Latin American Political Thought

Despite the current trend towards the study of comparative political thought in political theory, the work of Latin American political thinkers, which has been tremendously influential in their own region, remains marginal to the canon of Western political thought. This course is an overview of the various traditions in the history of Latin American political thought. It examines the answers Latin American thinkers have given to some of the fundamental preoccupations of political theory from the perspective of the region’s social and political realities, such as: What is justice? What is the nature of the human? Under what conditions is popular sovereignty possible? What is the relationship between aesthetics and politics? What should be the relationship between religion and politics? How should we theorize race? The course will introduce students to some of the most influential figures in Latin American political thought, including: Bartolomé de las Casas, Simón Bolívar, Domingo F. Sarmiento, José Enrique Rodó, José Martí, José Vasconcelos, José Carlos Mariátegui; as well as to the work of contemporary Latin American philosophers, and Latino political theorists in the United States who are drawing on this tradition. It will use this engagement with the history of political thought in Latin America to ask the following questions: To what extent can we say that there is a tradition of Latin American political thought? If so, what are its contours? And what, if any, is the difference between Latin American philosophy and Latin American political thought? What are the main problematics that animate this tradition? To what extent does it reflect concerns specific to Latin America? To what extent does it challenge the conceptual and methodological boundaries of the canon of Western political thought?

Course Requirements:

Students will write three short (4 page) critical response essays about the readings. Response papers should include a brief summary of the main arguments raised by the readings, an evaluation of the validity/persuasiveness of these claims, and questions raised by the readings. Response papers should not be simply book reviews. Papers will be due at NOON on the Friday prior to class and may be submitted electronically. Late papers will NOT be accepted.

Students will also make one in-class presentation on the readings. The in-class presentation should consist of: 1) a brief summary of the readings, and 2) important issues/questions raised by either the readings or student papers that should serve as a guide for class discussion.

Final grades will be assessed based on three critical response essays (22% each for a total of 66%), in class presentation (18%), and class participation (16%).

Required Texts The following books are available for purchase at the Co-op Bookstore:

6. Abdias do Nascimento, Brazil: Mixture or Massacre? Essays in the Genocide of a Black People (Majority Press, 1989). In addition, readings marked below with an asterisk will be available through blackboard.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Week 1 (August 30): Introduction

Week 2 (September 6): NO CLASS (Labor Day Holiday)

Week 3 (September 13): Latin American Philosophy and Political Thought—Aims and Method

Week 4 (September 20): Latin American Political Thought During the Colonial Period—Who is Human?

Week 5 (September 27): Latin American Political Thought in the Era of Independence—What is Popular Sovereignty?

Week 6 (October 4): Nineteenth Century Positivism

Week 7 (October 11): 20th Century Latin American Political Thought—Race, Culture, and National Identity

Week 8 (October 18): 20th Century Latin American Political Thought—Aesthetics and Politics
José Enrique Rodó, Ariel (University of Texas Press, 1998).

Week 9 (October 25): 20th Century Latin American Political Thought—Mestizaje

Week 10 (November 1): Latin American Marxism

Week 11 (November 8): Liberation Theology

Week 12 (November 15): Black Political Thought in Latin America
Abdias do Nascimento, Brazil: Mixture or Massacre? Essays in the Genocide of a Black People (Majority Press, 1989).

Week 13 (November 22): Race in Latin American and African-American Political Thought

Week 14 (November 29): U.S. Latino Political Thought