Political Science 253 Jim Mahon

Spring 2020 OH: W 10-12

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**THE TRAGEDY OF VENEZUELA**

The recent history of Venezuela offers a window into many of the most important political and economic issues faced by people and governments in developing countries. Why does an abundance of natural resources seem to solve some problems while creating others? How can democracy be made to work better for ordinary people? What does it mean for a government to be truly sovereign? How does corruption grow and what can people do about it? Which decisions should we leave to technocratic experts? What does it mean today to be progressive?

The course first briefly reviews Venezuelan post-Independence history, with an emphasis on the post-1958 electoral settlement. It then explores the political and economic background to the breakdown of this settlement, the rise of Hugo Chávez and the nature of his movement, and the decay of the “21st-Century Socialist” regime under Chávez and Maduro.

Requirements and grading. Graded assignments include a map quiz, three short (3-page) papers and a slightly longer (5-page) final paper. Evaluation weights are as follows: map quiz, 5 percent; 3-page papers, 18 percent each; 5-page paper, 26 percent; attendance and participation, 15 percent. Attendance and active participation are required. Honor code guidelines can be found in the Student Handbook. Give credit for ideas you get from others and put marks around direct quotations; for course readings, short internal citations like this (Gallegos, 134) are fine. Each paper prompt will be issued about a week before the paper’s due date, and will involve reactions to the readings in that section.

Class discussion. To generate good discussion, each student should come to class with one question and one comment on the readings for the day. You will be asked to share these with the class. Usually we’ll go over questions first, then open it up to comments, but on some days (especially early in the course) there will be some prepared lecture in between.

Readings. Most of the required readings come from these books, at the College Bookstore:

Miguel Tinker Salas, *Venezuela: What Everybody Needs to Know* (Oxford, 2015);

Rory Carroll, *Comandante* (Penguin, 2014);

Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold, *Dragon in the Tropics*, 2nd ed.(Brookings, 2015);

Raul Gallegos, *Crude Nation* (Potomac/ U. Nebraska, 2019); and

Alejandro Velasco, *Barrio Rising: Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern*

*Venezuela* (U. California 2015).

There is also a small packet of photocopied materials, the first slices of which will be passed out right away, the rest to be distributed once the enrollment is settled.

Venezuelan media sources include the following: [*Caracas Chronicles*](https://www.caracaschronicles.com/) (critical but newsy); [*Venezuela Analysis*](https://venezuelanalysis.com/) (pro-government); [*Venezuela News and Views*](http://daniel-venezuela.blogspot.com/) (anti-government blog by Daniel Duquenal); [*TeleSUR*](https://www.telesurtv.net/) (the pro-government TV station with affiliates across the hemisphere; Spanish); [*TalCual*](https://talcualdigital.com/)(once an actual newspaper, from the critical left, now just online; Spanish); [*15 y Último*](http://www.15yultimo.com/)(long-form pieces on local and regional politics; Spanish); [*Prodavinci*](https://prodavinci.com/) (literary and philosophical; Spanish).

**SCHEDULE**

\* = in packet; Glow = streaming on Glow

**2/5 (Wed.)** Introduction

In class: [*The Battle for Venezuela*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-0Zy7yqAUw) 2018 Al-Jazeera 49’ (YouTube).

1. **Historical Overview**

**2/10 Before Oil**

Tinker Salas, *Venezuela: What Everybody Needs to Know*, Introduction and Part I (pp. 1-58).

*Doña Bárbara*,1998 Betty Kaplan 111’ (Spain/ Argentina, adapted from the classic novel by Rómulo Gallegos) (Glow).

Tinker Salas grew up in one of the communities built by the oil companies to house their American, Venezuelan, and Caribbean-origin personnel. His most important book, *The Enduring Legacy* (2009), deals with the cultural and political influences of the oil industry on Venezuelans’ ideas of progress and citizenship. He’s considered moderately sympathetic to the *chavista* project. The movie tells a classic tale of the *llanos* (interestingly, the region in which Hugo Chávez grew up and with which he enthusiastically identified), a fatal-attraction story that stands in for the struggle between civilization and barbarism. The main characters’ names tell the allegory in case anyone misses it. *Doña Bárbara* has often been cited to depict the worldview of Europhilic liberal elites in the state-building generation of the late nineteenth century--not just in Venezuela, but all over Latin America.

**2/13 Oil and Politics in the Twentieth Century**

Tinker Salas, *What Everybody Needs to Know*, Part II (pp. 59-131).

[*Venezuela Oil 1970’s*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nL-vj8D3Mk8)15’ (YouTube)

Here is where Tinker Salas is most knowledgeable. The oil industry brought riches and a particular model of modernity, which Venezuelan leaders reproduced and enacted in different ways over time. The video clip is from a period of great optimism, striking a few notes of social consciousness but also making a subtle argument against nationalization (which would nevertheless arrive in 1975). The Americans making the film connected the patronal role of the oil companies, along with openness to foreign investment, to Venezuelan progress. Apart from the cheesy 1970’s visual aesthetic (remind me why some young people find it ironically appealing?), you get some high-grade “south of the border” exoticism and a typical US depiction of a Venezuelan who drives a big Mercedes-Benz as “middle class.”

**2/17 Oil and Economic Crisis before Chávez**

Raul Gallegos, *Crude Nation*, first part of Chap. 3 (pp. 57-79).

Ricardo Hausmann and Francisco Rodriguez, “Introduction,” and Francisco Monaldi and Michael Penfold, “Institutional Collapse: The Rise and Decline of Democratic Governance in Venezuela,” from Hausmann and Rodriguez, eds., *Venezuela Before Chávez: Anatomy of an Economic Collapse* (Penn State U., 2014).\*

From about 1982 well through the 1990’s, the Venezuelan economy stagnated and, well before Chávez, Venezuelan democracy foundered. Gallegos offers a compact history of economic decline, while Hausmann, Rodriguez, Monaldi and Penfold describe particular connections between the economic and the political. (Although their book came out only in 2014, it was written much earlier, around 2004-05.)

**2/20 The Crisis of Democracy as Viewed from Urban Public Housing**

Alejandro Velasco, *Barrio Rising*, Introduction, Chapters 6 and 7, and Conclusion.

In the film clip last time, the panoramic establishing shot of “modern Caracas” prominently showed the high-rise modernist housing complex that became known as the *23 de enero*. Located relatively close to the most important government buildings, above all the presidential palace known as Miraflores, its residents would play an important part in subsequent political history. We read Velasco’s book for the broader story and for his account of the pivotal series of events that began on 27 February 1989, known as the *caracazo*.

**2/24 Oil, Polarization, and the Chavista Period**

Gallegos, *Crude Nation*, rest of Chap. 3 (pp. 79-86).

Tinker Salas, *What Everybody Needs to Know*, Part III: read pp. 132-51; skim pp. 173-92; read pp. 206-18.

***Map quiz*** (in class)

Here we get our first accounts of the Chávez presidency. Gallegos is more critical and economically focused, Tinker Salas more sympathetic.

***First paper due Tuesday 2/25, 4:00pm***

1. **A Closer Look at Hugo Chávez and His Movement**

**2/27** **Power**

Carroll, *Comandante*, Prologue and first part (“Throne,” pp. 1-104).

Selections from *¡Aló, Presidente!* (YouTube video), in class.

Carroll’s biography is good journalism. It includes a lot of thoughtful and nuanced observations of Chávez (from afar, apart from their interaction on *Aló, Presidente*, which we’ll look at later) and the people around him.

**3/2 The Coup of April 2002: Colliding Narratives**

[*The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEsSf7ARpw8),2003 Kim Bartley and Donnacha O’Briain, 75’ (YouTube).

[*Radiografía de una Mentira*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtDl7SuHRkM), 2004 Wolfgang Schalk and Thaelman Urgelles, 80’ (YouTube).

Brian Nelson, *The Silence and the Scorpion* (Nation Books, 2012), Introduction and first slice of Part I, (pp. 1-25), “Aftermath,” Epilogue, and Appendix (pp. 255-93).\*

Tinker Salas, *What Everybody Needs to Know*, pp. 151-58.

The single most pivotal moment of the Chávez presidency, the attempted coup of 11-13 April 2002 became a touchstone for Chávez and other Venezuelans thereafter. He would often say “*Cada once tiene su trece*” (“Each eleven has its thirteen,” that is, for him, each apparent victory of imperialism and its local lackeys will soon be followed by a victory of the people). The 2003 documentary by two Irish sympathizers became an international sensation. A year later, Schalk and Urgelles attempted to deconstruct and undermine its narrative. Nelson’s book (now out of print) sought to adjudicate the dispute, drawing on first-hand accounts, mostly from the armed forces and protesters, but he left some questions unanswered. One’s idea about what happened on those three days came to define one’s position in Venezuelan politics.

**3/5** **Radicalization**

Carroll, *Comandante*, second part (“Palace,” pp. 107-200).

*¡Aló, Presidente!* 291 (only the interaction between Rory and Hugo)

We pick up Carroll’s narrative after the launching of the first social missions and the failure of the 2004 presidential removal referendum. This section first narrates his experience around his TV moment (to which, one of Carroll’s commentators said, the book is his “occasionally mischievous reply”). It also contains Carroll’s main analytical contribution, dividing *chavistas* into three types—disciples, utopians, and fixers.

**3/9** **Twenty-First Century Socialism**

*Comandante*, third part (“Kingdom,” pp. 203-91).

Carroll’s book ends in early 2013, with Hugo Chávez seriously ill but still alive, and the movement facing challenges of corruption and incompetence. Without remarking upon it, Carroll also changes his description of the ruling coalition. Now the three camps (though not mutually exclusive) are said to be corrupt loyalist generals; opportunists; and a group of “progressives, feminists, labor leaders, and indigenous rights activists” (267), who have seemingly become stupefied or coopted.

**3/12 Understanding Chávez: US Intervention and Anti-Imperialism**

Eva Golinger, “The CIA Was Involved in the Coup against Chávez,” *Venezuelanalysis*, 22 Nov. 2004.\*

James Petras, “U.S- Venezuela Relations: A Case Study of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism,” *Venezuelanalysis*, 23 Oct. 2013, especially “Imperial Policy During the Commodity Boom” to the end.\*

US foreign policy was not openly hostile to Hugo Chávez under the Clinton administration, or even during the first months of George W. Bush’s, although the latter included a lot of hard-right cold warriors who had, under Reagan, run the Contra war against Nicaragua and supported military dictatorships across the hemisphere. Soon they would turn against Chávez. Golinger, a Venezuelan-American lawyer and close advisor of Chávez, describes the documentary evidence for US involvement in the 2002 coup. Petras, a vigorous and steadfast fixture among Left critics of US foreign policy in Latin America, takes up the story and gives it additional context.

**SPRING BREAK**

**4/6 (formerly 3/16) Understanding Chávez: The Role of Race**

Jesus Maria Herrera Salas, “Ethnicity and Revolution: The Political Economy of Racism in Venezuela,” in Steve Ellner and Miguel Tinker Salas, eds., *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez and the Decline of an “Exceptional Democracy”* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).

Nikolas Kozloff, “Hugo Chávez and the Politics of Race,” *Counterpunch* 14 Oct. 2005.\*

Hazel Marsh, “[Venezuela’s Long History of Racism Is Coming Back to Haunt It](https://theconversation.com/venezuelas-long-history-of-racism-is-coming-back-to-haunt-it-82199),” *The Conversation*, 16 Aug. 2017.\*

There can be little doubt that race has played an important role in the ascent and ongoing strength of the *chavista* movement. In many Latin American countries, nationalistic elites reacted to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century “scientific” racism in Europe and North America by describing their countries, by proud contrast, as “racial democracies” (Brazil is most emblematic). By this view, a combination of Catholicism and centuries of miscegenation blurred the color lines and made USA-style “one-drop” rules and color bars both culturally and practically impossible. This was always a half-truth, but the rise of Chávez exposed it anew in Venezuela.

**and (formerly 3/19) Understanding Chávez: Institutions, Voting Patterns, and Public Opinion**

Rafael Di Tella, Javier Donna, and Robert MacCulloch, “Oil, Macro Volatility, and Crime in the Determination of Beliefs,” in Hausmann and Rodriguez, eds., *Venezuela Before Chávez: Anatomy of an Economic Collapse* (Penn State U., 2014).

Wikipedia: [2000 general election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_Venezuelan_general_election); [2005 parliamentary elections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005_Venezuelan_parliamentary_election); [2010 parliamentary elections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Venezuelan_parliamentary_election); [2015 parliamentary elections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Venezuelan_parliamentary_election).

Corrales and Penfold, *Dragon in the Tropics* (2015), pp. 186-90.

This time we use public-opinion data and election results to fill out our analysis of popular support for the Chávez government. The first article floats an unusual argument about the role of oil wealth in the formation of attitudes. The links to Wikipedia give you the raw data for the narrative and commentary from a late section of the Corrales and Penfold book (which we will read from the beginning after break).

***Tuesday 4/7 Second paper due, 4:00pm***

1. **Economics and Political Institutions**

**4/9 The Venezuelan Economy in Disrepair**

The core of Gallegos’s book consists of journalistic observations of an economy that does not work, or at least, does not work the way economists expect (and, in most cases, want) economies to work.

Raul Gallegos, *Crude Nation*, Prologue, Chaps. 1, 2, and 4 (pp. 1-55, 87-106); Chaps. 5-7 and Afterword (pp. 107-89).

**4/13 Participatory Democracy or Executive Manipulation?**

[Extract from *Comuna en Construcción*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ax7t0QQw6zY)(2010 Dario Azzellini and Oliver Ressler), 15’ (YouTube).

Dario Azzelini, “The Communal State: Communal Councils, Communes, and Workplace Democracy,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 46: (2013).\*

Margarita Lopez Maya, “Venezuela: The Political Crisis of Post-Chavismo,” *Social Justice* 40:4 (2014).\*

Matthew Rhodes-Purdy, "Participatory Populism: Theory and Evidence from Bolivarian Venezuela," *Political Research Quarterly* (2015).\*

Dario Azzelini is an Italian political scientist. The YouTube video comes from his longer (94-minute) co-authored documentary. It portrays how block-level community councils (*consejos comunales*) could become the basis for larger, but still participatory, communes, and these in turn the basis for a revolutionary new order. Lopez Maya doubts this vision; Rhodes-Purdy tries to investigate it.

**4/16- 23 Oil, Politics, and Institutions: An Interpretation**

The fashionable truism, “nobody is objective,” applies pretty well to the study of the recent political history of Venezuela. These authors are frankly critical of the *chavista* movement, although as academics they try to base their position on data while answering the arguments of the regime’s defenders. Their central focus on institutions differs from most of our other readings, bringing the discussion back to central themes in political science and in the new scholarly literature on the decay of democracy in the West. Corrales is from a Cuban-American exile family and teaches at Amherst.

**4/16** Corrales and Penfold, *Dragon in the Tropics*, Chaps. 1-2 (pp. 1-47).

**4/20** *Dragon in the Tropics*, Chaps. 3-4 and the introduction to Chap. 5 (pp. 48-102).

**4/23** *Dragon in the Tropics,* excerpts from Chap. 7 and most of Chap. 8 (pp, 160-63, 167-86,

190-203).

***Friday 4/24*** ***Third paper due, 7:00pm***

1. **The Puzzle of Economic Collapse and Political Stability under Maduro**

**4/27** **Portraits of Collapse and Control**

Gallegos, *Crude Nation*, Introduction (to the paperback edition, pp. v-ix)*.*

[*From Riches to Rags: Venezuela’s Economic Crisis*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mL8d91vdR9g)*,*Feb. 2018, Al-Jazeera 10’ (YouTube).

Moisés Naím and Francisco Toro, “Venezuela’s Suicide” (Nov/Dec 2018), from *The Collapse of Venezuela*, an anthology of articles from *Foreign Affairs.*

[Anatoly Kurmanaev, “Venezuelan Collapse Is the Worst Outside of War,” *NY Times* 5/17/19.\*](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/world/americas/venezuela-economy.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article)

[Tony Frangie Mawad, “A Witch Hunter in Cambridge,” *Caracas Chronicles,* 27 Nov. 2019.\*](https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2019/11/27/a-witch-hunter-in-cambridge/)

UNHCR, “Human Rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela” A/HRC/41/18 (5 July 2019).\*

[Anatoly Kurmanaev, “Rural Venezuela Crumbles,” *NY Times* 1/13/20.\*](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/13/world/americas/Venezuela-collapse-Maduro.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage)

Anatoly Kurmanaev and Isayen Herrera, “[Venezuela’s Capital Is Booming. Is This the End of the Revolution?](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/01/world/americas/Venezuela-economy-dollars.html?searchResultPosition=1)” *NY Times*, 1 Feb. 2020.\*

Here is a series of journalistic accounts of recent Venezuela. They set up the central question for this last section of the course: what explains relative political stability in a country whose economy has contracted by (according to various estimates) over two thirds? In various ways they also begin to answer it. Links are provided for most articles so you can see the pictures that do not come through on the copied or simplified versions in the packet.

**4/30 Support for *Chavismo* Is Not Fully Recognized?**

Tinker Salas, *What Everyone Needs to Know*, two short excerpts (pp. 163-69 and 192-200).

Alan MacLeod, “Manufacturing Consent in Venezuela: Media Misreporting of a Country, 1998- 2014,” *Critical Sociology* (2018) and

“Chavista Thugs,” *Race and Class* 60:4 (2019).\*

We have to start with the most obvious: maybe we are not getting an accurate picture of people’s attitudes. MacLeod focuses on the recurring tropes in what he regards as biased bourgeois media.

**5/4** **The Regime Has Become More Authoritarian?**

Corrales and Penfold, first part of Chap. 9 (pp. 204-07).

[Brent McDonald, Ora DeKornfeld and Nicholas Casey, “How to Win an Election in Venezuela: Control the Food,” *NY Times* video, 5/21/18.](https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/americas/100000005908945/how-to-win-an-election-in-venezuela-control-the-food.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article&region=Footer)

Bryan Bowman, “Confidante of ‘Tyrants:’ An Interview with Former Chávez Advisor Eva Golinger,” *The Globe Post*, 30 Jan. 2019.\*

[Joshua Goodman, “Sex. Drugs. Virus. Venezuela elites still party in pandemic,” AP, 7 April 2020.](https://apnews.com/7ad2d34c2f89e9f74bb1afb0584afacb)

TBA

Another explanation is just that a formerly semi-democratic regime has become effectively closed and authoritarian. This is where the Corrales and Penfold book ends up, and we supplement this (thinking back to the booming-Caracas story two classes ago) with a NY Times video about the 2018 presidential election. Bowman’s piece re-introduces Eva Golinger as a critic of what she regards as Maduro’s authoritarian turn.

**5/7 Cuba and Other Allies Keep Maduro in Power?**

Julio Borges, “Cuba Has Hijacked Venezuela,” *NY Times*, 10 April 2019.\*

[Angus Berwick, “How Cuba Taught Venezuela How to Quash Military Dissent,” *Reuters*, 22 August 2019](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-cuba-military-specialreport/special-report-how-cuba-taught-venezuela-to-quash-military-dissent-idUSKCN1VC1BX).\*

Brian Fonseca and John Polga-Hecimovich, “Two Nations, One Revolution,” in [*Venezuela and Cuba: The Ties that Bind*, Wilson Center Latin American Program, Jan. 2020](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/venezuela-cuba_final.pdf) (especially pp. 12-16).\*

Rocio Cara Labrador, “Maduro’s Allies: Who Backs the Venezuelan Regime?” Council on Foreign Relations, 5 Feb. 2019.\*

Jessica Donati, Andrew Restuccia, and Ian Talley, “How Putin Outfoxed Trump on Venezuela,” *Wall Street Journal,* 27 January 2020.\*

These readings describe the various forms of support enjoyed by the Maduro government from three main sources—Cuba, Russia, and China. The first is most active in the political and strategic sphere, the last economically, and the second in both.

**5/11** **The Opposition Is Feckless and Divided, But the Government (Mostly) Is Not?**

Review Carroll, *Comandante*, pp. 264-65.

Javier Corrales, “How to Tackle Venezuela’s Military Problem,” *NY Times*, 4 March 2019.\*

Harold Trinkunas, “The Tragedy of the Venezuelan Opposition” (5 Jan. 2018), and

Laura Gamboa Gutierrez, “Why Venezuela’s Regime Hasn’t Collapsed” (30 May 2019), from *The Collapse of Venezuela*, an anthology of articles from *Foreign Affairs.*

Jon Lee Anderson, “Venezuela’s Two Presidents Collide,” *New Yorker*, 17 June 2019.\*

As Juan Guaidó’s abortive coup attempt of 30 April 2019 dramatically showed, a few big popular mobilizations, a couple of high-ranking defections, and a self-referential social media show do not amount to the overthrow of a government. These explanations look at the strategic and organizational assets of both sides. Anderson also suggests a bit of naiveté and inexperience on Guaidó’s part. (Note: Anderson refers to Guaidó and López’s party (*Voluntad Popular*) as “right of center,” but it is [actually part of the Socialist International](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_Will).)

**5/14 What Is to be Done? Discussion and Summary**

Abraham Lowenthal and David Smilde, “Venezuela: Is There a Way Out of Its Tragic Impasse?” Woodrow Wilson Center Latin America Program (July 2019).\*

Frida Ghitis, “For Trump, Venezuela Will Remain a Foreign Policy Priority,” *World Politics Review*, 9 Jan. 2020.\*

Michael Penfold, “Venezuela’s Only Choice Left,” *NY Times,* 18 Jan. 2020.\*

Francisco Toro, “No, Venezuela Doesn’t Prove Anything about Socialism,” *Washington Post*, 21 August 2018 (under the “Files” tab on Glow).

To conclude, we’ll consider (along with the Corrales op-ed from last time) several explicitly policy-oriented contributions from experts on Venezuela and US foreign policy, as well as reflections on the meaning of the Venezuelan tragedy by an opposition journalist.

***Tuesday, 5/19 Last paper due, 4:00pm***