms, from the European-inspired boulevards of the early twentieth century, to the bold modernist experiments of the mid-century, to the informal, self-built housing that continues to spark debates among urban scholars and practitioners. In the process, we will ask: how were cities linked to politics and state formation? What challenges did rapid urbanization pose, and how did strategies to cope with these challenges change over time? How did everyday residents experience the city and stake a claim to urban space?

Throughout the course, we will focus on two central problematics: (1) the ways in which cities are perennially presented as in crisis and in need of urgent attention, and (2) the dilemma of scale; in particular, the ways in which the local level of streets, neighborhoods, municipalities, and popular experience intersects with transnational flows of people, capital, ideas, and geopolitics. Topics include urban planning and public space; labor and populism; race and gender; debates over informal settlements; and Cold War urbanism. The course concludes with a discussion of today’s urban crises, including the role of urban mega-events and the persistent problems of crime, security, and segregation. Readings will be drawn primarily from scholarly articles and book chapters and will focus on Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Brasília, Buenos Aires, and Santiago. When appropriate, we will also read classic works on the city from related disciplines such as literary studies, the social sciences, and architecture, as well as a diary of a shantytown resident from the 1950s. While the course emphasizes historical methods, it also employs a multi-media approach that illuminates the rich material culture of Latin American cities through films, maps, and photographs. Prior knowledge of Latin America is helpful but not required.

Course requirements
Readings and seminar discussions form the heart of the class. You should complete the readings with sufficient time to reflect on them and the questions they raise in relation to each other and to the course themes. I expect all students to engage in class discussions in a sustained, thoughtful manner, and to do so in an environment of mutual respect and openness to different viewpoints. Seminar participation will count for 20 percent of the course grade. In addition to weekly discussions, I will ask one to two students to help me lead the seminar each week. This will entail an oral presentation of approximately fifteen minutes that frames the key issues and questions from that week’s readings and initiates debate in the class. Each student will be responsible for doing this once; leading more than one session would confer extra credit. I encourage you to meet with me during office hours as you plan your
presentations. This oral presentation will make up 15 percent of the course grade.

Early in the semester, students will write a short, five-page paper on the course themes up to that point. I will distribute a list of prompts two weeks prior to the due date. This short essay, due on October 11th, will count for 20 percent of the course grade.

This course is designed to culminate in a research paper that will prepare you to write a senior thesis in the history department. This process will involve the search for a topic, identification of primary and secondary sources, framing of a research question, and the drafting of a 15–20 page research paper. I will provide a guide to primary sources on Latin American cities, as well as a list of possible themes and topics you may pursue. You are also encouraged to consult with staff at Yale libraries, particularly Jana Krentz, the curator of the Latin American collections. You should begin thinking of a topic early in the semester and meet with me periodically to discuss progress. There will be several components due along the way:
(1) Proposal of a topic with bibliography of primary and secondary sources
(2) Rough draft
(3) Final draft
The goal of having many check-in points along the way is to help you identify a suitable collection of sources in a timely fashion and aid you in pursuing your research question with enough time to produce a quality paper. The research paper will make up 45 percent of the course grade.

Academic Integrity
Yale College defines plagiarism as “the use of someone else’s work, words, or ideas as if they were one’s own,” and the standard penalty is two semesters of suspension. Plagiarism is a serious offense not only because it is intellectually dishonest, but because you are depriving yourself of an opportunity to learn, deepen your knowledge, and generate new ideas. To ensure academic integrity, it is essential to cite, paraphrase, and refer to others’ work properly. Prior to the first paper, we will discuss how to incorporate outside sources into your writing effectively and ethically. You should also familiarize yourself with Yale College’s plagiarism policy and the Writing Center’s guide to avoiding plagiarism.

Attendance and punctuality: Students are allowed one unexcused absence during the semester; beyond that, any unexcused absence will negatively affect your grade.
Arriving late to class hinders the class discussion as a whole, and regular tardiness will also negatively affect your grade.

**Late work policy:** Your short papers and proposals are due at the beginning of class in hard copy format. Your rough drafts and final drafts should be emailed to me by the due dates stated below. Unless you have a dean’s excuse, late papers lose 1/3 of a letter grade for every day late (A to A-, B+ to B, etc.). If you anticipate a conflict or difficulty meeting a deadline, contact me in advance.

**Laptop policy:** Laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices are not permitted in section unless you have a pre-arranged accommodation from the Resource Office on Disabilities.

**Note:** This syllabus may be revised to accommodate the needs of the class. At least one week’s notice will be given if changes are made. Students should check the Classesv2 course website regularly for any updates or messages.

**Required Texts:**

- All other readings will be found under “Resources“ on the Classesv2 course website [https://classesv2.yale.edu/portal/site/hist302j_f16](https://classesv2.yale.edu/portal/site/hist302j_f16)

**Recommended Texts, available at the Yale bookstore and Bass Course Reserves:**


**Week 1 - Sept 6**
Introduction: Approaches to Latin American Urban History

Week 2 - Sept 13
Pre-Columbian and Colonial Legacies

- Barbara E. Mundy, “Mapping the Aztec Capital: The 1524 Nuremburg Map of Tenochtitlan, Its Sources and Meanings” *Imago Mundi* 50 (1998), 11–33

Week 3 - Sept 20
Public Space in the Belle Époque City

- Cristina M. Jiménez, “Performing their Right to the City: Political Uses of Public Space in a Mexican City, 1880–1910s,” *Urban History* 33, No. 3 (2006), 435–456

Week 4 - Sept 27
Urban Politics and Populism: Vargas and Perón

Week 5 - Oct 4
Urban Testimonials: Race, Gender, and the Outsider’s Gaze

- Film: *Waste Land* (Lucy Walker, 2010, 99 minutes) – available on Kanopy

Week 6 - Oct 11
The High-Modernist City: Brasília


*Short papers due in class Oct 11*

Week 7 - Oct 18
Transnational Cities & Cold War Urbanism

- Edward Murphy, “In and Out of the Margins: Urban Land Seizures and Homeownership in Santiago, Chile,” in *Cities from Scratch*, 68-101
- Pedro Ignacio Alonso and Hugo Palmarola, “Cuba” and “Chile” in *Panel* (London: Architectural Association, 2014), 118-247, ~26 pages of which are text
October Recess: October 19–23

Week 8 - Oct 25
The Informal City: The Marginality Debate

- Bryan McCann, “Troubled Oasis: The Intertwining Histories of the Morro dos Cabritos and Bairro Peixoto,” in Cities from Scratch, 102-126

*Proposals due in class Oct 25

Week 9 - Nov 1
Urban Resistance and the Right to the City


Week 10 - Nov 8
Crime, Insecurity, and Segregation

- Pablo Piccato, “Cuidado con los Rateros: The Making of Criminals in

- Film: Neighboring Sounds (Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2012, 2 hours 11 minutes)

**Week 11 - Nov 15**

**Urban Mega-projects: High Modernism Redux?**


*Rough drafts due Wednesday, Nov 23, by 11:59 pm EST, sent by email

November Recess: Nov 21–27

**Week 12 - Nov 29**

Student presentations on their final papers

**Week 13 - Dec 6 (last day of class)**

Student presentations on their final papers

*Final papers due Thursday, Dec 15, by 11:59 pm EST*