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HIS 405-02 Political Violence and Truth Commissions in Latin America

Professor Willie Hiatt
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OVERVIEW

This course examines truth commissions, defined by the United States Institute of Peace as “bodies established to research and report on human rights abuses over a certain period of time in a particular country or in relation to a particular conflict.” Since 1980 violent internal conflict, civil wars, and repressive police and military reprisals against perceived national-security threats have prompted large-scale investigations in several Latin American countries, including Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, and Peru. Argentina’s 1976-1983 military dictatorship, for example, executed a “Dirty War” in which as many as 30,000 citizens died or disappeared. Both sides of conflicts – extremist guerrillas and governments – have carried out violence and committed murder. During Peru’s 1980-2000 Shining Path revolutionary movement, state agents, self-defense groups, and paramilitary forces were responsible for nearly forty percent of 69,280 total deaths. While the Truth Commission asserted the Peruvian state’s right to defend itself, the decision to put counterinsurgency in the hands of the military worsened the violence and resulted in its own atrocities.

This course situates truth commissions within a broader history of human rights, particularly the tensions between individuals and collectivities after the advent of the modern nation-state. We focus on violence and truth commissions in three countries – Argentina, Peru, and Guatemala – and pay particular attention to the social and cultural history of these conflicts. The course concludes with contemporary debates about the United States’ role in Latin American dirty wars, its own war on terror, and human rights in a global age.

We examine:

- Social Inequality

- Extremist Political Ideology
- State-Sponsored Violence
- Torture
- Historical Memory
- National Reconciliation

COURSE READINGS

You may purchase required books at the Rhodes College Bookstore or at local and online retailers. Copies of many books also are available on reserve at Shields Library. Required texts are:

- Alarcón, Daniel. *Lost City Radio: A Novel*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008. ISBN: 978-0060594817.
- Dorfman, Ariel. *Death and the Maiden*. New York: Penguin Books, 1994. ISBN: 978-0140246841. [Reserve]
- Feitlowitz, Marguerite. *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN: 978-0195134162. [Reserve]
- Hayner, Priscilla. *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*. New York: Routledge, 2002. ISBN: 978-0415924788. [E-book]
- Montejo, Víctor. *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*. Translated by Víctor Perera. Willimantic, Conn.: Curbstone Press, 1987. ISBN: 0915306654.

All additional articles and book chapters listed below are available as PDFs on Moodle.

ATTENDANCE, DISCUSSION, AND PARTICIPATION

I expect you to attend every class.

I expect you to participate in every class.

I expect you to complete all readings for the week before class begins on Tuesday.

Writing assignments require you to incorporate material from discussions and readings. We will spend significant class time discussing the texts to help you construct sophisticated arguments. More than two absences – including Week 1 for those admitted to the course – will adversely affect your grade. See me (or in an emergency e-mail me) well in advance if you will be absent. All excuses are subject to my approval.

Class discussions also give you an opportunity to talk about course readings and lectures and to ask clarifying questions.

You will have periodic quizzes on the reading material. By reading before class and thinking about weekly themes, you will be able to contribute to discussions and better prepare yourself for papers and the final exam. Failure to contribute regularly will lower your course grade.

ASSIGNMENTS

Turn in all assignments on time. Late essays and papers lose one-third of a letter grade for each day they are late.

Essay 1: Due September 10

- Short review (4-5 pages) of how the mainstream media (newspapers, magazines, news broadcasts on youtube) has characterized the debate over a truth commission for the United States' alleged human rights abuses. Don't truth commissions only happen in Third World countries? I will provide a detailed essay prompt on September 1.

Essay 2: Due October 15

- A short paper (4-6 pages) comparing and contrasting two truth commission reports (your choice) in the context of class readings and discussions. I will provide a detailed essay prompt on October 6.

Research Paper: Due November 19

- A major research paper (20-25 pages) on a specific topic related to political violence, human rights, and truth commissions. Guidelines for topics are exceedingly broad, but you must use extensive PRIMARY sources. I will work closely with you on selecting a topic, identifying sources, and articulating an original argument. Successful papers will incorporate substantial original research. I have set numerous deadlines to help you in the process:
 - **September 10:** Briefly discuss potential research topics with the class
 - **October 1:** Turn in a two-page prospectus outlining research topic
 - **October 8:** Turn in a bibliography of secondary sources
 - **October 22:** Turn in a bibliography of primary sources
 - **November 19:** Research paper due at start of class
 - **December 8:** Final research paper with revisions due at start of class

Final Exam: Wednesday, December 16, 1 p.m. I will provide a study guide, but expect to see broad questions on the works of fiction and films we engage in class.

GRADING

You final grade will be determined by:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| • Essay 1 | 10% |
| • Essay 2 | 15% |
| • Quizzes and Participation | 20% |
| • Research Paper and Presentation | 40% |
| • Final exam | 15% |

Grades of “A” are difficult to earn. An “A” demands work of exceptional quality and depth. For assignments this means nearly error-free essays containing outstanding insights. For class discussion this means thoughtful, regular participation in every meeting.

Grades of “B” reflect work that is above average compared to your peers. A “B” requires hard work and a clear demonstration of a thorough knowledge of the subject matter. For essays and exams, this means solid knowledge and understanding of the course material with some deeper analysis. This means that you participate regularly and demonstrate that you have read all the assigned readings.

Grades of “C” reflect competent college-level work. This grade may reflect a lack of commitment or difficulty in grasping the subject matter. These papers and exams often reflect some confusion or gaps in coverage. In section, C’s most often reflect less than complete reading or less than full engagement in class meetings.

Grades of “D” and “F” should be difficult to earn. On assignments, this grade usually reflects a serious lack of effort or misunderstanding.

Quizzes are unscheduled and cannot be made up.

All work is pledged under the Rhodes College Honor Code.

Please turn off cell phones.

CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE

Below is the reading schedule for the quarter. I will outline the broad narrative of Latin American history in discussions; course readings provide specific thematic approaches to the study of human rights and truth commissions:

Week 1: Introduction

Discussion

- Thursday (August 27): Introduction, Course Overview

Week 2: Human Rights and the Nation-State

Discussions

- Tuesday (September 1)
 - **Prompt for Essay 1 handed out in class**
- Thursday (September 3)

Readings

- Ishay, *The History of Human Rights*, Introduction and Chapter 3 [PDF]
- Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, Chapters 1-5
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights [PDF]

Week 3: The Emergence of Truth Commissions

Discussions

- Tuesday (September 8)
- Thursday (September 10)
 - **Essay 1 due at start of class**

Readings

- Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, Chapters 6-9
- Sabato, Prologue to the CONADEP [Argentina] Report [PDF]
- Phelps, *Shattered Voice*, intro (recommended), Chapter 1 (required) [PDF]

Week 4: Argentina and the Southern Cone, Part I

Discussions

- Tuesday (September 15)
- Thursday (September 17)
 - **Students will briefly discuss with the class possible research topics.** This is a preliminary but important step that will require advance reading on various political conflicts and truth commissions in Latin America. It is important that you begin thinking about a potential topic as soon as possible. Hayner provides a nice overview by country in Chapter 4.

Readings

- Robertson, Geoffrey. *Crimes against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice*. New York: The New Press, 2000. The Nuremberg Legacy, 203-242. [PDF]
- Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, Intro-Chapter 3

Week 5: Argentina and the Southern Cone, Part II**Discussions**

- Tuesday (September 22)
- Thursday (September 24)

Readings

- Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, Chapter 4-6
- Outside film: “The Official Story” or “Garaje Olimpo,” TBA

Week 6: Argentina and the Southern Cone, Part III**Discussions**

- Tuesday (September 29)
- Thursday (October 1)
 - **Two-page prospectus for research project due at start of class**

Readings

- Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden*, entire
- Selections from *Nunca Más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared*, TBA [PDF]

Week 7: Peru, Part I**Discussions**

- Tuesday (October 6)
 - **Prompt for Essay 2 handed out in class**
- Thursday (October 8)
 - **Bibliography of SECONDARY sources for research project due at start of class**

Readings

- Orin Starn, “Maoism in the Andes: The Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path and the Refusal of History,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27:2 (May 1995): 399-421. [PDF]
- Selections from *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru* (TRC), TBA [PDF]

Week 8: Peru, Part II

Discussions

- Tuesday (October 13)
- Thursday (October 15)
 - **Essay 2 due at start of class**

Readings

- Alarcón, *Lost City Radio: A Novel*, entire
- Outside film: “Boca del Lobo” or “State of Fear”

Week 9: Guatemala, Part I

Discussions

- Tuesday (October 20): Fall Break – No Class
- Thursday (October 22)
 - **Bibliography of PRIMARY sources for research project due at start of class.**

Readings

- Warren, Kay B. “Interpreting La Violencia in Guatemala: Shades of Mayan Silence & Resistance.” In *The Violence Within: Cultural & Political Opposition in Divided Nations*. Edited by Kay B. Warren, 25-56. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993. [PDF]
- Sieder, Rachel and Jessica Witchell. “Advancing Indigenous Claims through the Law: Reflections on the Guatemalan Peace Process.” In *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives*. Edited by Jane K. Cowan, Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, and Richard A. Wilson, 201-225. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. [PDF]

Week 10: Guatemala, Part II**Discussions**

- Tuesday (October 27)
- Thursday (October 29): In-class film: “If the Mango Tree Could Speak” (58 min.) OR “Romero” (102 min.)

Readings

- *• Sanford, Victoria. *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003: 1-75. [PDF]

Week 11: Guatemala, Part III**Discussions**

- Tuesday (November 3)
- Thursday (November 5)

Readings

- Montejo, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*, entire
- Selections from the “Report from the Commission for Historical Clarification:” <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/toc.html> [also PDF]

Week 12: When States Kill: Exporting Violence**Discussions**

- Tuesday (November 10)
- Thursday (November 12)

Readings

- Menjívar, Cecilia and Néstor Rodríguez. “State Terror in the U.S.-Latin American Interstate Regime.” In *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror*. Edited by Cecilia Menjívar and Néstor Rodríguez, 3-27. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005. [PDF]
- McSherry, J. Patrice. “Operation Condor as a Hemispheric ‘Counterterror’ Organization.” In *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror*. Edited by Cecilia Menjívar and Néstor Rodríguez, 28-56. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005. [PDF]

Week 13: When States Kill: The United States and Torture**Discussions**

- Tuesday (November 17)
- Thursday (November 19)
 - **Research paper due at start of class**

Readings

- Mayer, Jane. *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals*. New York: Doubleday, 2008. Chapters 1, 4. [PDF]
- Selections from “IRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] Report on the Treatment of Fourteen “High-Value Detainees” in CIA Custody,” February 2007. [PDF]
- Outside film: “Standard Operating Procedure” or “Rendition”

Week 14: Human Rights and Globalization**Discussions**

- Tuesday (November 24)
- Thursday (November 26): Thanksgiving Break – No Class

Readings

- Ishay, *The History of Human Rights*, Chapter 5 [PDF]

Week 15: Student Presentations, Part I**Discussions**

- Tuesday (December 1)
- Thursday (December 3)

Readings

- None

Week 16: Student Presentations, Part II**Discussions**

- Tuesday (December 8): Last Day of Class
 - **Final research paper with revisions due at start of class**

Readings

- None

Exam Schedule

- Reading Day – Thursday, December 10
- Final Exam –1 p.m. Wednesday, December 16