

Keynote abstracts: Levy Wasteneys Symposium (Friday, September 20th)

❖ Oswaldo Zavala (CUNY)

Mexican Narconarratives *after* “Narcos”: Reimagining Organized Crime in the Age of National Security

After at least two decades of the proliferation of narconarratives mediated by the official discourse of “drug cartels,” an emerging current of writers, filmmakers and journalists have renewed a critical approach to state violence and its implications beyond typical assumptions about organized crime. From the thousands of killings of the so-called “war on drugs” to the forced disappearance of 43 students in the state of Guerrero in 2014, this counterhegemonic critique aims to rethink — and more importantly, to reimagine— the most pressing events of violence as the result of social strategies of control and exploitation promoted by state structures and geopolitics. This essay proposes to analyze the politicized imagination intersecting state violence and drug trafficking that deliberately leaves behind the habitual hegemonic narconarratives to articulate instead a critical understanding of the criminal networks as by-products of official power. Along with the analysis of key works of fiction, film, and journalistic investigations, I will engage debates on state violence and neoliberalism in the age of permanent national security crises.

❖ Armin Schwegler (University of California, Irvine)

Unification & Division in 21st-century Latin America’s Hinterland: Language, Globalization, and the Rapid Reshaping of local identities

This talk examines one of Latin America’s most unusual communities: El Palenque (Colombia). Established in the mid-17th century and composed entirely of runaway slaves and their descendants, this Black village lived in virtual isolation until the close of the 20th century. Palenqueros thus not only managed to preserve “deep” African traditions, but also to maintain a Spanish/Creole culture that made them truly unique.

Based on Prof. Schwegler’s 30 years of fieldwork, this talk explains how and why rapid processes of linguistic integration, globalization, a recent movement of *negritud* (Black awareness), and increasing attention from scholars (linguistics, anthropologists, population geneticists, etc.) have drastically reshaped local identity.

Palenque’s fascinating story illustrates how the combination of these changes have integrated this once isolated community into the central fabric of Colombian life, while also contributing to the revitalization of a unique culture and language once thought to be on the brink of extinction.