

Spring, 2011

Latin American History through Film

(and vice versa)

Tuesdays, 5-7:50 p.m.

Center Hall 216

Dr. Eric Van Young

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office hours: Thursday, 3:30-5:30 p.m. (and occasionally by appointment)

Scope of the course:

The course is meant as an introduction both to films made *in* Latin America (for the most part), *by* Latin American film-makers (with a few exceptions), *about* Latin America, and also to the history of the region. The films range over a large span of Latin American history (at least since the area arguably became “Latin America,” from the time of the European invasion beginning in 1492), the earliest set at the time of the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs and Incas in the 16th century, the later films in the late 20th century. The films are works of fiction concerned with past historical eras, but often relating to real events or figures; that is, they are cinematic attempts to represent or recreate the past. One of the central themes in the class discussions and in your writing should be about how well this attempt at recreation comes off in the films, or if it is even possible, and to what degree. We will want to talk about the history being represented in the films, certainly, but also about how film does this—what narrative and visual techniques are employed, how “real” the films are meant to be, how well the actors are cast in their roles, and so forth. In other words, look at the films not only for the story and the history, but for the technique—the way that story is told. If you are already adept at looking at films as an art form, this will be old stuff; if not, this sort of discussion may increase your enjoyment in the watching of movies more generally.

Course format:

We will watch a film every week and have a discussion about it. I (or perhaps a guest presenter) will make some preliminary remarks for a few minutes before the film, and discussion will follow after it. Eight of the films are in Spanish with English sub-titles, and two were filmed in English. The course has discussion sections to be led by a very competent doctoral student in Latin American history, Laura Gutierrez, so that talking about the film of the week that does not get done in class can continue in the sections, and the readings can be discussed, as well. **N.B.:** Although all the films shown in this class belong to the UCSD libraries and will be on reserve for viewing during the quarter should you happen to miss a class or wish to view them again, a key part of the course is in-class discussion, the instructor’s remarks, and work in sections. So you should plan to attend both the classes and the discussion sections regularly.

Course requirements:

There will be no mid-term exam and no final exam in the class. There will, however, be a fair amount of writing, which seems to lend itself better to the subject matter. There will be two short papers (3-4 pages each) and one longer paper (about 10 pages) required

of each student. One short paper will be due in class in week 3, the second in week 7. The papers should be submitted in Times New Roman, 12-point font; should have proper bibliographic references of the author-title-page style (i.e., King Tut, *My Pyramid*, 33); and should be accompanied by a bibliography. Lateness in submission of the papers will be penalized. The long essay will need to be submitted at the end of the last class session, in week 10, and will relate to the general issue of cinematic representations of history as exemplified in one of the films. There will also be 3 quizzes, in the section meetings, about 10 minutes each, relating either to the reading for that week, or the films, or both. Each of the quizzes is likely to count 5% of the total grade, the short essays 15% each, the long essay 50%; there will be a discretionary factor of more or less 5% for class participation at the discretion of the instructor and the TA.

A note about discussion in the class and sections:

It is essential that all students try to participate in class and section discussions, not only because it may affect your grade, but also because the appreciation of film is such a subjective process that discussion, and the statement of different opinions, are most likely to bring out aspects of the film that one may not necessarily have noticed. Teaching assistants for the class will be Laura Gutierrez and Marisa Peeters.

Readings:

All the following books are required, all of them will be on reserve in the Geisel Library, and all will be available for purchase in the Student Bookstore in the Price Center.

- 1) Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford U. Press, 2004), paper.
- 2) John Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* (General Books, 2010), paperback.
- 3) John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, 2nd ed. (Norton, 2005), paperback.

A note about the readings:

Although the Chasteen text, a paperback book, is somewhat expensive, I felt justified in assigning it since there are only three books required for the course in total, and the book by John Reed is modestly priced. Since there is no “textbook” in the usual sense of the word, Chasteen is meant to provide general context by giving an overview of Latin American history, and should be read that way. Since his treatment does not correspond to any of the films specifically, it should be read in chunks, as indicated in the reading assignment calendar. Nor is there necessarily any direct correspondence between the book on colonial Latin America by Restall and a film shown in any given week, although the first three films deal with the colonial era. So students will need to do much of the intellectual work of integrating these two readings with their experience of the films—that is, in part, what the course is about. The book by John Reed, on the other hand, a sort of journalistic memoir upon which the film “México Insurgente” is based, should be read during the week that film is shown and discussed.

The size of the weekly reading assignments is quite variable, so it would be a good policy to keep up with them and not get backed up, especially as the end of the quarter approaches and the longer essay is due.

Course calendar and readings:

Week 1: 29 March

FILM: “La otra conquista” (“The Other Conquest”), directed by Salvador Carrasco (Mexico, 1999; 112 mins.)

READING:

Chasteen, begin reading *Born in Blood and Fire*, Introduction, and Chapters 1, 2, and 3 (pp. 15-116)—finish reading it by the end of week 3

Restall, begin reading the book and finish it by end of week 3

Week 2: 5 April

FILM: “Aguirre, Der Zorn Gottes” (“Aguirre, The Wrath of God”), directed by Werner Herzog (Germany, 1973; 94 mins.)

READING:

Continue with Chasteen and Restall

Week 3: 12 April

FILM: “La última cena” (“The Last Supper”), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Cuba, 1976; 110 mins.)

READING:

Continue with Chasteen and Restall

First short essay, on “Aguirre,” due in class (see attached guide sheet)

There will be a 10-minute quiz in sections of this week

Professor Van Young will be out of town; TA Laura Gutierrez will show the film, or there may be a guest presenter

Week 4: 19 April

FILM: “Camila,” directed by María Luisa Bemberg (Argentina, 1984; 105 mins.)

READING:

Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, Chapter 4 and 5 (pp. 119-179)

Week 5: 26 April

FILM: “Fitzcarraldo,” directed by Werner Herzog (Germany, 1982; 157 mins.)

READING:

Chasteen, Chapter 6 (pp. 181-178)

Week 6: 3 May

FILM: “Reed: México insurgente” (“Reed: Insurgent Mexico”), directed by Paul Leduc (Mexico, 1973; 110 mins)

READING:

Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, entire

Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, Chapter 7 (pp. 217-246)

Week 7: 10 May

FILM: “Viva Zapata!,” directed by Elia Kazan (U.S., 1952; 112 mins.)

READING:

None assigned; finish what you have been reading

Second short essay, on “Reed: México insurgente,” due in class (see attached guide sheet)

There will be a 10-minute quiz in sections of this week

WEEK 8: 17 May

FILM: “Eva Perón,” directed by Juan Carlos Desanzo (Argentina, 1996; 118 mins.)

READING:

Chasteen, Chapter 8 (pp. 249-277)

There will be a 10-minute quiz in sections of this week

WEEK 9: 24 May

FILM: “The Dancer Upstairs,” directed by John Malkovich (U.S., 2002; 133 mins.)

READING:

Chasteen, Chapters 9 and 10 (pp. 279-329)

Week 10: 31 May

FILM: “La ley de Herodes” (“Herod’s Law”), directed by Luis Estrada (Mexico, 2003; 122 mins.)

READING:

None assigned

Long essay due in class

Guide sheet for long essay—due in class on 31 May

Length, format, deadline:

- 1) The paper should be *no less* than ten (10) pages long, and should ideally not exceed about twelve (12) pages, although if you feel you need a little extra space to make your argument, go ahead.
- 2) Please make sure your full name is clearly written at the top of the first page, and that the pages are clipped or stapled together.
- 3) It should be typed, double-spaced; hand-written papers will not be accepted.
- 4) It should have normal margins—please don’t attempt to fill up the pages (and reduce your responsibility for writing) with a one-inch-wide column of print down the middle of the page or extra-wide margins top and bottom.
- 5) Works used in the paper should be cited completely in foot-notes or end-notes, giving a full bibliographic citation—i.e., author(s)’ full name, full title of the work (including article and journal title if from a journal, along with the page numbers if it’s a journal article, or if it’s a chapter in a multi-authored work), date and place of publication, etc.
- 6) The paper should be handed in at the end of class on 5 June. Electronic submissions will not be accepted. Papers handed in late will be penalized at 2% per day of lateness—that is, if they come in Wednesday, they will be worth 48% of the total grade, Thursday 46%, Friday 44%, and so on, so that they rapidly decline to very little value and can easily tilt a final grade one way or another.
- 7) Think very carefully if you are tempted to take some review or essay off the Internet and pass it off as your own. You should not even go to the Internet for this assignment,

and we can easily check (and may do so randomly) to see if the essay is original to you or not. Plagiarism penalties can be severe.

Content:

Pick one of the films we have watched during the quarter as the subject of your paper. All of the films are available for viewing in the Arts Library in Geisel Library; some of them may even be available for viewing on the Internet, so if you can find it and watch it, good for you

You should find at least three sources (you may use more, but not less)—journal articles, books, chapters in multi-authored works, etc.—relating to the historical period of the film, read the sources, and discuss how the film version of the historical incident, personage, period, etc., relates to the “actual” history as written about in your sources. For example, if you want to write about “Reed: Mexico Insurgente,” you might want to find a biography of John Reed, a book about the Mexican Revolution, and a journal article or book chapter about the “Benton incident” to compare to the cinematic versions of these. If you want to write about “Camila,” do some reading about Argentina in the period of the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas (and, for those of you who read Spanish, there are actually a number of historical works on the real Camila and her life). You should not use any sources available on-line (this includes Wikipedia, etc.), except perhaps for things such as journal articles down-loaded from data-bases like J-Stor. This is primarily a library assignment, so go to the library.

In your discussion comparing the film version and the “real” history, pay some attention to how the history of the period, place, persons, etc., is handled in the film—is there significant time compression, are the events dramatized greatly in comparison to the way they are portrayed in the written historical works, are they “distorted” for dramatic or political reasons, are characters added or subtracted from the film version, etc.? You may wish to allude not only to the actual history, characters, settings, periods, etc., but to the cinematic elements in the movie version—that is, the way the story is narrated, the way it is filmed or edited (for example, what shots are used, and how they are edited together to create effects or emotional reactions), the way the actors are directed, the way color, music, lighting, camera angles, or other elements are employed, and so forth. Finally, you should offer some opinion—and the reasons behind it—as to whether the film version is “accurate” or not, and if not, why not.

Guide sheet for first short essay—due 12 April

Length, format, deadline:

- 1) The paper should be *no less* than three (3) pages long, and should ideally not exceed four (4) pages, although if you feel you need a little extra space to make your argument, go ahead.
- 2) Please make sure your full name is clearly written at the top of the first page, and that the pages are clipped or stapled together.
- 3) It should be typed, double-spaced; hand-written papers will not be accepted.
- 4) It should have normal margins—please don’t attempt to fill up the pages (and reduce your responsibility for writing) with a one-inch-wide column of print down the middle of the page or extra-wide margins top and bottom.

5) If you cite written or other work (which is not required, and not even expected), cite it completely in foot-notes or end-notes, giving a full bibliographic citation—i.e., author(s)' full name, full title of the work (including article and journal title if from a journal), date and place of publication, etc.

6) The paper should be handed in at the end of class on 12 April. Electronic submissions will not be accepted. Papers handed in late will be penalized at 2 points per day of lateness—that is, if they come in Wednesday, they will be worth 13 points of the total grade, Thursday 11 points, Friday 9 points, and so on, so that they rapidly decline to very little or no value and can easily tilt a final grade one way or another.

7) Think very carefully if you are tempted to take some review or essay off the Internet, such as from Wikipedia or a movie data-base, and pass it off as your own. You should not even go to the Internet for this assignment, and we can easily check (and may do so randomly) to see if the essay is original to you or not. Plagiarism penalties can be severe.

Content:

The question to be answered is: What does the figure of Lope de Aguirre represent, not only in the early history of Latin America, but in many “frontier” situations, and perhaps more broadly, in all human history? You may wish to allude not only to the actual story, dialog, etc., but to the cinematic elements—that is, the way the story is narrated, the way it is filmed, the way in which nature is portrayed, the way the actors are directed, the way color, music, lighting, camera work, or other elements are employed, and so forth.

Guide sheet for second short essay—due 10 May 2011

Length, format, deadline: The same considerations as to length, format, and deadline apply as in the first short essay.

Content:

Pick two episodes/elements—incidents, conversations, extended situations, the portrayal of significant characters, etc.—from the film “Reed: México Insurgente” and compare them with the same episodes/elements as portrayed in the book by John Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*. Compare the two (for example, the interview with Pancho Villa about the Benton killing) and say something about how they differ in the book and movie versions, or how they are substantially the same, and why. This will obviously entail reading the book first with some care, since not everything in the book is included in the film. In your discussion comparing the two sets of episodes/elements, pay some attention to how they are handled in each case in the film—are they compressed in time, are they dramatized greatly in comparison to the way they are narrated in the book, are characters added or subtracted from the scenes, etc.—and discuss them **in terms of cinematic story-telling techniques**. You may wish to allude not only to the actual story, dialog, etc., but to the cinematic elements—that is, the way the story is narrated, the way it is filmed, the way the actors are directed, the way color, music, lighting, camera work, or other elements are employed, and so forth.

[over for Buckley Waiver]

If you want your graded exam/paper (with the final course grade) returned to you soon after the end of the quarter (you will find them filed under the course number within a few days, outside the History Department main office), you **must** sign the following waiver and include it with your final essay. Otherwise, you must ask specifically for

your work in the Department office a few weeks after the end of the quarter. Remember, also, that by the end of the summer these items will be disposed of and you will not be able to collect them after the start of the fall quarter.

STUDENT CONSENT FOR RELEASE OF STUDENT INFORMATION
"Buckley Waiver"

I hereby authorize the UCSD History Department to return my graded final examination/research paper by placing the examination/research paper in a location accessible to all students in the course. I understand that the return of my examination/research paper as described above may result in the disclosure of personally identifiable information that is not public information as defined in UCSD PPM 160-2, and I hereby give consent to the disclosure of such information.

Quarter _____ Course _____ Date _____

Instructor _____ Student I.D.# _____

Print name _____ Signature _____