

## Reflective Essay

The research project I am submitting for consideration, which I performed for Dr. Margarita Ochoa's "Latin American Revolutions in Film" in the fall of 2014, centers around the rhetorical usage of Che Guevara's personage by contemporary American conservatives. I embarked on historical research, delving into both Guevara's history and the history of Guevara as a symbol after his death in 1967, as well as a semiotic analysis of Guevara's own writings and modern conservative media sources, seeking to understand their representation of Guevara's image. The thrill and the challenge of this particular project, and the role the library served in it, revolves around the variety of sources the project required. Having to juggle such different types of texts necessitated flexible thinking and flexible resource-gathering.

The flexibility in thinking is exemplified in part by how I came to this particular research idea. Initially I intended to study how Guevara's theories of revolution impacted other global insurgencies. To begin I found a copy of Guevara's *Guerilla Warfare* in the library, as it is one of his seminal works, and as I perused it I noticed something odd. This particular copy, a 1967 reprint of a 1961 edition, was published by a company called Praeger and included an introduction by the translator, Major Harries-Clichy Peterson of the US military. In the introduction, Major Peterson seemed to indicate that his book was intended not to present Guevara's text in English, to educate Americans on the dangers of Guevara's philosophy and the best way to combat it. I contacted Dr. Ochoa to find a less blatantly biased translation, of course, but the political slant of Peterson's text was what inspired me to study how Guevara's image might be utilized by his ideological opponents. This need for attunement to bias continued throughout the project.

The library, then, proved crucial even at this early stage of the research project. If it library did not possess such a wide variety of *Guerrilla Warfare*, I might never have taken on this particular project. The bounty of resources enjoyed by the library manifested itself in other ways as well. While researching Guevara's own writings, the library provided access to numerous useful sources, including a useful collection of some of his less-well-known writings called *Che Guevara Speaks*. The plethora of secondary sources on Guevara and Cuban-American relations proved incredibly helpful as I explored the topic. The library stocks a number of different biographies on Guevara, for example, not just the most well-known ones, all of which provided me different perspectives on Guevara's life. In this sense, simply having access to library shelves was my greatest resources, as it allowed me to stumble across items I would not have otherwise discovered. That was the best method I developed for research, as a matter of fact – poring over the shelving, hunting for gems.

Many of the gems that I did find – many of which I found by plumbing the depths of Youtube, if they were beyond the reach of the library– contained wildly different perspectives on Guevara, and given my semiotic focus – how Guevara is portrayed rather than who he actually was – the bias of authors was not something to just keep in the back of my mind, but was in fact absolutely crucial to my research. This proved to be one of the big challenges of the project, ensuring that I balanced what was fact and what was feeling in the frequently ideologically loaded articles and videos that I was studying.

Handling such a wide range of sources, too – films and documentaries to political talk shows and merchandising – was another challenge, as each required a different mode of analysis. Regarding the films, for example, I had to pay attention to the shots, angles, and sound, all of which impact cinematic meaning. For political talk show videos, like those from Glenn Beck's

program, I needed an understanding of his methodology, a clear knowledge of not just his argument but *how* he was arguing, how he was making use of Guevara's image. All of this led me to develop new critical thinking skills – I had never worked with a show like Beck's before, after all.

This project, in other words, demanded that I hone my research skills to a new sharpness. I developed an attunement to biases, flexible research methods, and a new openness to different modes of analysis through this effort. These are all developments that I can bring into future research projects as well.