

Course Outline: The Development of Underdevelopment? Theories of Development and Capitalism in Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Thursdays 09:15 – 10:45 | Room I

In the post-war period, development became one of the key concepts in the social sciences and political debates. This was accompanied by a largely normative division of the world into so-called 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' countries. According to the then influential modernisation theory, it was the task of the latter to catch up with the supposed 'pioneer states' through a process of 'catch-up development'. How such a 'catch-up process' should be structured and what its objectives should be has been the subject of heated debate, particularly in Latin American states since their independence. In this seminar, we will examine such theories of and discourses on development from a Latin American perspective. While discussing various texts from the 19th and 20th centuries, we will look in particular at the theories of Raúl Prebisch and André Gunder Frank in detail. Prebisch was a co-founder of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), and Gunder Frank is regarded as a co-founder of the so-called dependency theory. In contrast to modernisation theory, both established in their work a structural link between development and underdevelopment within a globally interconnected capitalist system. The narratives of (under)development, shaped in part by these two economists and economic historians, had a significant influence on the development of social science theory in the second half of the 20th century and shaped the political and economic actions of governments, international organisations and private companies. In addition to the theoretical discussion, the seminar offers an insight into Latin American economic history from a global perspective.

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Session 1 | 17.04.2025 | Introduction

Session 2 | 24.04.2025 | Introduction to Latin American Economic History

Literature: Bulmer-Thomas, Victor: The Economic History of Latin America since Independence, Cambridge 2014, p. 1-19.

Further Literature: Grafe, Regina: Latin America. 1700-1870, in: The Cambridge Economic History of the Modern World Vol. 1 edited by Stephen Broadberry/Kyoji Fukao, Cambridge 2021, p. 219-245.

Further Literature: Astorga, Pablo/Herranz-Loncán, Alfonso: Latin America. Stalled Catching Up, in: The Cambridge Economic History of the Modern World Vol. 2 edited by Stephen Broadberry/Kyoji Fukao, Cambridge 2021, p. 251-275.

Session 3 | 08.05.2025 | Latin America and 'Modernisation'

Literature: Zumeta, César: Der kranke Kontinent, in: Der lange Kampf Lateinamerikas. Text und Dokumente von José Martí bis Salvador Allende edited by Angel Rama, Frankfurt am Main 1982, p. 83-96.

Session 4 | 15.05.2025 | The 'Indian Question'

Literatur: Mariátegui, José Carlos: Das Indioproblem, in: Der lange Kampf Lateinamerikas. Text und Dokumente von José Martí bis Salvador Allende hrsg. v. Angel Rama, Frankfurt am Main 1982, S. 200-214.

Weiterführende Literatur: Becker, Marc: Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America, in: Science & Society 70/4 (2006), S. 450-479.

Session 5 | 22.05.2025 | Development Economics after World War II

Literature: Rivarola Puntigliano, Andrés/Appelqvist, Örjan: Prebisch and Myrdal. Development Economics in the Core and on the Periphery, in: Journal of Global History 6 (2011), p. 29-52.

Further literature: Fajardo Hernández, María Margarita: The World that Latin America Created. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in the Development Era, Cambridge 2022.

Session 6 | 05.06.2025 | Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Literature: Love, Joseph L.: CEPAL as Idea Factory for Latin American Development. Intellectual and Political Influence, 1950-1990, in: State and Nation Making in Latin America and Spain, Part II: Visions and Politics of Development edited by Agustin E. Ferraro/Miguel A. Centeno, Cambridge 2018, p. 29-50.

Literature: Calcagno, Adriana/Duarte, Pedro Garcia: World War II and Industrialization Policies in Latin America. The Cases of Argentina and Brazil, in: History of Political Economy 56/1 (2024), p. 183-206.

Session 7 | 12.06.2025 | The Economic Development of Latin America – Raul Prebisch

Literature: Prebisch, Raul: The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems, New York 1950.

Session 8 | 26.06.2025 | Prebisch-Singer Thesis

Literature: Toye, John/Toye, Richard: The Origins and Interpretation of the Prebisch-Singer Thesis, in: History of Political Economy 35/3 (2003), p. 437-467.

Further literature: Chakraborty, Shouvik/Sarkar, Prabirjit: From the Classical Economists to Empiricists. A Review of the Terms of Trade Controversy, in: Journal of Economic Surveys 34/5 (2020), S. 1111-1133.

Session 9 | 03.07.2025 | World-Systems Theory

Literature: Hopkins, Terence K./Wallerstein, Immanuel: Patterns of Development of the Modern World-System, in: Review (Fernand Braudel Center) 1/2 (1977), p. 111-145.

Session 10 | 10.07.2025 | ECLAC vs. IMF (International Monetary Fund)?

Literature: Fajardo Hernández, María Margarita: CEPAL, the International Monetary Fund of the Left?“, in: The American Historical Review 128/2 (2023), p. 588-615.

Session 11 | 17.07.2025 | ‘Cepalinas’ – Gender and Development

Literature: Gautier Morin, Johanna: The Women’s Faces of Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The First Generation of Cepalinas, in: Journal of Global History 20/2 (2025), p. 182-198.

Session 12 | 24.07.2025 | ‘Commodity Frontiers’

Literature: Beckert, Sven et al.: Commodity Frontiers and the Transformation of the Global Countryside. A Research Agenda, in: Journal of Global History 16/3 (2021), p. 435-450.