Crime in Latin America

Fall 2015
History W4659
Wednesday 04:10-6:00pm
Fayerweather 301M

Pablo Piccato
Office Hours: Monday 12:30 to 2:00pm
324 Fayerweather
www.columbia.edu/~pp143

Latin America is the region with highest murder rates in the world. Crime (mainly in the form of banditry, petty theft, gender violence, drug trafficking and kidnapping) has shaped perceptions of Latin American societies by outsiders, and has heavily influenced political decisions by local and national governments. Although much has been written about political violence, rule of law and instability in the region since the early nineteenth century, understanding criminal practices and social reactions to deviance requires a careful survey of the past. This seminar will focus on studies that take a historical look at crime in the Latin American context, and will bring the discussion to the present. Transnational connections and comparisons will be encouraged, particularly as we explore the history and contemporary phenomenon of drug trafficking, incorporating the United States as a factor and a scene for Latin American crime. Readings, discussions and reports will try to identify commonalities across Latin American and dig deeper on some specific places and moments. In order to do this, the course will devote part of the semester to the analysis of primary sources, and will include a research component in the final paper.

Grading:

1. Quantitative exercise, due October 14 (10%).
2. Reading exercise, due November 18 (10%).
3. Class participation, presentation of readings, blog participation, on-time attendance (20%).
4. Final paper. Ten pages (60%).

Schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September 9</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
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<td>September 16</td>
<td>Starting with the present: Crime in contemporary Latin America. Read chapters by Davis and Gay in Arias and Goldstein, Violent Democracies in Latin America. Read also “Executive summary” in Human Development Report for Latin America 2013-2014, UNDP.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 23</td>
<td>Museum visit and round panel: Teresa Margolles: We Have a Common Thread. Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, College, SUNY. This event will start at 4:30 pm. Attendance is not required.</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td>September 30</td>
<td><strong>Bandits and the republican era</strong></td>
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<td>October 21</td>
<td><strong>Cities, class and petty crime</strong></td>
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<td>November 4</td>
<td><strong>Negotiations of crime and justice</strong></td>
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<td>November 11</td>
<td><strong>Modernization, disciplinary efforts, and the construction of criminals</strong></td>
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**December 2**

**Crime and fiction**
Jorge Luis Borges, stories from *Universal History Infamy, Six Problems for Isidro Parodi* and “Ema Zunz.”

**Paper project due**

**December 9**

**Drugs as business and culture**
Campos, *Home Grown*.

**December 23**

**Paper due**

**Bibliography**

The required books have been put in reserves and ordered at Book Culture (112th St, between Amsterdam and Broadway). Some of them, noted below, are no longer in print in affordable editions. It is your responsibility to secure access to them before they are due for reading.


Some ideas on sources for the quantitative and qualitative exercises

You can use different sources for these exercises. There are published statistics that you can use to select and analyze a specific series (type of crime, region, etc.). Some of these are printed and available in libraries, like

Anuario de estadísticas criminales, [Santiago, Chile?] : Fundación Paz Ciudadana, [1994]
Location: Lehman HV6878 .A58.

I used published Mexican sources to build my own database, which you can explore in http://www.columbia.edu/~pp143/estadisticascrimen/EstadisticasSigloXX.htm. I have the copies of the original sources, in case you are interested in digging on other aspects of the information that is not included in my tables.

Other statistical sources are online, although they usually do not cover long periods of time. One example, on Argentina, covering 2002 to 2013, can be found at http://www.jus.gob.ar/areas-tematicas/estadisticas-de-politica-criminal/mapa.aspx. Another, that requires more digging in the website but can yield useful results, is in http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/registros/sociales/judiciales/default.aspx. Other countries in the region, and the US, keep similar data. You can use US sources if you do not feel that your Spanish or Portuguese is at the level of the sources—although that is not usually a problem with quantitative sources.

Finally, you can build your own series. From a qualitative source (for example, judicial or police records) you can build a sample of crimes or sentences during a brief period. Although the results here might not be so comprehensive as in statistical series published by governments
over many years, they could offer very interesting results. For an example you can look at tables 7 and 18 in the Appendix of my book *City of Suspects*.

The Colombian government, for example, publishes Supreme Court decisions online (in http://jurisprudencia.ramajudicial.gov.co/WebRelatoria/consulta/index.xhtml; try a search for “asesinato”). Colombia’s Law Library contains many volumes of judicial journals and other qualitative sources. The catalogue is http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu although the holdings also appear in Clio. Do, for instance, a subject search on “murder El Salvador”.

The sources for the quantitative exercise are even more plentiful. There are judicial journals containing sentences that provide interesting glimpses about the work of justice (try http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.35112102354935;view=1up;seq=11. This website contains historical publications from many countries. One example, obtained looking for the keywords “Mexico” and “homicidio” is http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044061552949;view=1up;seq=9).

I also have copies of some criminal cases from Mexico that you can examine.

You can examine the periodical press to look for reports on crimes and penal courts. An excellent place to start is the World Newspaper Archive, that you can access through the Columbia Libraries portal (http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive?p_product=WHNPX&p_action=publications&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=D71N5FPWMTQ0MDYyOTUyNS4vMDk2ODc6MToxNDoxNjAuMzkuMiQ5LiE1MA&p_clear_search=yes&d_refprod=WHNPX&s_category=none). It contains newspapers published in English in several countries of Latin America. An excellent resource on Latin American resources at Columbia can be found at http://library.columbia.edu/subject-guides/latinamerica.html.

Literary sources are also legitimate. Take a look at *Martín Fierro*, commented by Dabove in chapter 9 of his book, for example. You can read the poem with an eye to the depictions of theft and violence, or punishment. But there are many other literary works that deal with criminals and crime. We will discuss some of them on December 2.