

**(PALAS 390) Popular Culture in Latin America**  
**Universidad de Belgrano**  
**Patricia Anderson (ABD)**  
**Spring 2023**

**Course description:**

This course examines aspects and expressions of popular culture in Latin America to understand how identity is constructed, negotiated and defined by non-hegemonic social sectors and actors. Using an intersectional approach, we will delve into specific examples and material expressions of culture and explore how the realm of culture becomes a space for asserting and displaying different kinds of power. Food, drink, clothing, music, art, and sports shape the manner in which Latin America is imagined and experienced. In the post-pandemic world, where localized and traditional worldviews are increasingly challenged by globalization and the erasure of difference, the cultural world emerges as a site of resistance that allows for the proud manifestation of racial, gender and class-based identities.

**Course requirements**

Each class is based on a specific topic with associated mandatory readings, visual and audio material, and in-class activities. It is expected that students come to class prepared for an informed debate and discussion of the topic of the week. Besides the classroom, this course requires the participation in “experiences”, or informed and active explorations of the urban landscape. Each student will write two brief personal reports based on this experience. In addition, each student will select a contemporary or historic Latin American cultural production and write a 5-6-page research paper on its relevance and significance to the way the region has been imagined and recreated. These findings will be presented orally to the rest of the class, together with “thinking questions” to trigger interaction and independent thinking. Ultimately, we will focus on a diversity of Latin American cultural expressions to deepen students’ understanding and experience of the region.

**Course objectives**

- To learn about the importance of culture in the construction of multiple layers of identity
- To develop tools to detect, observe and analyze a variety of cultural productions
- To trigger independent and original thought by fostering a space for discussion and exchange
- To expose students to diverse academic sources and materials
- To demonstrate the relevance of an active engagement with the learning experience

## Grading policy

Participation	10%
Out of classroom experiences (2)	10%
Experiential reports (2)	30%
Research paper	30%
Oral presentation	20%

## Class Schedule

### Week 1:

Introduction to cultural studies.  
Popular, pop, and mass cultures.  
Objectives, subjects, and relevance of culture.

### Week 2:

The struggle for identity in Latin America.  
Race, class, gender and intersectionality.

#### Required reading:

Marisel Melendez, "Visualizing difference: The rhetoric of clothing in Colonial Latin America," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005

### Week 3:

Urban spaces and cultural productions.  
The city of Buenos Aires and cultural dynamics in the streets.

#### Required reading:

Mary Weismantel, *Cities of Women*, (2008) excerpts

### Week 4:

Indigenous cultures.  
Weaving the past and performing identity through textiles and fashion.  
Cultural appropriation. Wrestling cholitas.

Required reading: E. Demaray, M. Schenk, M. Littrell, "Representations of tradition in Latin America boundary textile art," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005

### Week 5:

Food and drink in indigenous cultures.  
The Pacha Mama cult. Globalization and food.  
Experiencing traditional food.

Required readings:

Justin Jennings, "A glass for the gods and a gift to my neighbor: Alcohol in pre-columbian Andes," *Alcohol in Latin America* (ed. Gretchen Pierce and Aurea Toxqui) 2014

Jeffrey Pilcher, "Many chefs in the national kitchen: cookbooks and identity in 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexico," in *Latin American Popular Culture* (ed. Beezely and Nagy) 2003

**Week 6:**

Afro Latin America and the power of music and dance.  
From capoeira to tango to reggaeton

Required reading:

John Charles Chasteen, "Black Kings, Blackface Carnival and Nineteenth Century Origins of the Tango," in *Latin American Popular Culture* (ed. Beezely and Nagy) 2003

**Experiential report 1 is due this week**

**Week 7:**

Popular religiosity in the Afro and mestizo communities.  
Umbanda, popular saints and religious devotions.

Required reading: Kathleen Figger, "Bottles of water on the road: material symbols of an Argentine popular saint's cult," *Women's Studies International Forum* 9 (1) 1986

**Week 8:**

Masculinity and femininity in Latin America: performing gender in culture.  
The macho, the virgin, the whore.

Required reading:

Eduardo Archetti, "Masculinity Primitivism and Power: Gaucho," *Tango and the Shaping of Argentine National Identity, Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America since Independence* (ed. W. French and K. Bliss) 2007

**Experiential report 2 is due this week**

**Week 9:**

Queering culture: erasing gender binaries.  
Non hegemonic identities in Latin America's culture past and present

## **Week 10:**

Embodying power and appropriating culture.  
The carnival, pride parades and the art of political protest

### Required reading:

Valeria Manzano, "Poner el cuerpo: the youth body between eroticism and revolution," in *The age of youth in Argentina: culture, politics and sexuality* (2014)

## **Week 11:**

Embodying power and the emergence of modern sports.  
Football, polo, hockey

### **Research paper is due**

## **Week 12:**

Marginality, poverty and exclusion: social class and popular culture.  
Revolutionary Icons: Pancho Villa, Evita Peron and Che Guevara.  
The commodification of culture.

### Required reading:

Maria Claudia Andre: "Frida and Evita: Latin American Icons for Export," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005

## **Week 13:**

Marginality and exclusion: drug trafficking, gangs and identity.  
Popular culture and violence.

## **Week 14:**

### **In-class final oral presentations**

## **Week 15:**

Final remarks and concluding thoughts.

### **Mandatory Bibliography**

Marisel Melendez, "Visualizing difference: The rhetoric of clothing in Colonial Latin America," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005

Mary Weismantel, *Cities of Women*, (2008) excerpts

### **Bibliography:**

E. Demaray, M. Schenk, M. Littrell, "Representations of tradition in Latin America boundary textile art," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005

Justin Jennings, "A glass for the gods and a gift to my neighbor: Alcohol in pre-Columbian Andes," *Alcohol in Latin America* (ed. Gretchen Pierce and Aurea Toxqui) 2014.

Jeffrey Pilcher, "Many chefs in the national kitchen: cookbooks and identity in 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexico," in *Latin American Popular Culture* (ed. Beezely and Nagy) 2003.

John Charles Chasteen, Black Kings, "Blackface Carnival and Nineteenth Century Origins of the Tango," in *Latin American Popular Culture* (ed. Beezely and Nagy) 2003

Eduardo Archetti, "Masculinity Primitivism and Power: Gaucho," *Tango and the Shaping of Argentine National Identity, Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America since Independence* (ed. W. French and K. Bliss) 2007.

Valeria Manzano, "Poner el cuerpo: the youth body between eroticism and revolution," in *The age of youth in Argentina: culture, politics and sexuality* (2014).

Maria Claudia Andre, "Frida and Evita: Latin American Icons for Export," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005.

**Note:** Additional visual and reading matter will be provided for in-class work weekly