

Histories of the Public Sphere in Latin America: Religion and Politics
Graduate colloquium

HIST G8911
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W 10:10A-12:00P
302 Fayerweather

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The historical literature on the public sphere has been expanding rapidly in recent years, spanning diverse regions and periods, and dealing with intellectual debates, cultural transformations, elite and popular politics, and the shifting boundaries between public and private life. Although historians of Latin America are part of this new interest, they do not always engage the theoretical and methodological implications of the category, often on the assumption that the inequalities and exclusions of Latin American politics are not properly accounted for in a study of the public sphere following European models.

Simultaneously, historical studies of religion, religious practices and beliefs, church and state, and other topics have developed in exciting ways. These studies offer a diversity of perspectives on the ways in which religion has shaped and evolved with the public sphere. They also span a long period of time, from the late colonial period to the present.

This course will seek to pair those two areas of current historiography and social sciences. It will start with a review of the historical literature on the public sphere in modern Latin America that will involve a critical engagement with the theoretical and comparative literature on the topic. We will examine empirical contributions but also at the way in which the category impacts the debates and research agendas of political and cultural history. The course will include a reading of Habermas's work but will also seek to expand the usual limits of the study of the public sphere, going beyond the study of political ideas and elite sociabilities and focusing also on the history of media and popular cultural practices that, although outside the usual purview of intellectual or political history, are still relevant to understand dialogical interactions between state and civil society. The course also include readings on diverse aspects of the history of religion in modern Latin America.

Some of the question to be raised during the semester include: Can we write the history of that common space of rational and egalitarian debate called the public sphere? Do reason and public opinion have a history? Are social inequalities and exclusions and the mass media strong enough in modern societies to eliminate the possibility of a dialogue about the common good? How have religious practices and doctrines been shaped, in turn, by public debates beyond the traditional realms of official commemoration and professional history? This colloquium will reclaim these questions as objects of historical research in Latin America without losing sight of their contemporary relevance.

Requirements:

In-class presentations: each student will lead discussion at least one week during the semester. This will involve sending out discussion questions to the rest of the group ahead of the meeting, introducing the text and providing information on its historiographical context, and leading the discussion.

Weekly reactions to the reading, of 400-200 words, will be submitted to the courses blog (<http://edblogs.columbia.edu/histg8911-001-2017-1>) no later than Wednesday at 9 am.

Final paper, approximately 8000 words. Each paper should be discussed individually with the instructor. An abstract and outline should be submitted a month before the due date.

Reading in Spanish is required.

Readings and schedule:

January 18

Introduction

Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article."

January 25

The Public Sphere: Basic definitions and critical approaches

Habermas, *Structural Transformation*.

February 1

Approaches to the public sphere as public space

Guerra et al., *Los espacios públicos*, chapter by Verdo; Myers, "Las paradojas"; Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures"; Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere."

February 8

The Latin American laboratory

Piccato, "Public sphere in Latin America"; Palti, "Recent studies"; Uribe Urán, "The Birth of a Public Sphere"; Forment, *Democracy*.

February 15

Beliefs in history

Cipolla, *Faith, Reason, and the Plague*; selections from Defoe, *Journal*.

February 22

Religion in colonial settings

Dean, *Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ*

March 1

Studying religion in society

Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*.

March 8

Urban culture, religious institutions

Burns, *Colonial Habits*.

March 22

Parishes, politics

Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*.

March 29

Literature, apocalyptic cults

Vargas Llosa, *La Guerra del Fin del Mundo*.

April 5

State and religion

Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*.

April 12

Popular resistance

Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity*.

April 19

Conservative religions

Smith, *The roots of conservatism in Mexico*.

April 26

Religion in the public space

Román, *Governing Spirits*.

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