The New Left and Neoliberalism in Latin America

Recent years have seen a resurgence of the political left in Latin America. This course seeks to understand the origins of this new left, the ideas and character of its protagonists, the neoliberal philosophy it opposes, and the arena of democratic politics it inhabits today. It begins with two widely read polemical works by Latin American authors. The next part steps back to consider Latin American political economy, including the twentieth-century left, from a more historical and analytical perspective. With this preparation, we then look more closely at Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, and after break, we extend this survey to Bolivia, Ecuador, and Brazil, while referring to other countries as well. After considering explanations of the rise of the left and assessments of its performance, we end our common readings by asking what it might mean today to be on the left in Latin America—or anywhere—both in policy and political terms.

Requirements. Attendance is mandatory and regular participation is expected. In order to orient lecture and stimulate discussion, students should come to class with at least one question (this can be a request for clarification) and one comment on the readings for the day. As for written assignments, these include three short essays, a one-page reflective response paper, and a 12-page research proposal. In preparing the last, which will consist of a short introduction, literature review, and a summary of key questions, each student should meet with me to discuss topics (late April); prepare a one-page summary/bibliography, in time for a library workshop (May 3); and make a very short presentation to the class (May 7 or 10). There is no final exam. Honor code guidelines are the standard ones for expository writing—see the Student Handbook, pp. 136-37. For references to course readings, you can do short internal citations like this (Galeano, 244).

Evaluation. Attendance and participation, 15 percent; short essays, 15 percent each; reaction paper, 5 percent; presentation, 5 percent; and research proposal, 30 percent.

Readings. The following books are required and for sale at Water Street Books:

- Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, Carlos Alberto Montaner, and Álvaro Vargas Llosa, Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot [1996] (Madison Books, 2000);
- Bart Jones, ¡Hugo! (Steerforth, 2007);
- Michael Reid, Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America’s Soul (Yale, 2007);
- Alan Weisman, Gaviotas: A Village to Remake the World [1998], tenth anniversary edition (Chelsea Green, 2008); and

The rest of the readings are either linked here or in a packet coming out in the second full week. Notice also that there is a video, Cocalero, on 2-hour reserve at Sawyer, which you should view sometime before the class on the Monday right after Spring Break.
Schedule
(* = in packet)

2/1 (Wed.) Overview

I. Contending Views on Latin American History and Problems

2/6 A Classic Statement of the View from the Left
Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, Introduction (pp. 1-8), first part of Chap. 2 (pp. 59-83), and Chap. 3.

Galeano is a Uruguayan journalist and writer. *Open Veins*, his first book, has a kind of iconic status in Latin America, serving for many as a reference book about their historical predicament (and the way to overcome it). It is an extended synthesis of the “dependency” school of thought, which argues that the region’s economic relationships with external powers have decisively misshaped Latin American development, causing underdevelopment. Other key writers in that tradition have been André Gunder Frank and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (past president of Brazil, more moderate in office than he had been on the page).

2/9 The Left, continued
Galeano, *Open Veins*, Chap. 4, first and last parts of Chap. 5 (pp. 205-14 and 237-61), and Part III (“Seven Years After”).

In Chapter 4 Galeano presents his historical counterfactuals, instances where autonomous development was considered but blocked or tried but later overthrown by an alliance of foreign and domestic interests. The other selections describe problems with industrialization involving multinational enterprises and production for export—what Galeano considers a new system of exploitation. Part III then revisits the text in 1978, after the armed forces had come to power in Uruguay (where they imprisoned Galeano), Chile, and Argentina.

2/13 A Response from the Right
Mendoza, Montaner, and Vargas Llosa, *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot*, Foreword and Chaps. 1, 3 (plus a page at the very end of Chap. 13), 4, and 6.

A mixture of historical argument, triumphalism, and mockery, the *Manual del perfecto idiota latinoamericano* was a cocktail-party sensation in Latin America in the late 1990’s. As we find out in the third chapter, the authors aim their most direct attacks at the book we just finished, which they call “The Idiot’s Bible.” That chapter cites only a few pages in Galeano’s introduction, however, while the snippet ending the book refers only to his Chapter 4. Don’t worry about all the casual references to Peruvian events in the first part of the book (I’m guessing Vargas Llosa is primary author there).
2/16  The Right, continued, and a debate

*Idiot*, Chaps. 7 and 9, first part of Chap. 10 (pp. 141-54) and Chap. 12.

The first three of these chapters single out for critique the left’s admiration for Cuba, its anti-US attitude, and its nationalism. The last one responds to various criticisms of neoliberalism.

In 2007 the authors published a sequel, *El regreso del idiota* (México: Random House Mondadori), intended to respond to the rise of leftism in the region. It focuses more on personalities than on ideas. (An English summary of it was published in *Foreign Policy* magazine in 2007.) It does not seem as effective as its predecessor or as Andrés Oppenheimer’s popular *Cuentos Chinos* (Plaza Janés, 2005), which reads like Thomas Friedman and actually makes an argument.

In the last half hour of class we’ll debate the two positions. Students will be assigned randomly just before we begin, so be ready to argue either side.

*Three-page essay due Friday Feb. 17 at noon*

---

**II. Development Models and the Evolution of the Left in Latin America**

2/20  The Old Liberal Model

Michael Reid, *Forgotten Continent*, skim Chap. 2, read Chap. 3.

Introduction to Section III and Chaps. 11-13 (excerpts of papers by Coatsworth, Leff, and Engerman and Sokoloff), from Frieden, Pastor, and Tomz., eds, *Modern Political Economy and Latin America: Theory and Policy* (Westview, 2000).*

Before there was “neoliberalism” there had to be a (paleo)liberalism, and in Latin America the period of liberal dominance is generally understood to begin around the 1860’s. Liberal parties stood for free trade, rationalism, individualism, and legal equality against conservatives who fought for economic traditionalism, a society of castes and guilds, and the continued centrality of the Catholic Church. With the exception of slavery, which Latin American liberals generally abolished whenever they took power (but then tolerated or encouraged other restrictions on labor), this liberalism was similar to the founding creed of the United States. In fact the rapid growth of the US lent a great deal of prestige to the cause. As this implies, the sense of “liberal” (and hence “neoliberal”) here is closer to the word’s original meaning as someone who prizes liberty, rather than the unusual connotation the word now has in the US.

Reid’s second chapter gives an overview of development models and ideologies, along with his own position. Chapter 3 provides historical context for the rise and decline of liberalism in Latin America. The first two excerpts from the Frieden-Pastor-Tomz reader detail the achievements and problems of liberal development, while the Engerman and Sokoloff article is a provocative and highly influential comparison of development patterns north and south, aiming for an explanation of how Latin America fell behind.

2/23  Import-Substituting Industrialization, Its Problems, and the Debt Crisis

Reid, *Forgotten Continent*, all but the last section of Chap. 5 (pp. 106-20).


Introduction to Section IV and Chaps. 16 and 17 (Cardoso/ Helwege, Mahon) from *Modern Political Economy and Latin America.*
In a way, industrialization via import substitution seems too obvious to have a special name. And in fact, when conditions were favorable Latin Americans have substituted locally made products for imports since Independence, and even during the liberal period. This process accelerated during the twentieth century when Europe and the US fell into war or depression, cutting manufactured exports to Latin America or making them more expensive. But it was mainly after World War Two that ISI became a deliberate strategy supported by restrictive trade policy (tariffs or more often, quantitative limits on manufactured imports) and foreign-exchange controls (under which the authorities limited access to dollars or other hard currencies, depending on the purpose for which they were sought). The main exceptions to this trend were countries in the US orbit (most of Central America and the Caribbean), which suffered relatively less in the 1930’s due to bilateral trade pacts with the US and were thought to be too small to contemplate a push for inwardly focused industrialization.

Again, Reid gives the political-historical context—the Cold War, populism, the Cuban Revolution, and the rise of bureaucratic-authoritarian military regimes. The Johnson article is a classic case study of problems with politically imposed industrialization, which were much worse in the smaller countries (and even in Chile, not as bad in other industries as in the forlorn desert factories Johnson describes). The first chapter from the Frieden-Pastor-Tomz reader weighs the pro’s and con’s of ISI. The second compares Latin America and East Asia in an attempt to understand why Latin America was slower to switch to policies promoting a more export-oriented and labor-intensive kind of industry.

2/27 The Left in the Twentieth Century
Jorge Castañeda, Utopia Unarmed, Chaps. 2-4 (pp. 23-128).*
Background reading: Wikipedia entry on Marxism and (within it) on Marxism-Leninism

Here is one of Mexico’s most famous political intellectuals in his most widely read book. Its subject mirrors his own personal narrative. His father became Secretary of Foreign Affairs under the López Portillo government (1976-82), his mother was a Soviet diplomat under Stalin at the UN. He began his political life as a student activist and a Communist. He was once accused of being a CIA agent in his youth, while recent news accounts claim documentary evidence in Mexico’s national archive showing that he was a Cuban spy from 1979 to 1985. (The documents also show that he broke with the Cubans over their high-handed arbitrariness.) He joined the dissident front that eventually became the PRD, advising Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in his run for the presidency in 1988. He later convened a series of meetings in 1999 and 2000 that brought Vicente Fox (of the rightist PAN) into contact with leading lights of the political and cultural left in Mexico, helping to make Fox the consensus anti-PRI candidate for those voting strategically in 2000. Fox rewarded him with the post of Foreign Minister, which he held until 2003. He tried to run for President in 2006 but his candidacy was ruled illegal since he had not been nominated by any party.

In these chapters we get a thoughtful and personal history of the Latin American left in the twentieth century. He guides us through the origins of and distinctions between nationalists, populists, Moscow-line Communists, Maoists, and Cuba-inspired foquistas.

TBA Neoliberalism: Its Rise and Its Contemporary Critics
Reid, Forgotten Continent, rest of Chap. 5; Chap. 6, skim Chap. 7, read Chap. 8 (pp. 120-158; skim 159-78; pp. 179-211).
This is really the heart of Reid’s book. Chapter 6 opens with financial crisis and political breakdown in Argentina in 2001-02, widely described as a failure of neoliberalism, and then asks where neoliberalism came from and what its adepts tried to accomplish. This he does sympathetically (as might be expected from an employee of The Economist) but not uncritically. Chapters 7 and 8 also serve as a guide to the landscape of populist and reformist left politicians we will visit after break. Chapter 7 is mostly about Hugo Chávez, with only a brief mention of other like-minded leaders at the end. You can skim it since we will get plenty of Hugo later on. Chapter 8 is more important as an overview of events in Chile, Brazil, and Mexico.

3/1 Social Change and Democratic Politics
Reid, Forgotten Continent, Chaps. 9 and 11 (pp. 212-32 and 264-92).

Here we finish our examination of the regional context, looking at the variety of new social actors and the political space of democracy. Reid hopefully suggests that the pluralism of burgeoning urban societies and the withdrawal of the military’s political “veto” have allowed a bottom-up fortification of democratic political culture and institutions. His Chapter 11 has some background on the rise of Evo Morales as well.

III. The New Left: Heroes and Movements

3/5 Venezuela and Hugo Chávez
Bart Jones, ¡Hugo! (2007, Steerforth Press), Chaps. 1-3, 5, last part of 7, 8-9, the first and last parts of 10, the first part of 11, and the second half of 14 (pp. 1-53, 67-82, 107-33, 158-65, 216-25).*

Jones shows us how Venezuelan politics and society could create a man like Hugo Chávez and the country’s armed forces would then work hard to stifle him. The 1958 political settlement making Venezuela a “model democracy” helped shape parties that were at once omnipresent and, by the 1980’s, totally opportunistic. This system could not handle the stresses of austerity and began to fall apart after 1988, most dramatically after the February 1989 riots known as the caracazo.

3/8 Hugo Chávez and His Opponents
Jones, all of Chap. 15, second part of 19, and all of 20-26 (pp. 226-47, 302-432).
Clip of ¡Aló Presidente! to be shown in class

Hugo Chávez rode to power as the enemy of rich oligarchs and “partyocracy” and the champion of the common Venezuelan. But in his first few years in power, his policies were much more moderate than his rhetoric. This had begun to change by the end of 2001. The big watershed moments came in 2002, with the coup in April and the strike in December. With some justification, Chávez saw the hand of the Bush administration in the first, and it remains a rhetorical touchstone in his speeches to the nation. (He is still fond of saying “every 11th has its 13th,” meaning that every apparent advance by our imperial enemies and their local allies will fail in the face of popular resistance.) More fundamentally, the sense of being under attack by the US was important to his nationalistic appeal, and it made comparisons of Venezuela to Cuba more credible.
**3/12** Interpretations of “21st-Century Socialism” and the Outlook for 2012

Jones, finish—Chap. 27 and both afterwords (pp. 433-87).


*Timeline of recent political events*

Current news and opinion at *Venezuela Analysis*

Current news and opinion at *Venezuela News and Views*

Jones brings us through the referendum of Dec. 2007. Along with a nice description of the social missions, we get a sense of the political institutions of the new socialism in Venezuela and who has benefited from the oil boom economy. Corrales offers a different interpretation, asserting that while the political profile of Chávez’s movement is new (though not admirable), his economic policies are old (and likely to fail). The news articles bring us through his more recent assertions of executive power and his treatment for cancer, setting the stage for the elections of 7 October 2012. The two blogs, very different in their opinions of the government, give a sense of the current polarization of Venezuelan politics.

**Three-page essay due Tuesday, March 13, at noon**

**3/15** No class

-----------SPRING BREAK-----------------------------------------------

**4/2** Bolivia and Evo Morales


Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, “Return to Cochabamba: Eight Years Later, the Bolivian Water War Continues,” *Earth Island Journal* 23:3 (9/22/08).*


*Bolivia timeline*

The election of Evo Morales in Bolivia was in some ways more historic and transformative for Bolivian politics than was the ascension of Hugo Chávez for Venezuela. His indigenous origins and his rise to prominence as an organizer of distressed coca farmers bespeak a big democratic breakthrough in a country which, despite a revolution in 1952, still retained a degree of racial hierarchy and exclusion unusual even for South America. The Landes video gives you a sympathetic view of the man and his movement in the quest for the presidency, while Dunkerley emphasizes historical legacies and the importance of Morales’s party. Gray Molina focuses on polarized politics while arguing that good pro-poor policy will be a key to consolidating the Morales regime. Friedman-Rudovsky looks at the disappointing aftermath of
the water wars while the news articles describe recent initiatives—and retreats—by a still-popular government.

4/5 Rafael Correa and Ecuador


Roger Burbach, “Ecuador’s Popular Revolt: Forging a New Nation,” Transnational Institute 10/1/07.*


Ecuador timeline

Ecuador has followed Bolivia and Venezuela on the path of leftist re-founding under a president who centralizes power. But here, this took place in the context of an already active and successful revival of a left protest movement led by indigenous people, gathered under the umbrella of CONAIE. While indigenous people make up a smaller proportion of the total population in Ecuador than they do in Bolivia (or Peru), this early and effective organization (and early betrayals by politicians) has meant that Correa cannot assume the support of the indigenous grass roots. This is especially so because CONAIE’s founding issue, environmental damage from oil and mineral production, and its signature demand, plurinationality, both conflict with the basically nationalist-developmentalist goals of Correa and the populist left.

These readings come at the Correa presidency from several angles. The CRS report gives a broad background and lots of facts. The Burbach piece is a sympathetic account of Correa’s goals, while Wood is more skeptical about the benefits for indigenous communities and environmentalism. The next few news articles relate to the further escalation of the tensions Wood described, with Rathbone making the connections between Bolivia and Ecuador, as well as the end of the Chevron case and the president’s new powers against the press.

4/9 Brazil

Kingstone and Ponce, “From Cardoso to Lula,” and

Barros Silva et al., “Lula’s Administration at a Crossroads,” in Leftist Governments in Latin America.


Brazil news link from Topix

Brazil timeline

Fifteen or twenty years ago, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Workers’ Party) looked just as radical and, to many, just as identified with one person (Luiz Inácio da Silva, known everywhere as Lula) as have the movements in the Andes we’ve just studied. But when Lula became president in 2002, on his fourth try, he tacked toward the center while emphasizing continuity with his center-left predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. By then it had also become apparent to close observers that the PT was a strong party, rooted throughout most of the country, with strong institutions of internal governance that could resist any attempts to turn it into someone’s personal vehicle. Should we ascribe Lula’s moderation to Brazilian political
culture, to its political institutions (federalism, especially), to the PT, to the market panic that followed his election victory in 2002, or to his own personality? And how effective has the PT been in power, not only in policy terms, but also in keeping itself together as a party? The two chapters from the Weyland-Madrid-Hunter volume address these and other questions, while the Margolis piece spotlights Lula’s successor, Dilma Rousseff.

4/12 Explaining the New Left
Kurt Weyland, pp. 17-22 (“Causes of Moderation versus Contestatory Postures”) of Chapter 1 in *Leftist Governments in Latin America*.
Benjamin Arditi, “Arguments about Left Turns in Latin America,” *LARR* 43:3 (2008).*
Sara Miller Llana, “Quiet Rise of Latin America’s Center,” *Chr Sci Monitor*, 11/19/08.*

The first explanations for the rise of the left basically followed what leftist politicians and movement leaders were saying: it was just a reaction against the failures of neoliberalism. In an influential article in *Foreign Affairs*, Jorge Castañeda cited the region’s great inequality and neoliberalism’s lack of concern for it, while he also distinguished between radicals (Chávez; he later added Correa, Morales, and Daniel Ortega), who attacked existing political institutions and capitalism while centralizing power, and moderates (Lula in Brazil, Bachelet in Chile, Vásquez in Uruguay) who did not. Later explanations, such as Weyland’s, have maintained the distinction while looking more skeptically at the hypothesis that neoliberalism is the cause. Arditi tries to reframe the debate about leftist influence and politics, arguing that it may be as much about agenda-setting and new organizational power (with new forms of politics emerging from the latter) as it is about winning the presidency. Miller Llana summarizes some opinion polling suggesting that the latest trend might be the rise of the center. Murillo and her co-authors complicate this view, arguing that recent trends are best understood as a normalization of democratic politics and a rejection of poorly performing (right of center) incumbents.

4/16 Assessing the New Left: Debate

Today we debate the effectiveness of the more radical versus the more moderate versions of leftist in Latin America. Ellner broadly sympathizes with the projects of Chávez, Morales, and Correa, while the other authors find them wanting in some ways.

Students should come to class with a paper that lists points in favor of each position, and will then be randomly assigned to one or the other. The debating points could come not only from these readings but also from elsewhere in the course.

**3-page paper due at the start of class**
IV. What Does It Mean To Be Progressive in Latin America Today?

4/19 The Policy Agenda
Reid, Forgotten Continent, first and middle parts of Chap. 10 (pp. 233-36 and 242-46).
Joseph Goodman, Melissa Laube, and Judith Schwenk, “Curitiba's Bus System is Model for Rapid Transit,” Race, Poverty, and the Environment (Winter 2005/06).*
BBC mini-documentary on Curitiba transport
Christina Ewig, “Inequality and Latin American Welfare Regimes: Why Gender Ought To Be at the Top of the Agenda,” LASA Forum Fall 2008.*
“Giant Escalator Installed in Colombian City of Medellin,” BBC 26 Dec. 2011. Link
“Stand-up Comics Lead Social Revolt against Brazil’s Powerful Elites,” The Observer 2 Oct. 2011.*
Video of Camila Vallejo from Aug 2011
Uki Goñi, “Defying Church, Argentina Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage,” Time, 15 July 2010.* Link
“Affirming a Divide,” and
“A Surprising Safe Haven,” both from The Economist, 28 Jan. 2012.*

A huge variety of policies might be on the agenda of a progressive or left government in Latin America, and in practice it is largely via the selection and pursuit of these policies that many governments (especially subnational ones) define themselves as progressive. What are the problems that appear to be most urgent, important, and (to some degree at least) amenable to government action?

Here is a list of illustrative examples, not meant to be exhaustive. Forero reminds us of the region’s deep inequality, while Reid gives us a glimpse of welfare and education policies, with Ewig’s critique applying to many on the left as well as right. Frenk and the Science Daily piece describe the quest for basic universal health care in Mexico; we hear of escalators in Medellin and buses in Curitiba, as well as a smoking ban, ambiguous environmentalism, mockery of the powerful, and a new expansion of the conditional cash transfer program Bolsa Familia in Brazil. We then become acquainted with the world-famous figure who has led (until recently) the Chilean student protests in favor of free university education. This is followed by an article on same-sex marriage in Argentina, affirmative action and race relations in Brazil, and the unusually low crime rate in Nicaragua. The last, because it is tied to the reform of police (and people’s attitudes toward the police) that accompanied the Sandinista revolution, leads us back to the question of reform vs. revolution as well as to the importance of the state, our topic for next time.
4/23 The Policy Agenda: Making the State Work
Reid, Forgotten Continent, rest of Chap. 10 (pp. 236-42 and 246-63), and second half of Chap. 12 (pp. 305-315).
Begin reading Weisman, Gaviotas, at least as far as the Overture and Part I (pp. 1-89).

Social spending requires revenue; public services need public administration; justice implies a functioning judiciary; markets work badly without effective and impartial regulation; and everything requires security. For many reasons, a key agenda today—largely agreed upon by left and right--involves the reform of the state.

4/26 Do We Need a Utopia?
Weisman, Gaviotas, finish.

We read this wonderful book not only because it’s inspirational but also to compare the idealism of the Gaviotas founders and residents to that traditionally found on the political left in Latin America—and to the ideas of neoliberals as well.

*One-page reflective paper due at the start of class*

4/30 Summary and Research Orientation
No assigned reading

V. Research Colloquium

5/3 Research workshop with Rebecca Ohm, librarian

*Email a one-page topic summary/ bibliography to Ms. Ohm (and to me) by noon on May 2*

5/7 presentations

5/10 presentations and wrap-up

*Research proposal papers due Monday, May 21, at noon*