

## Latin American Rhetoric

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### Introduction

When we think of anything as “Latin American,” it is likely that we imagine something quite different from “American.” Maybe we envision a unique language, culture, or nationality. These differences are likely applied to a wide-ranging geography (the Western Hemisphere), inclusive of a host of countries (e.g., Mexico, Argentina, Peru, etc.), and likely ethnically homogenous. Perhaps these characteristics, moreover, might ultimately be described as foreign, unique, or exotic even. Attaching the term “rhetoric” to “Latin American” then might simply mean putting into view a “rhetoric” that reflects and/or furthers these unique “Latin American” features and situating these characteristics within a broader history of rhetoric.

And yet, it would be a mistake to take such an “add and stir” approach to a study of “Latin American rhetoric” within our inquiries. This is because the task of unearthing or exploring a “Latin American rhetoric” actually invokes ethical and philosophical dilemmas that possess no untroubled resolutions. For, on the one hand, the task of proposing a “rhetoric” capacious enough to capture the diffuse and multiplicitous practices comprising suasive acts spanning a geography consuming nearly an entire hemisphere is as herculean a project as it is a folly. On the other hand, defining what is “Latin American” requires tapping into the corrupt proceeding of adopting the negative to name the positive. It is, in the words of García and Cortez, to assume an “ontological difference” that renders what we might name “Latin American Rhetoric” as an “intelligible” entity at all (García and Cortez, 2020). In short, proposing, as this pedagogical resource does, the quality and features of a “Latin American Rhetoric” runs merely codifying the very essentialism that ASHR’s “Expanding the History of Pedagogy Initiative” is attempting to disrupt.

This resource, however, must grapple with the possibility of naming a “Latin American Rhetoric,” if only because it is difficult to move away from how deeply entrenched these descriptive terms are. In many respects, the vocabularies we use to define disruptions of universal and Eurocentric histories of rhetoric must nonetheless align with “conventional” terms we use to describe whatever rhetoric exists as their opposition (i.e., Chinese

rhetoric, Latin American rhetoric, Egyptian rhetoric). Historians of rhetoric are, in this sense, “sentenced to the sentence,” bound by the language we have inherited to define rhetoric that is *not* the dominant rhetorical paradigm.

What this resource offers, consequently, is a resource for broaching the rupturability of what might be referred to as a “Latin American Rhetoric.” That is to say, this resource offers a way of teaching “Latin American rhetoric” that is not simply an “add and stir” approach. It also does not simply attach the term “rhetoric” to something that is “Latin American” and ask instructors how the “rhetoric” represents Latin America. It does not simply give “examples.” Such casual explanations of “Latin American rhetoric” erase the colonial foundations of “Latin American” or distance the violence of “rhetoric” from the creation of the *idea* of Latin America born at a particular time and place. Indeed, as these resources demonstrate, there is no “Latin America” without the colonization of the Western Hemisphere.

This teaching guide provides a set of resources that illuminate the political and social conditions that supported the creation of the *figure* of “Latin American” and, in turn, rhetoric(s) that made that *figure* possible. The guide encourages instructors to reflect on the spread and ballooning of “rhetoric” from a relatively small area in the Ancient Greek world to an imperial art form by tracing how “rhetoric” as an art was instrumental in creating our ideas about what counts as “Latin American.” And, finally, these resources encourage thinking about how we might integrate, responsibly and ethically, histories of “Latin American Rhetoric” into our Western histories of rhetoric in ways that account for the impact of colonial violence(s) that undersigned the creation of “Latin America.” It is with these aims in mind, that this resource proposes a pedagogical resource for teaching and exploring a “Latin American Rhetoric.”

## **Course Applicability**

### **Undergraduate Courses**

Social Movement Rhetoric  
Contemporary Rhetorical Theory  
Modern Rhetorical Theory  
Latin American Politics  
Colonization in the Americas

Religious Rhetoric  
Indigenous Rhetoric

### **Graduate Courses**

Contemporary Rhetorical Theory  
Modern Rhetorical Theory  
Decolonizing Rhetoric  
Religion, Colonization, and Modernity  
Revolutionary Rhetoric  
Indigeneity and Latin America  
Decolonial Praxis in Latin America

### **Key Pedagogical Themes**

**The colonial matrix of power and its rhetorical implications:** The construction of Latin America is, in many respects, the result of centuries of social, political, and cultural investment in making Latin Countries appear as European as possible. Taking into account how rhetoric in Latin America resembles and/or resonates with European rhetorical training, practices, techniques, and politics recognizes the consequences of such an enduring commitment from European power(s).

**Indigenous epistemologies and rhetorical practices:** Colonization introduced a new paradigm and philosophy for organizing social and political life in the colonies of the Western Hemisphere. Discovering indigenous knowledge and ontologies requires sensing where these might yet be latent and discernible but not altogether visible. In short, indigenous knowledges and “ways of being” must be presumed as always and already present even when European rhetoric predominates.

**The relationship between evangelization and rhetorical education:** The evangelization of the Western Hemisphere is one of the many consequences of colonization, and, consequently, makes up a significant portion of the influence of “rhetoric” in Latin America. Successful evangelization, in many ways, could be discerned within the communication practices of the colonized.

**Revolutionary rhetoric and de/colonial praxis:** While colonization severely impacted and shaped the life of the colonies, attempts to disrupt

and rewrite the social and political conditions of colonization have always been present. Sensing resistance to dominant "rhetoric," whether through technique or through suasive discourse, revolution and resistance has been a consistent theme in the history of rhetoric in Latin America.

**Border-thinking as rhetorical methodology:** Border thinking, as methodology, entails recognizing and affirming the presence of a figural line between what constitutes the colonized and what constitutes the colonizer. Border thinking as rhetorical methodology, thus, is a means of discerning that line and highlighting the interanimation between these two distinct worlds.

### **Essential Terminologies**

**Modernity/Coloniality:** a coupling of terms intended to highlight the interanimation and interdependence of the era of historical colonization (and its aftermath) and the era labeled "Modernity." Spanning the 15th-20th century, the terminology conveys how the engine of modernity was colonization and how modernity justified colonization.

**Colonization:** the historical, punctiliar act in which a colonial power arrives and claims indigenous lands; the initiating act of coloniality.

**Coloniality:** the flip side of the modern era that corresponds to the ways in which colonies were installed, managed, contoured, and reproduced processually in the wake of colonization.

**Decolonization:** a process of political upheaval that results in the displacement and, often times expulsion, of a colonial power from land.

**Decoloniality:** a critical stance in opposition to the forms and force of coloniality; can be an engine for decolonization but is not reducible to it.

**Border-Thinking:** an epistemological position dedicated to inhabiting the limn of colonial and indigenous ontologies.

**Colonial Matrix of Power:** A coordination of institutions, ontologies, epistemologies, and economic engines by a subtending philosophy-theology that installs colonies and ensures their resemblance to colonial powers.

**América:** a term that captures the notion that the identity and history of the Western Hemisphere hinges on the identities and histories of “Latin America.”

**Codex:** A pre-Columbian manuscript of indigenous texts, typically reproduced and circulated in European spaces. About a dozen have survived, and they have been grouped by scholars into at least 3 categories (Borgia, Mixtec, Maya).

## Primary Sources

### Codex Borgia

A pre-Columbian manuscript containing indigenous (i.e., Aztec) iconography and images. Various Codex texts were traced and reproduced for keeping by European power/s, thus being named by their new owners and identified by the same. Studying this text provides a way of accessing alternative epistemologies, ontologies, and communicative practices born out of indigenous communities. Moreover, they provide an entry point to seeing the abstractive nature of colonization in the history of rhetoric.

### Digital Florentine Codex

A text written by a partnership composed of Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún, Nahuatl elders, and artists that hand-painted illustrations within the text. The text contains histories of the Aztec empire, conquest, as well (purported) cultural and ethical teachings. With a book on “rhetoric” (Book 6), the text is a valuable resource not for accessing untainted perspectives on pre-Columbian rhetoric but for exploring the influence of European rhetorical education on indigenous communities’ communication practices.

### Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life. Simon & Schuster, 1996.

A 16<sup>th</sup> century text containing the origin of Quiché (kee-chay), Mayan communities. Composed in response to a purging of Mayan artifacts, the Popol Vuh, written by literate indigenous community members,

exemplifies attempts to reimagine (through rhetorical interventions) pre-Columbian traditions through a Christian tradition in order to ensure their preservation. For a text that facilitates the practice of border thinking as rhetorical methodology, this resource allows for both sensing border thinking among indigenous communities attempting to preserve indigenous knowledge(s) and practicing border thinking in attempting to see the distinctions between colonization and colonized communication practices.

**“The Battles of Tenochtitlán and Tlatelolco León Portilla,” (Chapter 14) in Miguel, ed. *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*. Expanded and Updated ed. Translated by Angel Maria Garibay K and Lysander Kemp. Beacon Press, 2006.**

Written in 1528 by an anonymous author but composed in Nahuatl (na-wah-tle) that details the experience of conquest. This resource makes visible the indigenous experience of the fall of these communities, but, most important, provides an alternative persuasive account of colonization. Moreover, this resource surfaces the ways that violence has been crucial for establishing the conditions for “rhetoric” to flourish in the Western Hemisphere and the ways that “rhetoric” facilitated the preservation of these accounts.

**Flynn S. J., Lawrence J. “The De Arte Rhetorica (1568) by Cyprian Soarez, S. J.: A Translation with Introduction and Notes.” Dissertation, University of Florida, 1955.**  
**[https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00032920/00001/pdf/0.](https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00032920/00001/pdf/0)**

This text supplies an introduction to the art of rhetoric for Jesuit students prior to their study of more rigorous texts in rhetoric (e.g., Cicero, Quintilian, etc.). As a Jesuit educational text, this text would have been a popular training manual for training Jesuit ministers that eventually made their way to Latin American colonies for the purposes of mission work in places such as Brazil, Peru, and Mexico in the late 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The text illustrates how rhetorical education dovetailed with evangelization.

**El Plan de Ayala**

A Mexican manifesto announcing a departure from the revolution initiated by Francisco I. Maduro. Written by revolutionaries Emiliano Zapata and Otilio Montaño in 1911, the manifesto proclaimed the rights and privileges of agrarian communities while also calling for a greater fulfillment of revolutionary principles. Such a text underlines the interanimation between rhetoric and revolution in Latin America and how revolution has played a role in shaping the rhetorical practices in Latin America.

### El Despertado Mexicano: Declaration of War

A revolutionary manifesto announcing an uprising of the people against the Mexican government. The document initiated the formation of the EZLN, the Zapatista National Liberation Army. This document, too, showcases the rhetoric that revolution has spurred in Latin America, as well as a way to trace how violence has spurred its own rhetorical forms. Moreover, the text is rhetorically significant for demonstrating how contemporary contexts, though not colonization in name, still resonate with colonial practices.

### Secondary Sources

**Tenorio-Trillo, Mauricio. 2017. *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.**

This book provides an explanation of the ways in which Latin America operates and has operated as a figure of speech. The text showcases how crucial persuasive argument is the development of an identity category, while also demonstrating the role of social and political institutions to sustaining the suasive potency of "Latin America."

**Mignolo, Walter. 2000. *Local Histories/Global Designs Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.**

Mignolo's book demonstrates the ways in which European colonization produced and continues to reinforce the inferiority of specific epistemologies, both in Latin America and beyond. This text underscores how language and argument participate in the creation and subversion of colonial power dynamics.

**Baca, Damián. 2008. *Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations, and the Territories of Writing*. New York: Springer.**

Baca's monograph highlights the ways in which colonization enacted an oppressive regime of indigenous communication. Reflecting on histories of communicative oppression and resistance, Baca's text spotlights how the emergence and furtherance of "Latin American" rhetoric stems from European colonization and expansion in the Americas.

**Abbott, Don Paul. 1996. *Rhetoric in the New World: Rhetorical Theory and Practice in Colonial Spanish America*. Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press.**

Abbott details the shape of rhetorical practices in Latin America after colonization. Showcasing the intersections between religious rhetoric and classical rhetorical traditions, Abbott's book demonstrates how engagement with colonies informed rhetorical theories.

**Izaguirre III, José G. 2024. *Becoming La Raza: Negotiating Race in the Chican@ Movement(s)*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.**

Izaguirre's book takes a decolonial approach to the study of racial rhetorical criticism. Demonstrating how race has been and continues to be a colonial construct, Izaguirre traces how racial construction occupied the rhetorical attention of Mexican American activists inhabiting the US.

**Gómez, Nancy R., Michael L. Butterworth, and Adriana Angel, eds. 2021. *Rhetorics of Democracy in the Americas*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University.**

Gómez, Butterworth and Angel's collection of essays analyzes various expressions of political communication in and across Latin America. Focusing primarily on Latin American rhetors, this text's emphasis on the shape and concerns of persuasive communication in Latin America demonstrates the variation in political, rhetorical contexts across the Western hemisphere.

**McManus, Stuart M. 2021. *An Empire of Eloquence: The Classical Rhetorical Tradition in Colonial Latin America and the Iberian World*. Cambridge Cambridge University Press.**

McManus's book, which highlights the teaching and practice of public speaking in colonial Latin America, traces the spread and development of classical rhetorical in Latin America. Showing, too, how religious interests intersected with the spread of classical rhetoric in the Western Hemisphere, McManus's book presents an important historical contribution to understanding the development of rhetorical theory and praxis in the Western Hemisphere.

**Olson, Christa J. 2013. *Constitutive Visions: Indigeneity and Commonplaces of National Identity in Republican Ecuador*. University Park: Penn State Press.**

Olson's book supplies a rhetorical approach to histories of identity construction and politics in Ecuador. Highlighting the ways in which indigeneity is leveraged in persuasive communication, Olson's book reveals the fluidity and complications present in broaching a "Latin American" rhetoric.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are the various senses in which rhetoric has shaped Latin American social life and politics?
2. How has colonization of Latin America contributed to evolutions of rhetorical theory? How does Latin America figure into Western histories of rhetoric?
3. What are some of the features of revolutionary rhetoric? How do these aspects of revolutionary rhetoric demonstrate the ways that colonization has shaped Latin America?
4. What rhetorical techniques (e.g., repetition, narrative, etc.) are present in the Popol Vuh? How do these techniques further and/or obscure the presence of colonization?
5. How has evangelization shaped what makes a "Latin American" identity?
6. What are the various ways we might understand a "Latin American" rhetoric?

7. In what ways has violence played a role in shaping rhetorical practices in Latin America? How does violence surface in the revolutionary documents?



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