



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1985 Volume IV: History as Fiction in Central and South America

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## Introduction

It may sound farfetched to some, but New Haven, like many other cities in the U.S., is a part of Latin America. If in doubt, go to Rivera's Market on State Street, where you can buy Cuban and Puerto Rican food, or listen to the language that some of the workers at Yale use to speak to each other. Channel 41 broadcasts news nightly directly from Mexico, as well as a full array of soap operas, many of them (to judge by the accent of the actors), made in Argentina. There are so many Spanish speakers around Yale that there are days when I barely have to use the English language. The schools in New Haven also have a heavy Latin American presence. The children are mainly Puerto Rican, but there are also Colombians, Cubans and others from many different countries. It is not surprising then, that there should be an interest in Latin America among New Haven teachers.

In our seminar we read text on Latin American history and then a series of major novels that used that history to create fictions. We discussed how, by fictionalizing it, Latin American authors attempted to find meaning in Latin American history. Our quest through space and time took us from the sources of the Orinoco River and preHispanic America to the great cities of Tenotchtitlan/Mexico City and Caracas. We dealt with the Mexican and Cuban revolutions, and with their cultural products. We tried to see how Gabriel Marquez labors to turn Latin American history into a modern myth. The curriculum units prepared by the seminar participants reflect our broadranging approach to Latin America.

Francisco Cintron wants to give his students a sense of the accomplishments made by various Hispanic authors from the Caribbean, and therefore to convey to the Latins a sense of pride and to the others one of respect. Frank Gallucci's interests lay in Geography, a much neglected area of study in the schools. Latin American geography is not only an important factor in the development of culture, but also an important component in fiction. Where was, after all, El Dorado? Peter Herndon is interested in Revolution and, needless to say, he found ample material in the literature we read. He wants to communicate to students how slaves lived and why they revolted. Patricia Niece chose the great Uruguayan shortstory writer Horacio Quiroga as the focus of her unit. Quiroga's masterful tales, full of sound and fury, but with much meaning, will interest students and give them an excellent example of the Latin American imagination. Norine Polio's brilliant presentation of preHispanic drama will teach students about a period that is difficult to reach, and about which very little is known by the public at large. Laura FerranteFernandes' unit on Diego Rivera makes excellent use of a visual approach to teach about Mexico and the Mexican Revolution.

I mean no false modesty when I say that I have learned a great deal from these curriculum units, and most of all from their authors. I hope that many others, particularly children, profit from them as much as I have.

Roberto GonzalezEchevarria

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