

THE STORY OF MEXICO

PART I: HISTORY, CULTURE, AND HERITAGE, 1500 TO 1968

Winter session 2018

Instructor: Alex M. Saragoza

This course will be presented in two parts over the winter and spring sessions of 2018. The content will be interdisciplinary in nature and will bring a broad, multifaceted approach to the story of Mexico’s past, present, and possible futures.

The first part will cover the time from the encounter—between the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the arrival of the Spanish to the New World—to the crisis of the Mexican state as reflected in the protests of 1968, the year in which the summer Olympics were stages in Mexico City. Throughout, questions of gender, class, race, and place (urban/rural) will be contextualized in light of political, economic, social and cultural conditions. The course will begin with an introductory overview of the class and its thematic elements, including the role of the U.S. In general, each class session will consist of two segments (noted in the syllabus as A and B); the segments will be composed of a lecture of approximately 40 minutes, followed by a Q&A period of 15 minutes or so, and a brief break in between. Readings will be posted on the website of the course; in addition, the course will encompass clips from films, images of art, literary selections, music, dance and food (recipes) in order to tell the story of Mexico.

Week #1

Introduction

A. “Seeing Mexico”: the perils of proximity
   1. Nations Indivisible, or Distant Neighbor?
   2. The Mexican imaginary over here: margaritas, Frida, “aliens” and narco
   3. The Mexican imaginary over there: corruption, starbucks, turistas, and Trump
   4. Everyday life in Mexico over time
   5. An overview of the course

B. The encounter: Aztecs, Spaniards and the meanings of “conquest”
   1. Spain and Spaniards at the time of the encounter
   2. Indigenous peoples of Mexico at the time of the encounter
   3. The Spanish imperial reconnaissance of the Americas
   4. Legacies of the encounter
WEEK #2

The Colonial Heritage

A. Turning point: silver, trade, and their tolls
   1. The global significance of Spanish silver (and other valuable commodities)
   2. Labor and the indigenous peoples of Mexico.
   3. Mestizaje: the casta system and its social and cultural repercussions

B. Many Mexicos: 1521 vs. 1769
   1. The late Spanish empire and Mexico
   2. The French revolution and Spain
   3. The imagery of Spanish colonialism

WEEK #3

The Cost of Independence: 1810 to 1910

A. A fractured nation
   1. The meaning of Jose Maria Morelos: class, race, land and church
   2. Liberals, conservatives, and the trials of nationhood

B. Mexico in a changing world
   1. The U.S. and Mexico in the era of dictatorship
   2. The border: the formation of a boundary
   3. Society and culture in a century of instability

WEEK #4

The Mexican revolution and its consequences, 1910-1940

A. Visions of change and its discontents
   1. The victors and their policies to 1934
   2. Lazaro Cardenas and his meanings for Mexico
   3. The making of the authoritarian state

B. The Neighbor next door
   1. Culture, nationalism and lo mexicano (becoming Mexican)
   2. City and countryside
   3. Relative deprivation: the inequities of daily life
   4. Art and revolution
WEEK #5

**1940 to 1968: the fraying of the Mexican state**

A. The unraveling begins: the dark side of the Mexican miracle
   1. Crony capitalism and corruption
   2. The cactus curtain: the twilight of official culture
   3. The middle class besieged: aspirations, *fresas y los juniors*
   4. Pyramids by day, cocktails by night: Americans and Mexico

B. Sociocultural change and its ripple effects
   1. Remittances and their meanings
   2. The Burning Plain: rural Mexico and its discontents
   3. On the edge: the golden age of Mexican cinema in the midst of change

WEEK #6

**The making of the crisis of 1968**

A. Youth, culture, and the state
   1. Higher education and cronyism
   2. Women and the political challenge
   3. The students of the university

B. The Response of the State: the killing at the Plaza de Tlatelolco
   1. The Olympics and its discontents
   2. The Crisis deepens
   3. On borrowed time: the State and the opening of the Olympic Games
   4. A New Generation arises in Mexico

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