

**University of Pennsylvania  
School of Social Policy & Practice  
MSSP/SWRK 797**

**Whose Colony? Politics, Identity and Social Policy in Revolutionary Cuba (1959-2017)**

**Spring 2019**

**I. Course Description**

Cuba represents one of the world's long-standing institutionalized revolutions whose narrative and policies have changed from a strong nationalism yearning for Independence, to an alignment with communism's ideology and *modus operandi*, to a nostalgic, post-Soviet Union "socialism" ruled by a binary, state-controlled capitalism. In addition to the myriad of social and political changes affecting the island, the transition of leadership from Fidel Castro to his brother, Raúl, and the death of the former in 2016, has put into question the theoretical pillars of the Revolution, thus undermining its initial legitimacy. This course is designed to provide students with the critical and analytical tools to dissect Cuban revolutionary politics, policies, and identity mutations within the island's historical trajectory. We will begin by critically reviewing key points of diplomatic and historical relationships between the U.S. and Cuba, followed by an analysis of the notion of Independence – upon which Castro relied to gather massive support – in the context of the 60's debates on decolonization and underdevelopment. In addition, we will delve into the theoretical foundations of the Revolution focusing, among other texts, on the literature by Cuba's "founding father" José Martí, who deeply influenced the Spanish-American war (1898)'s outcomes as well as Fidel Castro's vision for Cuba. Throughout the course, students will also have the opportunity to critically read and discuss main Cuban social policies such as its famous Literacy Campaign, and other Education, Housing, Cultural, Health, and Immigration policies, as well as the island's complex relationship with technological development and communications. Finally, we will study identity and race dynamics, which are inextricably embedded in Cuba's political landscape.

This course will begin with four introductory sessions at the University of Pennsylvania, followed by six class meetings during a two-week stay in Havana, Cuba. Once in the island, students will visit key historical and cultural sites such as El Museo de la Revolución (The Museum of the Revolution), El Museo de la Alfabetización (The Literacy Museum), and La Escuela de Artes Plásticas (National Art School). Parallel to these endeavors, students will also engage in conversations with distinguished Cuban scholars and cultural critics. Lastly, students are required to develop a research project on a particular Cuban social policy and produce a final paper or writing/multimedia project.

**II. Educational and Learning Objectives**

By the end of "Whose Colony? Politics, Identity and Social Policy in Revolutionary Cuba (1959-2017)" students are expected to demonstrate:

1. an understanding of the history of Revolution in Cuba;
2. ability to critically analyze a program, law, or policy in Cuba;
3. an understanding of Race and Raza in Cuban politics and the Revolution;
4. ability to dissect colonial/postcolonial dynamics of power and sovereignty
5. and, a more complicated understanding of Cuban culture, idiosyncrasies and social policies.

### **III. Course requirements:**

#### **Expectations**

Classroom learning is a fundamental component of your professional education. Students are therefore expected to attend each class, arrive to class on time, be in attendance for the full class. In the event that you are unable to attend class for any reason, you must notify the instructor in advance and learn how you are to make up the content you missed. Excessive absenteeism (i.e., missing more than two classes) is considered a serious problem the instructor will handle by meeting with the student and determining whether the student's educational adviser should be notified. Excessive absenteeism could result in course failure.

Students are expected to: (A) participate substantively in class discussions; (B) read on a regular basis and come to class prepared to critically engage the reading assignments; and (C) engage in research work throughout the length of the course, which may include active involvement with the community.

#### **Assignments**

Students will be responsible for several assignments during the course. The assignments will require students to demonstrate critically their understanding of the readings and critical analysis of Cuban policy, programs, laws, and history.

**Students must produce a reflection on the class materials before 11pm the night prior to the class meeting.** This reflection should contain between 500 and 800 words and will be shared with the entire class via e-mail thread or Canvas. The absence of these reflections, or the submission of reflections that are not related to and/or quote the class material will be considered not turned-in, which will result in the loss of the participation grade (20%).

Grades will be based on three criteria: class participation, presentation, and final paper/project. Class participation is worth 20% of your course grade, presentation 20%, and the final paper/project is worth 60% of your overall course grade.

#### **Format**

All papers must be typewritten, in 12-point font, double-spaced, page-numbered, with 1" margins at the left, right, top and bottom. The cover page (not included in the page limit) should include the title of the paper, student's name, assignment number, professors' name and date submitted. Papers should be stapled, not paper-clipped. Papers **must be proofread** carefully for clarity, organization, spelling, punctuation, and other potential errors before submission.

**In-text citations following APA or ASA style guidelines are required** for all written assignments, with the specific source including authors' last names and year of publication, regardless of whether you are paraphrasing or using specific quotes. **A list of references cited or consulted must be included at the end of each paper in proper APA or ASA bibliographic form.** Footnotes may be used where appropriate to further explicate a concept or issue.

You should keep a copy of each paper submitted. The instructor will gladly answer any questions regarding format, citing or organization. Papers written for other classes may not be submitted for written assignments in this course. Direct substitution of papers between courses may result in a failing grade for that assignment.

Students also have the option of developing an alternative writing/multimedia project, including (but not limited to): op-ed, chronicle, documentary, etc. in consultation with the professors.

### **Plagiarism**

Students are expected to conduct themselves consistent with the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity, which presents standards regarding plagiarism, multiple submissions and other actions. Students are expected to be familiar with the Code, which can be found at <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html>

### **Evaluation**

Assignments will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. demonstrates understanding of the reading and theoretical perspective;
2. demonstrates critical analysis of the readings;
3. and, critically engages social policies in the context of revolutionary Cuba.

### **Grading Policies**

The final course grade is based on the student's performance in class and on the final paper/project.

### **Readings**

It is expected that students will read required class assignments from the recommended texts and/or articles, and from relevant materials of their own choosing.

### Class 1 (Jan 18<sup>th</sup>): Introductions

- Review of syllabus, course expectations and requirements
- Travel advice and emergency information

### Class 2 (Jan 25<sup>th</sup>): Why Cuba?

- Obama's speech in Cuba (2016): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEw3H0C-Lj8>



#### President Obama speech in Cuba – FULL SPEECH (C-SPAN)

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

President Obama delivered remarks in Havana to the Cuban people. At the beginning of his speech, he commented on the terrorist attacks in Brussels, Belgium. <http://cs ...>

- “A useful corner of the world”, Paul Kramer. *The New Yorker*, July 2013.
- “The Empire and the Independent Island”, Fidel Castro. In *Guantánamo. Why the Illegal US Base Should Be Returned to Cuba*. NY: Ocean Press, 2011.
- *The Least Worst Place*. Karen Greenberg. NY: Oxford University Press, 2009 (Chapter 1).
- “An Interview with Giorgio Agamben”, Ulrich Raulff. *5 German Law Journal*. 5 (2004).

### Class 3 (Feb 1<sup>st</sup>): Development vs. Underdevelopment

- *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Dipesh Chakrabarty. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. (Introduction)
- *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1993. (“Collaboration, Independence, and Liberation”)
- “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”, Anibal Quijano. *Nepantla. Views for South* 1. 3 (2000): 533-580 (Selection)

### Class 4 (Feb 8<sup>th</sup>): Theoretical Foundations of the Revolution

- *Nuestra América (Our America)*, José Martí, 1891
- *Cuba, or, The Pursuit of Freedom*. Hugh Thomas. New York: Da Capo Press, 1998. Book IX *Victory: L’Illusion Lyrique*, 1959: 1035-1090.

- “La historia me absolverá” (“History will absolve me”), Fidel Castro, 1953.

#### Class 5 (Feb 15<sup>th</sup>): Raza and Race

- “Spanish Nationalism and the Ghost of Empire”, Ángel Loureiro. *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 4. 1 (2003): 65-76.
- Allen Jafari. 2011. *¡Venceremos? The erotics of black self-making in Cuba*. Durham NC: Duke University Press. (Selection)

#### Class 6 (Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>): The Revolution and the Arts

- “Exhuming *Lunes de Revolución*”, William Luis. *The New Centennial Review*. 2. 2 (summer 2002): 253-283.
- *Unfinished Spaces*, Benjamin Murray and Alysa Nahmias. 2011. Film. (Suggested)
- *P.M.* Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal. 1961. Film.
- “Palabras a los Intelectuales” (“Words to Intellectuals”), Fidel Castro, 1961.
- “The Revolution that Might Have Been”, Lillian Guerra. In *Visions of Power in Cuba*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

#### Class 7 (March 1<sup>st</sup>): Students’ presentations:

##### Group one: The Revolution and Alfabetización (Literacy) & The Revolution and Health Care

- Kozol, Jonathan. 1978. *Children of the Revolution: A yankee teacher in the Cuban schools*. Part One: ‘Cuba 1961: The Great Campaign (A Nation Learns to Read and Write)’
- Leiner, Marvin. 1974. *Children are the Revolution: Daycare in Cuba*. Part IV: ‘Nutrition & Healthcare’

##### Group two: Education in the Revolution

- Carnoy, Martin. 2007. *Cuba’s Academic Advantage: Why students in Cuba do better in school*. Chapter 1 & 4
- Dixon-Román, E. 2012. “Products of the Revolution: The Social System of Comprehensively Conceived Education in Cuba.” in *Thinking Comprehensively About Education: Spaces of Educative Possibility and Their Implications for Public Policy*. Ezekiel Dixon-Román and Edmund W. Gordon (eds.). New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis.

##### Group three: Social Policy in the Revolution

- Lara, José Bell. (ed.) 1999. *Cuba in the 1990s*. La Habana Cuba: Editorial José Martí.
  - ‘Ethics, Economics and Social Policies: Values and Development Strategy: 1989-2004.’ By Eugenio Espinosa Martínez

- 'Cuba's Struggle to Maintain the Social Safety net in the Age of Globalization' by José Bell Lara
- 'Family and Social Security in Cuba' By María del Carmen Zabala Argüelles

**Presentation:**

**Due: March 1<sup>st</sup>**

Students are asked to form groups; each group would be assigned several readings (see section above) that should be analyzed and presented to the class. It is expected that students will critically engage the readings, present their findings in a digestible, visually appealing manner and provide at least one extra reference.

Students are expected to provide feedback and critically engage all students' presentations.

**Final Paper/Project:**

**Due: April 1<sup>st</sup>**

Students are asked to select a Cuban law, policy, or social issue of their choice and write a 15 to 20 pages critical analysis of such law, policy, or social issue in practice, construction or implementation. The paper should engage the revolutionary context as well as the historical and analytical framework discussed during class time. This paper may be the culmination of field notes based on experiences and observations of a social, educational, art, immigration or health program in Cuba. Visual ethnographic work and journalistic approaches are welcome in consultation with the professor.